Papers on Worship

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Worship in the Hour that Now Is

John 4:23, 24 (Adapted from a lecture ‘Christian Worship’ at the Haverstock Room, Kentish Town, May 17, 1870.)

One cannot understand the nature of worship without taking into account the new relationship of the worshipper. One must consider the place in which divine grace has put him, as well as his new obligations.

Time was when God had a worshipping nation, a people who stood on the ground of their own responsibility to God. This was the standing fact of Israel who fell as Adam did before. And the conclusion that Scripture draws for all now is, that on such a ground there is and can be nothing but ruin. What really can be more just? Man himself acknowledges that law is a righteous ground, and in fact is ever prone to take it. Israel only did what every other nation in the earth would have done in the same circumstances and what most professors are doing now, because they have not learned the true conclusion from God’s history of Israel.

The mass of souls in the civilized world — in these countries at least — attempt to stand before God substantially on the same ground as Israel did. That is, they take as their rule the law of God, and endeavour, as they say, to shape their conduct according to the law of God, nevertheless looking with a kind of hope to the Saviour, that if there be sincerity they may at last get to heaven, saved then from their iniquities. This is the patent fact in Christendom, as no one can deny. It is found in its most open form in Roman Catholicism, but substantially also in Protestant countries, not being

confined to any particular class, creed, or polity. I use the fact as the all but universal position taken by man where he has heard of Christ, even when possessing the word of God in his hand.

Now God did bring out this principle in Israel; but it was for the purpose of guarding man from ever afterwards taking such a place. The main object of the Old Testament was to show that they had every possible help as a worshipping nation. Yet the issue of the trial was the rejection of the Son of God, and their own remediless ruin, for eternity indeed, but also for this world. They came under the chastening of God until He gave up such dealings as even broke them up as a people, and dispersed them to the ends of the earth. All these experiences, trials, and punishments of the Israelitish nation were really the result of the self-righteous effort to take their stand on their own merits, or legal obedience. It is not to be supposed that they did not look to God, or that they excluded prayer; it is not meant that they did not mingle every kind of form at any rate of expressing their dependence upon God. The truth is, that such forms are but a veil which serves to hide the true state of the case from men's own eyes, and acts as a cover over the faults that God's eye continually sees, and because of which at last He must judge, or abandon His own character.

The Lord Jesus, in the chapter before us, causes the light to shine in answer to the question of a poor Samaritan woman, who really had no character to lose, yet was encouraged by His grace, and ventured to ask Him about worship. If she thought herself unknown, He not only knew perfectly her history, but let her know that He knew it. Nevertheless, in the fulness of divine

goodness, even from her He did not withhold what surely every soul ought to know — what it becomes more especially the Christian to know — what the will of the Lord is about our worship.

Yet there is not a single range of truth on which man is more sensitively tenacious of his own thoughts; none where he is less willing to enquire of God; nothing on which he is more ready to take up arms if opposed, or himself to force on others, nothing on which he more resents the interference of strangers, settling down in traditional views and ways, rather than be subject to the truth. He likes to worship as his father did, or his grandfather before him, and, if he knows of anybody beyond his grandfather, he is only so much the prouder of it. That is to say, he likes to look back at a long succession of people worshipping as he does, and likes to do, himself. In short, there is no serious thought of the will of God about the matter. Where is any true reference to the Lord Jesus — the only One from whom we can perfectly know what the mind and will of the Lord really is? Now the Lord has anticipated this, and in no way left us a prey to doubt, having left on record His answer to the enquiry that was made then. He declares it in the case of the simplest person that can be conceived; whence we may learn beyond doubt how deeply it affects every soul in earnest about God. It could hardly be said that the woman of Samaria was divinely concerned at first, but the Lord did not leave her till she was.

Again, there is a very important consideration here: not only the contrast between the worship that the Lord was about to introduce with that which had been; but also what is necessary in each individual soul to lay as a

basis and power for worship. There is weighty order in these chapters. We must not take them isolatedly. The truth of John 4 supposes that of John 3. The third does not bring us into worship, but it lays down what is inseparable as a preparation for worship. The great truth of John 3 is the necessity of being born again (the new birth as it is called), and next, that the new birth cannot now be separated from what is no less necessary, the cross of the Lord Jesus. If I am born again, I have it by believing in Jesus, the Son of man that must be lifted up from the earth — the only-begotten Son of God, given by God in His love to the world, that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now, this of itself does not make man a worshipper, yet it is the admirable and only fitting basis for it. But we want power as well as nature in order to worship according to the exigencies of God's mind as now revealed, and according to the love that will make us thoroughly happy in worship; that it should not be merely a duty coldly rendered to the Lord, or with an effort, but a full, unaffected, and holy flow of joy. Not that duty is excluded. There is not, as far as I know, a single thing that pertains to us here, but what, if it end in duty as far as we are concerned, springs from grace in God Himself. When we look at it on every hand, in point of fact we shall find in John 4 that both points of view in worship are before the Lord, and both are revealed to us.

He shows, accordingly, to this woman, that it was not enough for God, if enough for man's desire, that we should be just able to enter into the kingdom of God. He would fill the heart now with divine joy. The power of the Holy Ghost associates us with the love of God that He

has given to us in Christ. I say “associates us with His love in Christ,” because one may look at the power of the Spirit of God in a merely external way. This a man might have, and manifest its energies, and nevertheless be lost after all. I grant you that it is a truth which many do not understand, but Hebrews 6 is perfectly clear about it. We find persons who had tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and yet fallen away. We must carefully remember that such apostates were never born of God. There is no such fact or teaching in the New Testament as that one born of God perishes; but then we are not always judges of who are, and who might not be, born of God. We may be deceived. There are those who apparently begin well, run zealously, and turn aside. There may be men possessed of mighty powers, working miracles, or displaying other effects of the presence of the Spirit of God (and these are brought before us here) who nevertheless fall away irreparably.

But what is spoken of in John 4 is not the external working of the Spirit; it is His power mingling itself with, and acting in, that new divine life which is given to every believer. This clears the subject at once. For that which is supposed in Hebrews 6 does not touch upon Christian worship, which clearly is the subject here, and this in contrast with Jewish, or, yet more, Samaritan forms. The religion of Sychar was merely the vain rivalry of those who had no part nor lot in the promises of God. But it is the solemn truth revealed by our Lord that Christian worship supposes the passing away of Jewish worship. Such is the fact before all eyes now. The people of the Jews, witnesses of God for ages, have disappeared from their land, having lost their public testimony, and

are cast out of the only place in which that witness could be properly borne. They have no longer the consecrated spot where the holiest of all once proclaimed to the world the God that hid Himself in the thick darkness, to whom the High Priest drew near once a year tremblingly, not without blood, nor incense. But now all is changed; and those who alone are true worshippers are supposed to possess, not only a new life capable of entering into the mind of Christ, and having the moral feelings of God, which those that are born of Him have and must have; but further, that they, propitiated for and cleansed by the blood of the cross, possess a new divine power working in that life by which they are enabled to worship in spirit and in truth. This is the main subject of that part of the chapter which has been read tonight.

Now I do not speak of a thing outside you. If you love the Lord Jesus, if you have turned to Him in the bitterness of your souls, if you know the anguish of being sinners convicted in the sight of God, if nevertheless the proclamation of His mercy has touched and won your hearts to Himself, if in short you have faith in the Lord Jesus, you are children of God. Fear not those who call it presumption to take such a place. It is presumption if you have not faith in Him, but the truest humility for those that believe. It is what you owe Jesus. You are false to your Saviour if you question what He has done for you. You owe it as a part of your allegiance, your loyalty to the Lord Jesus, to let all know the great things the Lord has done for your soul. But, as the consequence of the mighty work of the Lord Jesus in your salvation, you are constituted worshippers — not now on the footing of a nation tried by its efforts under the law of God, but of His children saved by sovereign

grace. Legal probation was the case once with the children of Israel. But Christian worship is founded on the momentous fact that the cross of Christ has closed all trials of the creature on the ground of his own responsibility; that God has brought in an entirely new thing, not man tried, but, God as the Saviour-God, and man (i.e. believers) on a new footing — taken out of either the ancient people of God or any other; for it is of no consequence what people may have been, but what grace makes them now in Christ.

It is a question of giving Christ to those who, when they had nothing but sins, are, in faith of Him, brought to confess their sins. I grant you, without the confession of sins, without the justifying of God against ourselves, there is nothing as it should be, nothing divine, in any soul. But then, if you are confessors of the name of the Lord, you cannot choose your place: God has defined it, as His grace has given it all. He puts in this place those who receive Jesus. His own children He puts in this place of men cleared from their sins, their evil nature itself judged and done with before Him This most comforting truth communicated to their souls sets them the more free to know Him better, and to worship Him who so loved them. In principle, therefore, every Christian is constituted a worshipper. The sad fact, however, meets us now that there are very few Christians indeed who know what Christianity is. Thus the last truth that people are apt to learn is the first truth in importance as practically concerning themselves. Not that people have not got notions of Christianity, but that the clear simple spiritual understanding of the new place into which Christ has

brought us is in general the least understood by believers.

Let me ask the question: Supposing you were to go among the Christians of this city — and certainly they are not behind those of other places — supposing you were to go throughout this land, or the countries which surround it, among those who are really children of God, would you find in their hymns of praise, in their spiritual songs, the consciousness of their perfect nearness to God, of their present joyful rest in the Lord, of their delight in His known presence by the Spirit of God, of their waiting for the Saviour to come and receive them unto Himself? Is all this their language, their uniform language? I fear that I am doing no dishonour to any congregation of any body, to any form of worship as it is called, if I say that such would be altogether the exception, and not the rule. The reason is manifest. Even Christians are afraid of seeming to slight the place of Israel in the Old Testament. Consequently for the most part — and I am not speaking of any particular denomination — go where you may, in France, England, Ireland, Scotland, or any other land, substantially it is the same thing, though with marked differences undoubtedly. It would be unjust to say that the language or the form is exactly the same; but I may well ask — Is there the simple, holy, joyful, sense of nearness to God, unclouded peace, without a single spot or stain, without a question of fear, on the part of the body of Christian worshippers? He who would affirm this must have had a very different experience from mine. The reverse I believe to be true.

For the most part the prayers that are found in use among the real children of God — and the more real, the

more you will find this — betray the anxiety of godly men, their earnest desire to awaken from indifference and form to a sense of sins, warning and entreating, beseeching and expostulating, if by any means to alarm, and somehow to win, men from the world to God.

Is this then worship? Not an element of it. It may be service, as far as it goes, and it is; but this confusion of things, so widely differing, makes it the more needful to explain what Christian worship is, what is its nature and distinctive character. I answer, that it is the united outpouring of thanks and blessing to God and the Lamb, from hearts purified by faith, who have the knowledge of the Father and the Son by the power of the Holy Ghost; and who therefore draw near in the happy confidence of His love, in the confessed delight and enjoyment of what God is, in the praise of what He is, and of what He is to them.

Preaching, or prayer on the part of those seeking the conversion of souls, is not worship. Intercession for saints even is not worship, unless it rise up to the character of thanksgiving and of blessing. Very often they may approach and mingle. Still, prayer in its own essential nature is the spreading of our wants before God with the desire of relief, and of answer in His grace. And it appears to me that scarce anything is less happy than teaching or preaching mixed up with prayers. I am not alluding to preachers only; for the evil is common among those who have no evangelistic gift; and yet they seem hardly to know what prayer is, still less worship. What they substitute for it is often an iteration of truths, then quite out of place. Suppose that we were dealing with individuals, it might be perfectly right; but when

one thinks of speaking to God, is it becoming to teach Him? This is forgotten.

Need one tell you how the very thought of the One we are speaking to is lost in such cases? They are thinking about this one and that one — I will conceive genuine in their love and desires; but even then sincerity can never cover nor excuse such a fault. They are off the ground of Christian worship; and this is an essential fault if the object of the meeting be worship.

I say, then, that the expression of our wants to God, although most proper in its place, is not worship. Again, confessing our sins is not worship. This I do most entirely admit to you, that if people do not confess their sins day by day they will not be able to worship when they come together; if they are honest men, the effect of not confessing at home, of carelessness in self-judgment, leads to the turning of worship into an occasion of confession, because the heart is burdened. Thus, instead of its being the joyful drawing near to God and raising the hearts of all to the worship of the One before whom we bow, and in whose nature and grace we take our delight, and telling what we know of Him, and how we appreciate His love — instead of this, the heart is oppressed with a sense of its unworthiness, with its failures from day to day; and accordingly the meeting becomes one of confessing how much we fail, instead of the power of the Spirit going out to our God in the sense of His grace and of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Everyone knows that it is impossible for the soul to be born of God without feeling the need of prayer. Crying to God is always true in its own place, it is true every day, true throughout the day; but the subject that I am

bringing before you now is worship, not prayer. Again, in order to produce the sense of our need, and of any measure of confidence in God, there must be conversion. The Holy Spirit uses the word to quicken the soul; as we know, normally this was done by the preaching of the gospel: and this is, I need not say, ordered of God wisely and graciously. But neither preaching nor praying is worship, and the mingling of these things together tends to obscure them all, and comparatively to destroy the sense of what worship is for the children of God.

Hence you will find as to this, two parties among those that bear the name of the Lord. There are mere formalists, who very often sound right to a certain point in what they say; for they will tell you that the great thing wanted by Christians is Christian worship. Therefore, they cast a slight on those who go almost wholly for sermons, whether to rouse the unconverted or to instruct the faithful. Yes, but it surely is of no small importance to know that we have the Christian people before we begin to worship. A further question still arises, — Do these men know the truth? Are they themselves born of God?

And there is exactly what drives the other class into an opposite ground. They look around; they know more or less the character, the life, the state, of most of those who compose the congregation; and, feeling very justly that they are in general not born of God, but in the disobedience of nature, and in darkness before God, they most earnestly seize the opportunity (though nominally for worship) either to thunder out the law, or to preach, as far as they can, the gospel to win men’s souls to God. This, we have seen is all right in its own

place; but it is a profound error to call it worship. Thus it is that mistakes are found on every side.

There is danger and difficulty unless we are simply looking to Christ, and content to follow His word: when we look to Him all is clear. Scripture shows that the gospel is necessary for bringing in God Himself to the soul, and, to speak still more strictly, for bringing the soul to God. Suppose that one has found the Lord, submits to the righteousness of God, and has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him: then comes worship (as it is said in John 9, “Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him”). But though, in principle, every child of God is entitled to worship Him, in point of fact there are many who may not be able to rise at once into worship. The reason is because their practical state is not one of rest in His grace. They are not quite easy in His presence, they would be afraid to die, they hope at last to go to heaven; but they are not happy or sure. Worse than this, they think it is a dangerous thing to be sure; they have been told so by those who ought to know, and they devoutly believe it. They are afraid of the grace of God now, and dread the judgment-seat by-and-by. Now if they reversed matters, if afraid to trust in themselves, they would be right. If they were uneasy lest they might be taking the ground habitually of their own deserts, of their faithfulness and obedience, then it would be so far wise. But after looking to Jesus and at His great salvation, after hearing the way in which God speaks of the Saviour and the Holy Ghost testifies to the perfectness of redemption, to allow one question after this is nothing but unbelief.

But supposing this has been secretly judged, and the soul has received with all simplicity the message of the

grace of God that brings salvation; what then? Now is the place for worship. Now, the soul at ease, at liberty, and in peace, delights to draw near to God. But not alone: grace strengthens the new-born instincts of obedience, and there is no thought of forming one's own plan of worship, and we must still listen to the Lord, who does not merely speak of a single soul here and there drawing near in adoration, but of "the true worshippers," and "they that worship," etc. Christian worship supposes isolation no more than will-worship. Liberty undoubtedly there is, but this only to please God; not, one undertaking worship after this fashion, another after that. He who alone reveals the Father, and is with Him (as we hear elsewhere) the object of our worship, shows us how we are to worship. And if our hearts, knowing the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, really desire to worship Him, surely we shall want to worship Him according to His own will. We lose our pains, and turn our worship rather into a grief and a dishonour to Him (not to speak of loss to our own souls), unless we are found worshipping Him in the spirit of intelligent obedience.

It is notorious that in the Old Testament much is said of worship in Jerusalem. But in the New Testament we find that on the day of Pentecost, after the cross, when the believers received the gift of the Holy Ghost, they were not left where they had been; they thenceforth began to form what is called "their own company." What does this mean? Without a doubt the company of those that confessed the name of the Lord Jesus like themselves. It is not implied by this, that unbelievers might not creep into their midst, but that nobody was received who was not supposed to believe in Him. Granted that it does not

become a Christian to be suspicious; but it is the duty of faith and even charity according to the word of God and as far as we can discern, to guard the company that bears the name of Jesus from those who are not of Him — to warn others from taking a place in which nothing can sustain but life in the power of the Spirit. What wretchedness, whether deceiving or self-deceived, to profess eternal life on earth, and after all to be lost in hell! I see no care for Christ's honour, nor love to man, in such indifference as some count charity. It is really unwillingness to bear for the Lord's sake what is painful to flesh and gives offence to the world.

True love invariably seeks the good of its object. In the Christian, also, love submits to One whom we own infinitely superior to us, and withal loving us with a perfect love. We are not put on the ground of doing things merely because we think them right. We need not hesitate to say that, if we desired or sought to do right, simply because we thought the thing right, we should be always wrong. In short, the only true principle for a Christian, is obedience. We are sanctified unto the obedience of Christ. It is the very life-breath of the new nature. It was what was found in perfection in Christ, and God now calls us to walk even as He walked. Assuredly there is immeasurable distance between the perfection of Christ's walk and our walk; but this is certain, that we are bound to go forward in the same direction. The Lord may and does distance us, but we are bound to be on the same road. We are called to direct our faces to the same heaven, and we are bound to go onward, according to the measure of our strength, after Him, not away from Him. This is what is implied in being sanctified unto His obedience. God has given us to

see its perfection in Christ, but He has set us in the very same path; as He said Himself, “Follow me.” So here, as to this most important department of what concerns a Christian.

For the new nature has two, and but two, spheres of exercise; one sphere of its exercise is upward, and another sphere downward. Life goes out in praise and adoration towards God, as it is displayed in active goodness towards man. This includes of course those that are members of the same body, and none but the possessors of the life of Christ and of the Holy Ghost. Besides the love towards all mankind, and yet more intimately to his brethren, there is nothing that ought to stamp a Christian so much as worship. The love that was in Christ ought to be reproduced in the Christian. He has the same life, and that life is exercised in its own divine affections by the Spirit of God. But then, the highest sphere of its display is not downward, but upward. Hence, however precious service may be, whether in the higher part (namely, ministering to the church the grace of Christ and the truth of God), or in the giving out the gospel of God to the world (and these are the different parts of Christian ministry), precious as either may be, nothing equals worship. In the one case you are looking at man, or the saints; in the other case you are before our God and Father, and as much as God is above man, so is Christian worship even above Christian service.

For true worship is the common united occupation of God’s children. God would give them the best place: and the very object of Christian ministry is to bring souls out of this naughty world, by the grace of God and the truth communicated to them, in order to set them in holy

liberty and delight before God. This is its object. It is evident, therefore, that Christian ministry does not stop, as it were in the doorway between the children of God and their God and Father. Ministry points to the door, and, more than this, it introduces into the house; but when the door is reached, it merges in the crowd of those that enter and adore. When it acts otherwise, it ceases to be Christian ministry, and becomes mere clericalism — ministry for the flesh and for the world; ministry with the effect, if not for the purpose, of exaggerating and exalting self. And what is there of Christ in all that?

This, then, is what our Lord Jesus brings before us — God, as He knows Him; God manifesting Himself in two ways. First of all, He is the Father; not God in His abstract majesty as such; not Jehovah in government of a people, thus remaining hidden away in clouds and veils, so that He could not be known intimately, only approached dimly and distantly. So it had been, and it was Judaism. But a change was near; which Jesus here announces. Christianity is the ineffable love of God that comes down and seeks worshippers who are by grace made His children, not only bringing them out of their vileness, but at once calling them to Himself, as Father. For it is no question of gradual attainment, a sort of process of purification, either on earth or in heaven, or in some invisible state of the dead. The blessedness of the gospel is, that it shines from heaven and meets souls on the earth, putting them while here below through the cross into relationship with heaven, yea with God Himself. This is Christianity; anything short of it is not our revealed portion, though short of it there may be many elements of truth. There are none that know and

love Christ at all who have not a measure of the truth. And there are those that preach not a little that is unsound, with a very small measure of the gospel. Does it not delight us that they preach Christ (even though there be sad drawbacks), and that God uses it? What a mercy that He does not limit His blessing to such as teach Christ fully, that His mercy is with all sorts of preaching and preachers, even such as are much mixed up with the world! Nevertheless there is something of Christ about them, and God can and does use this. Are we jealous of it? Do you not like God to save people, in a Roman Catholic chapel, or anywhere else?

It is not that we should count it a right thing for persons who know better, to go here and there. On the contrary, if you have the truth and know it, by all means stick to it. Never be afraid of giving unflinching support to what you know is the truth. We respect the man who inflexibly stands to what he accepts as divine; only first take care that it is divine — that you have the truth and will of God. I repeat, he who boasts of a principle that he will never give up, ought surely first to look well to himself that he has learnt it from God; that he has it in his soul by divine teaching. Tests soon come to try whether people have been taught of God. When a man has truth, he is not afraid of looking at it again and again. He is not going, like Balaam, to enquire according to his own will, when God has given him his plain answer.

On the other hand, a man who has the truth from God can wait patiently on the difficulties of others. He bears to be sifted and examined, because he is perfectly certain of the truth as revealed of God, and believed by him, without pretending to answer the objections of every man. He will seek ability to estimate aright the

difficulties of others; but even if he cannot solve them, this will not lessen his conviction of the truth. I may have the most perfect certainty that I am a living person before you; but if some man asked me to explain how I know that I am alive, I might have difficulty to give reasons adequate to convince; yet this does not hinder the certainty of the fact, nor one's own consciousness of it. In his conscience, however, the caviller knows perfectly well that he is talking folly all the while. He is aware that to reason against the truth of what is, by putting frivolous perplexities, has no real sense in it. Surely, beloved friends, in the things of God we are not to allow such a spirit; but always to treat cavilling objections as sin. At the same time, if you have the certainty of the truth of God, you may and ought to be patient with others; you will be wise to avoid making attacks on them. This can only rouse animosity. God who has brought you to Himself, and made you a worshipper, has made all His children equally worshippers; and that which is thus according to God for one Christian must be right for all. Now, if you have your eye single, you will not be afraid of the light of God. You will delight to examine His word, and see whether in this you do so follow the light of God — whether, according to our Lord's description of a true worshipper, you are worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth.

It is evident from what has been observed that the first qualification and basis for worship is this: not only that we are really the children of God, but that we should have the consciousness of it. He who may be a real child of God, yet doubts it (and there are many such), cannot worship God practically while he abides in that state. What he needs is to understand the truth more fully; he

wants to know even the gospel better. He may be a believer, but far from clear; such an one is not yet free. Supposing he takes his place as a worshipper in that condition, he must join in words that are above, not only his own experience, but even his faith. Consequently such an one is in danger of seeming more or less hypocritical when he is telling the Lord how he delights in Him and His salvation, yet he does not delight; when he is thanking the Lord that he has no doubts, while he has doubts; when he sings as in joy that all his fears are gone, whereas many deep anxieties remain and recur. It is evident that such a condition is not favourable in any way to the general simplicity and truth of the Christian. It is due to the glory of God, according to the Scriptures, that His children and their worship should be direct, transparent, and as true as redemption known in a good conscience can make it; for the worshipper once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. While a man is in a harassed unhappy condition, wisdom would not hurry his coming to the table of the Lord, which is the proper centre of Christian worship. Nor would love call him, till set free, to join in that which is necessarily the expression of peace, of rest in the Lord Jesus, of rejoicing in His grace, of waiting and longing for His return in glory.

It is clear according to the Scriptural account of worship — in the New Testament — that all this is pre-supposed. For souls born of God, yet in bondage, what is to be done? Christian teaching is of all moment. The Lord provides the instruction that is requisite. Above all, it is to be found in the gospel fully preached, without going farther. It is no abstruse mystery which is needed; but

what every Christian conscience ought to feel to be the truth, once it is presented from God's word.

How comes it then, that many do not relish the full testimony of grace in redemption? Because they like the dim twilight of Judaism; they prefer to be left a little uncertain and somewhat vague. The moral reason is evident: when men are enveloped in a haze, they can indulge the flesh, they can trifle with the world, they can enjoy earthly pleasure. They thus please themselves with little compunction. Do not mistake here. God intends that His children should be thoroughly happy and walk in liberty. But that liberty is in freedom from sin to serve Jesus: to do the will of God is the growing delight of the heart, in cleaving to the Lord, in knowing His will more perfectly, and in a single-hearted self-renunciation, in order to glorify the Lord Jesus.

We know that the devil endeavours to make all appear to be a gloomy subject and a very painful strain. Not so: under law there was gloom, condemnation and death. The gospel sets us in conscious life, liberty and the light of God's presence. This is exactly where people mistake. They can only conceive that the obedience of a Christian must be that of nature, which consists in obeying commands that are contrary to what we wish. I have no hesitation in saying that such should not be the obedience of a Christian, as it never was of Christ; and Christ always decides the truth for a Christian. Our Lord Jesus, when He was here below, habitually spoke out of the sense of His being a Son, the Son of God. There is no small analogy with the Christian. His being a son of God is not a groundless vaunt, nor any real exalting of himself. How can I boast of that which is pure grace towards me? How can I be vain of that which does not in

the smallest degree belong to myself, which was not acquired by my merit, but only and freely given me by God Himself in the name of Jesus Christ His Son? But when you have received Christ, the new life of the believer delights in the will of God, and is deeply pained whenever there is forgetfulness of His word, and a doing what is contrary to it. Here is where the connection, and the necessity, and the joy, of this worship appear.

We know, alas! that a Christian may slip into what is wrong; and hence, therefore, arises the need of self-judgment. How is it stated in 1 Corinthians? I particularly mention it, because we find it there (1 Cor. 11) connected with the dealing of the Lord, who was pleased to lay down the serious yet simple principle by His servant the apostle, that, if the believer does not judge himself, the Lord judges him. And it is evident, further, from 1 Cor. 5, that between his failure in self-judgment and the Lord's sure judgment, if all else fail, there ought to be the judgment of the assembly. Christian discipline, I grant you, many people shrink from; they are afraid of its name, and dislike all approach to it. We know well why. They are aware how it has been made an instrument of torture, what it wrought in the dark ages, not in isolated cases, but in multitudes. I do not wonder they dread it. But the abuse of the truth, the vile corruption of the ways of God in the church, and the perversion of that which should be the holy obligation of the Lord's name into a means of priestly domination, is no reason why we should abandon the word of the Lord and our own bounden duty. I say this word abides; and it is most evident that no difficulties, no confusions in Christendom, were ever meant to weaken the word of God.

Hence, therefore, as connected with our subject, it is plain that to carry on Christian worship truly, there must be holiness of walk, with self-judgment, in the believer: otherwise the worship is lowered, or becomes formal and false. If there be on the part of those who compose the assembly the habitual want of self-judgment, they will all surely sink. If we live in the Spirit we must walk accordingly, or we soon cease so to worship. Instead of being a company of souls that freely and thoroughly enjoy the grace of God, they will, if upright, lapse into groans and sighs and self-reproach, which might be necessary and right in the closet individually, sometimes even for the assembly, too; but a sorry substitution of another service for Christian worship.

But more than that; it is the business of all Christians (and of some especially) to watch over each other in Christ and for His sake. So far from its being a presumptuous interference with one another, it is the revealed will of God (1 Thess. 5), the instinct of new life, and the sure fruit of love. Do you think, for instance, that a parent, or even an elder brother or sister, fail in love because they deeply feel and express their sense of a wrong done by one of their family? I need not tell you that sin is of such a nature, that, if there be none other, the youngest of all is entitled and bound to lay it as a charge on the oldest of all. Granted, that this would be a serious and an undesirable state of things; for we have always to consider in these matters the way of doing them. And one need hardly add that zeal or good intentions will not satisfy the new nature — nothing but the will of the Lord. It is always painful to have to touch another’s wound. I press particularly this, because haste to find fault, whether publicly or privately, is the cause

of as many practical difficulties as any other; and I cannot conceive a greater intrusion on Christian worship than the introducing of such topics habitually into seasons devoted to it. Surely, beloved friends, that is neither the time nor the place, nor the rule in ordinary circumstances, even supposing our thoughts may be ever so correct. What we have there to do is not to be finding fault with this person or with that thing: let us take another and more fitting occasion; let us seek alone and in private, if indeed we ought to do it at all. Would it become a woman to be forward in such matters? or, again, a young man with those older? There should always be the cultivation of the lowliness of grace, more particularly if you are obliged to blame another: there is no time that demands such love, and that calls for such humility.

I do not apologise for having touched on these practical topics, as connected with worship, because we know them to be very materially and intimately linked with it. Nevertheless, I desire to come back to the main business. For, while there are these incidents in our own way, or these difficulties through others, which may be more or less hindrances, still it is very evident that the characteristic objects for which God has a people here below are the two spheres already named. Another occasion may serve to speak of ministry; but not now, when I only refer to it, lest any one might suppose it was overlooked. Having it as the present object to treat of worship, I press this, — that any of you, children of God, who are not seeking to take the place given you by the word of the Lord, of true worshippers worshipping the Father, are losing your time upon the earth in forgetfulness of your sweetest privileges. No one

dictates to you; you are not advised where to go, what to do, with whom to consort, but this only — consult as to it the word of God for yourselves. If you be afraid of the test, if you are unwilling to follow its direction, you have not avoided a bad conscience. Remember what you are sanctified for. Let nothing be so prized as the glory of Christ, nothing so authoritative as the revealed will of the Lord.

Let me press this also upon you, as self-evident, that if you are mingled, Christians and no Christians, men of the world and believers in Christ together, there cannot be worship in spirit and in truth. There never was, since the Lord announced its nature, real Christian worship where such mixture exists. The effect of the attempt is not that worldly persons are raised upward to the ground and power of worship in spirit and in truth, but that Christians must go down to the atmosphere of the worldly. That is to say, you abandon (and for what? or on whose authority?) all your own proper privileges. There are few things so dreadful as putting such language, the language of Christian nearness, into men's lips that are far from God. Among many, even among some called evangelicals, worship is in practice, as in principle, scarcely known. Persons who have outward forms do maintain it in name; but it is earthly and almost wholly false, being for the most part a kind of galvanic movement kept up among the dead; it is fatal for man, and profane in the sight of God. No, it is divine life and redemption that must be the basis of worship; and the Spirit of God alone is the power of carrying it on. As it is addressed to our God and Father in the name of the Lord Jesus, so is it offered on the principle of the unity of Christ's body. It is essentially above the pettiness of a

sect, and its true character dies and vanishes before it can be made to express peculiar views. When God formed His church upon earth, there was no such thought as men making a draft of doctrine or a code of rules; neither should there be now. The church of God is the best school of doctrine: practically, we learn ourselves, and others, there as nowhere else; but it is God’s doing while we are there, not before going in.

Nowadays, people constantly bring their notions into the church, instead of forming their judgments from the teaching of the Spirit by the word in that place of light and truth. I maintain that thus formed you never can be right; and, therefore, far from attaching value to the conceived notions of any in such circumstances, I entreat them to think only of Christ, before they are on the true ground of confession and worship: the communion of those that are His. Many, for want of seeing this, labour to get up notions before they are true worshippers. But it is vain. They are always one-sided, and their views sure to be foreshortened in some sort of way; they are apt to be or go wrong in most important particulars. It is never wise to theorise apart from the facts of Scripture; and none can doubt where they point. Be assured there never can be true intelligence until you have taken the place of true obedience. All real understanding in divine things is of faith, and cannot be separated from moral state. It is the effect of obedience, and the fruit of being judged by God’s word, of your not presuming to judge — which is what people do when they try to be intelligent before they are willing to receive, learn, and be everything, in and only through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This I believe to be the true way. The Lord would humble souls first, and would then exalt them; it is the abased, or rather those that learn to abase themselves, who have that blessed promise. The true pathway then is Christ: to come in, not as having ready-made views and a stock of judgments, but content with this only, that God in grace has met me in the midst of my folly and sins, and has given me Christ. After the mercy He has shown me in redemption, there is nothing that I should not desire to learn of such a God, as there is no good thing that His love keeps back from me. Thus grace makes one willing not only to learn but also to do for His name. How much there is, which comes with all simplicity and only in due proportions, when we are gathered to the name of the Lord, and all truth is felt to be practical in the worship and service of the Lord!

And now a little word as to the object of worship. You will find in Scripture that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus is habitually prominent. For instance, in this chapter of John's Gospel, He is the One whom our Lord Jesus puts forth. But you are not to draw from this that the Son of God is not an object of worship equal with the Father. The reason why the Son could not be put forward in John 4 is manifest: it was the Son that was Himself speaking, and, therefore, as He came to glorify the Father, naturally and necessarily He does not treat of His own glory; nor does the Holy Ghost, when He was sent down from heaven to glorify Christ. But let us take the very first chapter of Acts, when Christ went above. The disciples were in difficulty about an apostle, in Judas' room, and at once betook themselves to the Lord — not to the Father, but to the Master. And when Stephen bows down, about to depart, he asks the Lord

to receive his spirit, not the Father. So when suited blessing is desired for the saints, whether the church or individuals, it is always from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. If it were blessing fully stated, it was from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

But then there is this difference, and it is an important one, that although the Holy Ghost is in His own right and title equally an object of divine worship as the Father and the Son, yet the Spirit of God is now pleased to take the place of giving effect to the counsels of God, and to work for the glory of the Father and the Son in the church. Hence it is observable that, although the Spirit of God be in His own nature entitled to worship, He for the time exalts the Father and the Son, just as the Son on earth was always exalting the Father. This is the real key to the absence of direct worship addressed to the Spirit of God in the New Testament. It must never be supposed that the Holy Ghost is not worshipped; for when we adore God as such, He is worshipped in the unity of the Godhead. “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him [it is not merely the Father, but also God] must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” If we say God, the Father only is not meant, but the Trinity. Evidently, then, we worship the Father in saying God, but we also worship the Son and the Holy Ghost; for Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are equally God. And, consequently, it is seen at once how blessedly this fits in with worship. It is not full Christian worship merely to worship the Father. To our Lord Jesus, according to Scripture, not only angels pay homage, but glorified saints praise alike God and the Lamb: He is worthy.

We have in the Revelation an insight into the worship that we shall pay, when we are thus glorified in the

presence of God: Revelation 4 and Revelation 5 are explicit. Therein is disclosed that heavenly scene; and first of all God as such, the Lord God Almighty, has His homage. The chapter speaks about earthly dealings and judgments, and the Lord God Almighty, who takes, as is meet, the universe under His ken, is thus worshipped. But in the fifth chapter there is an advance. There the elders direct their song of praise first of all, and very especially, to the Lamb. “Thou art worthy to take the book”; and this is in the very presence of God the Father. As it is said elsewhere, “Let all the angels of God worship Him”; so too all the elders of God worship Him. The persons who have the most intimate acquaintance with His mind worship Him emphatically, and after this personal manner: ‘` Thou art worthy to take the book.” This surely is the fullest warrant. It is no use to say that it is all a future scene. Why is it revealed to us now? What is the object of God in revealing that which is to come, except to act on our souls now? It is not merely to inform us of something that will be by-and-by, but He intends to give our hearts present fellowship with His mind, and thus form our thoughts and convictions of due and full heavenly worship now. I think and trust then, that it will be plain to all Christians here, that the worship of the Lamb, of the rejected Messiah who died and rose for us, is as truly Scriptural as the worship of the Father; and that the worship of God, as such, includes in its scope and nature the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

For our present profit it is evident that conscious possession of the Spirit and the direct assurance of His guidance, now that we know the Father and the Son, are vitally momentous. On this one may say a few words.

How are Christian people, when they come together, to know how to worship aright? Ask yourselves, Do you not know that the Holy Ghost is sent down for the express purpose of guiding the children of God? Certainly if He guides them in their service, and in their walk, and in their communion, He takes no less interest and active place in their worship. And so it is that in 1 Cor. 14, (founded on 1 Cor. 12, the present action of the Spirit,) when the assembly of God's people come together, you find blessing and praise as well as prayer. It is not only the exercise of gifts in prophesying or in singing. The various elements of worship are all brought in. For what can be more so than blessing and praise? Accordingly, therefore, the Spirit of God is as much the practical power in the assembly as He is in the individual. Man's will is ruinous and wretched.

The Spirit of God is the One who can alone guide aright; but then He is here for the purpose. Consequently, while the service of need has its place, there are times when He draws out our hearts in worship. "God," as such, may be before our eyes. Quite right and very true, as it may be exactly seasonable, and more so than any other object. At another time "the Father" might be most before our hearts; at another, again, "the Lord Jesus," in one glory or another. I do not believe that these things can be regulated aright by the wit of man, nor that there can be any rules given as to them; but that the spiritual discernment which is fostered as well as formed by the word of God will feel and own the right thing at the due time. This is undoubtedly very difficult; but the church of God is not meant to ease us of difficulties, but to exercise us in what would be altogether impossible to nature. Give this up, and you will merely sink down into

a thing of nature and of the world — religion of common sense. You degrade and ruin the worship of God, unless it be sustained where nothing but divine power can; and the need of the divine Spirit has to be confided in, especially when we remember that worship proceeds in the unfettered assembly of Christians. There is the blessedness of believers, that if you are really faithful to the Lord, you will be in the place of His will, and working according to the love of His heart, and joining in such worship as demands nothing short of the presence and power of the Spirit of God.

Clearly, therefore, an unbeliever, or even a believer not yet emancipated from law, would spoil such worship. But then, if there be spirituality in an assembly, there will be detection, and removal in due time, though it is well not to be hasty. You know the patience of the Lord, who knows how to make manifest in due time what is for His glory. It is never right to be suspicious; on the other hand, it is wrong to be careless. Is it really argued that, because there was a Judas among the twelve, you should consciously let in Judases? But the Lord knows how to make the presence of one manifest. To turn him out should be a pain: but it is our duty to do so when there is a manifestation of that which calls for it even in one who is proved at last to be a saint.

In no case ought there to be haste; but always the exercise of dependence and confidence in God. Grace does and will keep up the hearts of the children of God. Legality brings in its own things, sometimes with excitement, sometimes with downcast feeling, and thus clouds in every way the children of God. These are not the ways to help saints: but by grace and truth better known, exhorting them to lean on the Lord, and so prove

that the gracious God who has done such infinite things in Christ is always for them, and will take up their cause in every circumstance. May He grant that we hold fast and seek to know Him better, and grow in the brightest place than can belong to the Christian on earth — the place of worshippers, who, if they rejoice to adore the Father that called them and revealed Himself in grace, must worship God, according to the exigencies of His nature, in spirit and in truth.

W.K.

Christian Worship

Being the substance of three lectures by W Kelly.

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Lecture 1 - “True worshippers.” John 4:20-24.

The grace of our Lord is as rich as it is conspicuous in the scene before us. Had it not been so, He would not have unfolded worship to this woman of Samaria. He would have chosen some more worthy person. He might have found readily such an one as Peter or John, or had He gone beyond the bounds of His own disciples, such an one as Nicodemus, or Joseph of Arimathea. But not so. He was making known expressly the free-giving of God, revealed in Himself the Son, and distinguishing in the broadest and the most distinct manner the difference between that which had been and that which was not to be. The old worship was altogether unsuited to the new purposes of God; another hour was dawning. She of Samaria thought, like many an one since, that the worship of God was only a question of human opinion. Strange that even God’s children should doubt that God’s worship must be of God’s will! That He Himself should be denied a voice, the voice, in His own worship is indeed the climax of man’s incredulity. But so it has been, and so it is, and men see not the presumptuous self-will that does not allow God to decide what is His will for the worship of His children.

There is no subject in which men think that difference is more allowable than in worship. But our Lord Jesus brings out the truth of God as to it unmistakeably. Man’s will is bad enough anywhere but specially so where it

intrudes into God's worship. Not that one pleads for the light of God in this matter and not elsewhere. Be assured that those who complain of lack of light on such a subject in scripture have a far more serious question to settle. For this is as much a matter of revelation, and so of faith on our part, as the salvation of a man's soul; and the same faith which can trust God in one thing can trust Him in everything; while on the other hand the incredulity which doubts God on one point is ready to doubt in all. Those who talk doubtingly of the authority or the certainty of God's word as to Christian worship, ministry, the coming of the Lord, or anything else that is revealed, will be found to have no rest in Christ for their souls. The evil heart of unbelief is at work and unrebuked.

I deny (as a matter of fixed principle) that the word of God is obscure: the allowance of such a thought arises from nothing but secret infidelity, and infidelity from an unjudged will. For let us for a moment consider, Is it God's word, and is it for man, that is, for His people? Will you affirm then that man speaks more clearly than God? Will you deny that God, when He proposes to reveal Himself to man, can make Himself understood by His own or by others?

It is freely admitted that there is another characteristic of God's word. It is necessarily a moral test of the heart; and God, therefore, does put His word in such a form that dependence on Him must be exercised, and that rashness or a heady spirit will mistake. Not that this makes obscurity, but that faith and the affections are thus put to the proof. "If thine eye be single," says the Lord Jesus, "thy whole body shall be full of light." The light of God always discovers and deals with a certain

moral state; but God by His grace makes the heart to welcome the light.

The Lord then clearly draws a contrast between what was and what is now. Undoubtedly the woman of Samaria was wrong in her thoughts. She belonged to a people who took up the law, a heathen people who copied the forms of Judaism in part. “Salvation,” says the Lord, “is of the Jews.” These knew whatever had been known in the matter of worship; but no matter what the darkness of the Samaritans, or the glimmer of light among the Jews, another hour was coming when a new character of worship would be brought in for the children of God; and I specially draw your attention to this. It is not for a moment denied that there were other vast changes, such as the preaching of the gospel to every creature. I merely now refer to the fact that the two things were to go on together, but altogether distinct in their own nature. In short, then, the gospel was to be preached to every creature, and the children of God were to be henceforth true worshippers.

What then did our Lord mean by “true worshippers?” He first speaks negatively. “The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.” (Ver. 21). It was no longer to be a question of “this mountain,” with its spurious imitation of Israel, nor of Jerusalem with its imposing ritual of the law. But “the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” (Ver. 23.) This is the first point of which we have to take notice. Henceforth it is a question of worshipping the Father, a simple but wondrous privilege, in a general way easily enough understood, but not so easily carried out. To do so one must clean break with the world. For man, the

world as such, does not affect it, nay, dares not to worship the Father. Nor need you wonder; for, if you search the word of God, you will always find that “the world” and “the Father” are in constant antagonism; just as the Son of God is to the great enemy, and the flesh or fallen man to the Spirit of God, so is the world to the Father.

One marked feature then of this new worship is, that the world is necessarily excluded. I do not mean by this that the world may not be present to hear; but that the nature of the worship shuts out the world from taking part. This will be made still more evident when we enter into particulars. It is God’s children alone, those who have faith in Christ Jesus, who worship the Father. Yet doubtless the attempt has been made in many lands and ages to bring the world into Christian worship. The invariable effect is that such worship turns out fit neither for the world nor for the family of God. The effort to comprehend both on such a ground and for such an end must be a failure, a delusion. For the world, by the very fact that it is the world, is incapable of so worshipping. Christian worship supposes the truth known, yea, God Himself known; Christian worship supposes a new nature given; it supposes the gift and power and action of the Holy Ghost; it supposes the Christian assembly wherein the Spirit works by whom He will. And all these things are wanting in the world. Nay, further, to put the world upon this ground is to deceive it; it is to be active parties in falsifying the conscience, and in deluding men as to their true condition in the sight of God.

But there is another and very grave result. The children of God never preserve their own elevation by grace in

attempting to comprehend the world as worshippers; for thereby the world is not raised up, but the church sinks to the level of the world. Consequently the language of such worship savours always of uncertainty, hesitation, and dread, in the soul's relation to God; entreaties for pardon, deprecation of judgment, unbelieving prayers for the Spirit of God to be poured out afresh, and all the other petitions which naturally flow from a position which is essentially false. This is found in all religious systems invented by man.

Yet if there be intermingled with it God's solemn judgment of sinners, incongruous as this may be, it appears in some sense a merciful inconsistency, rather than that the unconverted should be cheated by a more consistent worship to take the place of God's children without a warning. For what could be more awful in its way than to hear an unconverted man formally assuming the language of the church, expressing a delight in God of which he knows nothing and a communion with the Father whose love is hateful to him? But in fact all the liturgies I have seen (and they are not few) merely fall back upon the feelings of men, with a slight tincture of gospel and a large infusion of law. There may be sublime language and glowing ideas, chiefly borrowed from the Old Testament; but in substance they are utterly beneath intelligent Christian use, apart from faults of form, and the very idea of a liturgy now.

But, when we come to search and understand the distinctive truths of the New Testament, we see that what the Lord Jesus here intimates of the immense change in worship then at hand was connected with the revelation of Himself, the accomplishment of His work, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Lord could not but

say, if one compares the Jews with the Samaritans, “We know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.” For worship is always according to the revelation: what then could it be where salvation was not? Jewish worship was set out in figures and shadows; salvation was a hope, not an actual relationship and possession. The Jews were looking — and they were right in looking — for the Messiah, who would not only tell, but accomplish, all things; He whom they were looking for was to be a Saviour. The salvation that the Jews had before their eyes was still a thing in prospect, and not yet brought home to the heart as a present reality. While they waited for Messiah, the worship was suited to their state. It was surrounded with priests and forms, which showed that the way was not made manifest into the holiest. (Heb. 9)

But an end came to this state of promise and provisional imagery. The veil was rent from top to bottom, when the Jews led the Gentiles to crucify their Messiah, God’s Son. Wonderful to say, in that crime of man, in the cross, God wrought redemption; and man first stood in the presence of God, a Saviour God. The whole Jewish system was at an end; it was dead if not yet buried, for God allowed a decent time for the funeral. But Judaism cast away life in rejecting the Messiah, and the cross made it evident. From His rejection the Lord (as the Spirit afterward) was gradually unfolding, as the disciples could bear, the new order of things; for those accustomed to the old wine did not relish the new all at once. They frequented the temple at the hour of prayer, though they went to their houses to break bread. For a little while they were half Jews and half Christians. But God was about to lead them out finally, and the Epistle to the Hebrews cut the last cord which bound the

Christian Jew to the old economy. From that moment it was unfaithfulness to Christ, as he was now made known, to linger among the old things. “Let us go forth therefore unto him,” etc.

In the same Epistle God instructs us in Christian worship as contrasted with the Levitical service. What do we find? The legal sacrifices superseded by that of Christ, and the Jewish sanctuary, figure of the true into which Christ is gone, where we now draw nigh in faith. The old sacrifices were always renewed; the Christian knows but one sacrifice, and the reason why is, that it has brought in perfection. Otherwise you only repeat and thereby give witness that you have nothing perfect. But the essence of the sacrifice of Christ is that it is once offered, and by that one offering He has not merely sanctified, but perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Nothing can be more distinct than the doctrine of the apostle as to the offering of Christ for the Christian. He is looking not at passing circumstances, but at the essential difference between the Jewish worshipper and the Christian. The Jewish worshipper needed the constant succession of offerings to meet his wants; the Christian’s wants are already met in the cross and in Christ Himself.

The new state of things has been effected by the grace of God through our Lord Jesus. The Christian is brought into the enjoyment of God for heaven and eternity; and this now by the Holy Spirit dwelling in him, whilst waiting for Christ to take him on high.

Let us look briefly at some of the privileges that constitute the true worshippers. It is evident that the very first want of the soul arises from the fact that one is

a sinful, yea, lost man. For a sinner is rather a leper than a worshipper; and a leper, as you know, was by God's word an outcast, one who must stand afar off and announce his own uncleanness; one who was not only out of his tent, but out of the camp of Israel, and so incapable of bringing his gift to the presence of God. Such is really the condition of every sinful man before God. A leper typifies not a Christian in a bad case, but man who is wholly in the loathsomeness and corruption of his natural state, far from God. Whereas the Christian is born of God, has received a new life or new nature that no man possesses; naturally, with which Christ alone quickens. How is it to be had? Only in the Son of God, and this only by faith. There is no other life Godward.

It is granted that there is no true faith without repentance, and that what is commonly called Sandemanianism or Walkerism is in this utterly wrong. All efforts to obliterate repentance, in order to ease or simplify believing in Christ, are false, evil, and dangerous. They slight the work of God in the conscience and reduce faith to intellectualism. This however is not the point now, but the great truth that he who believes has, according to scripture, everlasting life.

Yet new birth alone does not make one a Christian worshipper. Supposing you had ever so many born of God, you would, were this all, have not one "true worshipper." Not only, therefore, the world cannot be true worshippers, but even if people were truly converted, this of itself would not constitute them such. Hence it is that Christ does not say a word about worship in John 3, because He is there simply insisting

on the necessity of the new birth. But in John 4, we have Christ Jesus the Giver of the living water, and true worship follows. In John 3, the Lord is the Gift, in John 4, He is the Giver. If some think these distinctions rather fine, it is because they do not understand them. They are as plain as they are important; and men simply show their own lack of intelligence in the truth by such quibbling. Are they ever happy men? Do they really enjoy peace with God? When we see clearly our own state and His grace, the truth as revealed is enjoyed without cavil. I have said that in John 3, the Lord Jesus is the gift of God the Father, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” In John 4, the Son of God says, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.” The living water is therefore the figure not of Christ, but of the Holy Ghost; and I wish to prove the truth that you not only need life in Christ, but even if you had it, unless you have also the living water, you cannot be a true worshipper. The Holy Spirit must be given in order to this.

Many assume that the moment a man is born again he receives the Holy Ghost. But this is to confound the new birth with the gift of the Spirit. It is untrue that every man receives the Holy Ghost at the moment of being born again. There is an essential difference between the two operations. When one is born again, he is awakened from the slumber of sin and cries to God in the consciousness of his guilt and ruin. From the grace of Christ he may have divine comfort, but God lets him taste of the bitterness of his own heart and ways. In the

great majority of cases converted souls know what this is; and it is well that they should.

I do not deny that it is an imperfect state, a state very different from the just effect flowing from a full knowledge of the gospel. Such may look to Christ without knowing His work, or the good news of salvation. In this state one is not a true worshipper. How could one not yet in the condition of deliverance worship in Spirit and in truth? Is it pretended that one who cries "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" can at the same time say that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death?"

Outward affliction well consists with joy in the Holy Ghost at the same time, but not inward bondage with inward liberty. Those who say so cannot know the deliverance in their own souls, or are blinded by tradition and will. Till set free as well as quickened, we cannot truly worship our God and Father. Christian worship is the expression of the heart's joy, of its perfect satisfaction in Christ, of conscious nearness to our God and Father, as children beloved. Salvation (not life only) is what one wants, that the living water may flow, and he adore and praise. One may be born of God, yet without simple submission to the perfect work of the Lord Jesus one is sure to be craving this or that, doubtless cleaving to Christ, no longer in the dead state of nature, but still without real enjoyment of God in peace, perplexed, tried, and unable to say, "Abba, Father." In this condition, then Christian worship is impossible, and you do wrong to invite such to worship the Lord. You place them in a false position, and tempt them to become

hypocrites in leading them to sing hymns altogether beyond their faith or experience.

With this state of things the doctrine of the Lord entirely coincides. He does not hurry on souls before they have the requisite power through His own grace. When the woman asked Him whether He was “greater than our father Jacob,” He answers, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” He who has so drunk can worship God as a Christian. “God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” All else is the sacrifice of folly, at least it is not worship in spirit and in truth. There is a divine spring of joy given inwardly, and, until one is brought into that condition, it is in vain to expect true Christian worship from him. It is of importance to recognize this, as it is a fact that many converted souls are not thus emancipated from sin and the law. (See Rom. 7)

In order to make it clearer, let us refer for a moment to the day of Pentecost, when the apostle Peter says to those convicted of sin, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” When men truly repent, are they not believers? It would be a sorry doctrine which supposes genuine repentance without real faith; yet the gift of the Holy Ghost was consequent upon all. He Himself received the Spirit as the Holy One of God, sealed by the Father as man here below. But we could not have the Spirit thus till sin was judged in the cross and ourselves washed in His blood. Then we could, on the ground of His mighty work which annulled sin, not only be

quickened of the Spirit as sinners, but be sealed of the Spirit as saints. This is the Christian, and he is a true worshipper: till a soul is brought really to this, he cannot be. Thus we see in this instance how truly Christ is the Giver of the Spirit to those who already believed. Until redemption was accomplished, there was not a clear space or righteous ground for the Holy Ghost to dwell in. But when the Lord Jesus had effected that mighty work, He went up on high, and sent the Holy Ghost down. He is thus the Giver of the Spirit. He gives that living water to the believer, not to the world; to the soul that rests on Him and His redemption; not to the one that hates sin merely, but to him that has found in Jesus and His work all that the heart and conscience need before God. He has received the Holy Ghost, and the grace of God has given it to him.

Those under law, doubtless, do not as yet possess the Holy Ghost. This is why they so often fear and question; but when they bow to God's righteousness in Christ with simple faith, they receive the Holy Ghost. One may thus account for so many persons as are supposed to be brought to God on their deathbed. The great majority of those who are made happy then have been already converted. But there were perhaps allowed hindrances. With death staring them in the face they submit to the righteousness of God, and the Holy Ghost is then given to them.

But look again at another case in scripture. In Acts 19, it is mentioned that there were at least a dozen men at Ephesus who were believers but had not received the Holy Ghost. They did not even know the fact. Of course they had heard of the Spirit, but somehow not as yet of the gift of the Spirit. They knew from the teaching of

John the Baptist that the coming Christ was to baptize with the Holy Ghost; but when they heard the full truth from the apostle Paul, they received the Holy Ghost. This is the grand point, for miracles and tongues might cease: the Holy Ghost was to abide for ever. Therefore I believe that not even the dark ages of popery nor all the divisions of Protestantism, so painful to the spiritual mind, have driven back the Holy Ghost to heaven. I believe in His continued presence, because I receive the words of Christ. The Holy Ghost is always given to the believer when he has submitted to Christ's redemption. This shows the great importance of the gift of the Spirit: without it there is no true worshipper. He is not only quickened, but one who has found rest in Christ and is sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Such as these the Father seeks to worship Him.

Accordingly this is the condition that is supposed in all the Epistles. Take for instance the Epistle to the Romans. The apostle addresses them all, the saints that were then at Rome, as being dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, as being in the Spirit and having the Spirit in them. How blessed! There are the true worshippers.

So again, in the Epistles to the Corinthians, the same thing re-appears. There were many lamentable features there requiring to be dealt with even by public discipline. Did these destroy the standing of the worshippers? Paul calls on the Corinthians to put away the evildoer from the assembly, but not to cease breaking bread themselves. In chapter 5, he is speaking, not about the Lord's supper, but of ordinary intercourse with a known unclean professor of the Lord. Certainly we should never be suspicious; but where plain

undeniable evil exists, the wicked person should be put away from the saints. Whether he be converted or not is not the question, but proved evil in one bearing the Lord's name in the church is inconsistent with the fellowship of saints on earth. Here it was the very one whom, on repentance, they were called in 2 Corinthians 2, 7, to receive back. The gift of the Spirit appears throughout.

In the Epistle to the Galatians serious error is corrected and solemn warning given; but they are addressed as God's children, having the Spirit of sonship, and thereby crying Abba Father in contrast with the Old Testament saints. They could worship therefore.

In that to the Ephesians the Christians are treated as already blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ, and hence, as having redemption and sealed by the Holy Spirit, able to draw near to the Father. So the apostle, though solemnly admonishing the Colossian saints presents them as "giving thanks unto the Father who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," etc. They were true worshippers.

The Philippian believers the apostle calls to rejoice in the Lord alway, and says that we are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Even the Thessalonians, young saints as they were, are exhorted to rejoice evermore, and not only to pray unceasingly, but in every thing to give thanks as the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning them.

The Hebrew Christians are addressed as having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for

us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh, and, having a high priest over the house of God, to draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, etc.

The apostle Peter calls the Christian Jews to whom he writes throughout Asia Minor, a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus. See also 1 Peter 4:14 The apostle John treats even the babes of God's family as having known the Father, and all the family as having their sins forgiven, and now as children of God. He tells us that, as confessing Jesus to be the Son of God, God dwells in each and he in God. He declares that love with us is made perfect that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, because as Christ is so are we in this world.

There can be no doubt therefore that the contrast is painful in the extreme between the uniform language of the New Testament about Christians as thus called to worship in liberty and joy and nearness to God, and that of liturgies ancient or modern; and this because the results of redemption soon got merged and hidden in Jewish forms, and the law was recalled to the place of the Holy Ghost, and man in the flesh intruded wholesale into precincts which belong only to those solemnly accredited as God's assembly, the body of Christ.

But even the best position and highest privileges will fail to keep a man right with God; dependence on the Lord and obedience alone can do this. Nay, further, the greater the privilege the worse the fall, if the soul wait not upon God. It is a great mistake to think that only the wicked can fall: Christian men may, yea must, if unwatchful. The condition of the true worshipper is not

such that he remains immoveable as a statue. He is alive unto God, but is responsible morally; he ought to grow but may decline. No doubt he has his “old man,” the only thing to do with which is to judge it, treating it as vile and evil, according to the cross, where it was condemned root and branch in Christ made sin for us. (Rom. 6:6; Rom. 8:3.)

Thus, as the rule, all saints are now called to join in the worship of God. They are saved that they may, not serve only, looking down, but worship, looking up. hence the all-importance of the Lord’s Supper, the centre of Christian worship, and of its celebration on each first day of the week. (1 Cor. 11; Acts 20.) But this will come more fully before us when we treat of worship itself, and of divers helps or hindrances to it.

The souls whom the Lord contemplates are those who, as believing in His name, have not life only but the Spirit, who have therefore liberty and power, and can thus unaffectedly and with simple hearts unite in thanksgiving and praise of their God and His God, of their Father and His Father. Such as may be born anew but are not yet delivered nor in peace with God need the gospel that they may join their brethren, apart from the world, in that which will occupy them all for ever, begun even now on earth by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.

Lecture 2 - “Worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:20-24.

My present task is to speak a little, not on the worshippers, but on the worship — on worship in spirit and in truth. On this subject many, not to say most, of God’s children have accustomed themselves to language

and thought in general vague, often removed far from the truth of God. They have allowed themselves the habit of calling every religious service worship, embracing not only prayer, but preaching or teaching. Even the larger part of that which is thrown into metre or verse in hymns is only the expression of desire, sometimes of doctrine, very generally of prayer. Proper worship is the rarest thing possible, even among the true children of God. The reason is plain. You cannot have true worship unless the worshippers are set consciously in their Christian place before God. I endeavoured to show on a former occasion that to be a worshipper supposes, not only divine life in the soul, but also the relationship of a child of God known by the Spirit now. This is not always the state of converted men. they have been, by some sad means or other, possibly with upright enough intentions, turned aside from the full grace of God, they have been afraid of confiding in what the Lord Jesus has done for their souls.

It is granted that the grace of God is so infinite, and so above the thoughts and reasonings of men, that nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit can keep the soul in the enjoyment of it, and that all attempts to look at grace out of God’s presence is attended with the utmost danger. The flesh would habitually turn it to license; and thus it is that many godly souls have been stumbled, seeing such overwhelming evil by wrong representation, or, as we should rather call it, by mix-representation, of the grace of God.

They have heard the most high-flown expressions the cover of sin, or even of hypocrisy. Instead of judging the man, they have sometimes slipped into misjudging the

truth of God. This is not wise; for it can never be without the virtual impeachment of the word of God. Their consciences are thus at the mercy of evil or careless men who dishonour all the truth they talk of.

When we open the scriptures, we see His grace and truth clearly. The very object of God in so revealing Himself is to put believers, convicted of sin and repentant, in the bright, thorough, simple-hearted enjoyment of His grace, that the whole life should be the expression of thanksgiving and praise, as well as of service and devotedness to Himself. There is another reason why people shrink from this, because they have accepted the mischievous idea that the Christian is left in this world to improve the race and be an ornament, if not an ameliorator, of society, to deal with mankind as under probation and the law of God, just as Israel were before redemption. Now I do not for a moment deny that the Christian is meant to be the light of the world, the salt of the earth. He is here for a testimony; but a testimony of what? of his own goodness, or of Christ's? It makes a great difference, "Let your light so shine before men," said our Lord, "that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." This is the grand point. It is not, Let your good works shine before men, the effect of which would be to glorify yourself. And here is where men are apt to err, because the glory of a certain individual casts a sort of halo around the race to which he belongs.

But it is a totally different thing where "our light" shines. By our light I understand our holding forth Christ, not qualities of our own, but that which we have only in the Lord. Consequently it is the good confession of His name. When men see good works coupled with

the holding up of the Lord Jesus, the profession of Him does bring glory not to us but to our Father in heaven. These are the words of the Lord Jesus, but men shrink from that which gives them the distinctive consciousness that they belong not to the world; for there it is man has not a little inclination to figure. It does not matter how obscure he is, he would like to be somebody. But this is the very thing that Christ would relieve one from; for if the gospel be true, and it is not for Christians to doubt, one of its first principles is that we are dead to the world, and that our life is hid with Christ in God. When a man is dead, there is an end of him. This is what Christ writes upon the believer, what He makes good and true in everyone who has accepted Him and His mighty work. We are crucified with Him, not as men say called to crucify nature; but all that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and its affections. Thus you see the first principles of Christianity sever those that are Christ's from the world, from its interests and its objects; while they introduce them, if you will, on a new ground into the world, for it is granted that this is also true. "As thou (the Father) hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world." The death of Christ takes us out of the world, but by His resurrection we are sent into the world on a new footing of life and righteousness. It is on the new ground of God's righteousness that we stand as true worshippers, and thus only can we render worship to our God and Father in spirit and in truth.

Now even God's children shrink from this place. They love the Lord Jesus. They cleave to His person, they find comfort in His love, they cannot do without His blood; but they would rather not go farther. They would rather

not give up the world quite. They would like to be sure of the next world; but the tenacity with which they hold to this world forbids their having a true present link with the next. In such a state Christian worship is impossible. Hence, therefore, as it would never do to deny that they are worshippers, or that they worship, they get to call even going to hear a sermon worship. We all know this, and perhaps some now present are in the habit of saying so. I refer to it for the purpose of showing the too common vagueness of God's children as to worship. The condition out of which worship springs by grace is so feebly realized that we must not wonder at it.

What then is Christian worship?

The worship of the Israelites was suited to their condition. In that worship every Israelite joined. He brought his oblation, his gift, his peace-offering; and there were also presented the fruits of the land that God gave them, as we know that God prescribed on their entering the land. Now we should feel that such a call does not belong to the Christian properly but to the ancient elect people.

God is now forming since redemption another company of worshippers having no connection either with Jerusalem, or with that mountain of Samaria. A new thing has taken place. Worshippers are no longer called to Jerusalem, nor does grace exclude the Samaritans; but contrariwise, wherever the Spirit of God forms a people for the praise of God the Father of the Lord Jesus, throughout the world, these are the true worshippers; and the true worship is their adoration of Him who has brought them into such a blessed

relationship. Their hearts delight in what He has done and suffered for them; they find their joy in Himself. God has given Jesus Christ His Son, and has displayed Himself in Him. True Christian worship is their hearts' return for all.

Accordingly, by the Spirit, our Lord Jesus here gives a certain characteristic of it, which I shall dwell on for a few moments. "The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father." Now it is remarkable, if you look at the language of Christendom at large, how little the Father's name appears. Take up any form of worship in any part of West or East: there is trifling difference in this respect. They all agree in sinking down from conscious nearness as children to the Father, into the distant place of a people; before a governor and a judge. If they approach God, it is to One at a distance, to a God that they are in quest of but dread, to a God from whom they are seeking in some way to win a certain measure of enjoyment they do not yet possess, a certain confidence they desire but do not as yet know.

Hence, therefore, we find distance and doubt, fear and anxiety, marked in the formal language of such souls even if children of God. Take one very well-known instance, and by no means, as it appears to me, an extreme case. Texts illustrating the wicked are selected to prepare the soul for a knowledge of God, such for example as Ezekiel's, "When the wicked man turneth away from the wickedness that he hath done," etc.; or the words of the prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my Father. " What is the meaning of all this? It is surely not for the Christian. Is the Christian a wicked person, or even one who is arising to go to his Father like the

prodigal? In such a state of soul Christian worship is and must be unknown. After these texts are read, there is a confession, and this again is followed by an absolution; and then, but still with dread and vacillation and perplexity, a certain recognition of and yearning after God is expressed, a deprecation of His anger, entreaties for favour, especially in earthly things, withal prayers for pardon and so forth. If you ask, Is not that scriptural? I answer, Is it scriptural for Christians in their worship? No, beloved friends, but for those who have lost the idea of worship, and have sunk into another people who are not another, but rather half Jews and half Christians.

We have referred to the prodigal son. Now if we wanted to take that text to describe Christian worship, it should be the prodigal not in his confession of sin, but when he has arisen and gone to his father, when the best robe is put on, when the ring is on his finger, and the shoes on his feet, and when there is the scene of gladness, not merely the prodigal or the friends or the whole house rejoicing, but, best of all, the father himself rejoicing. “Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.” Some no doubt will exclaim, That is heaven. Not a bit of it. It is here, it is now. It is true of the Christian in this world. It would be perfectly impracticable for the world; and herein lies the hitch. They want to bring the world into the worship, and, as they cannot raise the world to Christian worship, they sink the Christian in worship to the level of the world. But I deny that the parabolic scene of joy in the parable means heaven; and I will tell you why. The eldest son was in the field; and when he came to the house, he did not understand the reason of such joy. He

in effect disowns the prodigal as his brother, and casts up to the father “this thy son,” who had wasted his substance with riotous living. Is not this here below?

Thus the real point is God the Father finding His joy in blessing the prodigal, yea, bringing him into the communion of His own joy. Such is the character and spring of Christian worship. It is the sons of God that enter by the Holy Ghost’s power into the delight of the Father Himself in Christ. But, again, you see it cannot be heaven; for when we are there, there will be no elder brothers murmuring at the grace of God. Can you deny this? Can you affirm that this is not the just application of the parable? Can you say that there is any shifting the scene?

It is not in heaven that the prodigal was clothed and blessed. It was here; and it is very solemn to think that it is here, and here only: when we depart to be with Christ, there is no putting on Christ in heaven. If we have not put on Christ here, we shall be found naked, according to 2 Corinthians 5:3: “If so be that, being clothed, we shall not be found naked.” The wicked when they rise at the resurrection are to be clothed; they are to have their bodies; but when thus clothed, they will be found naked, for they have not put on Christ here. The just will have been clothed too, but the clothing of their resurrection-body does not leave them naked, but rather manifests them like Christ. Now, no doubt, men by their clothing may, in the eyes of their fellows, cover over what they really are; but in the resurrection-state all must be manifested, whether they be just or unjust. It is the Christian’s comfort that in glory he will be manifested; but for the wicked, what a solemn thought that they will be seen through and through! Then they

must — I will not say be honest, but be — absolutely unveiled, and detected in all their hatred and evil. When clothed, they will be found naked. But we put on the best robe here. We have all the blessing of Christ now as the fruit of redemption; and this is what was intended to be shown.

Thus you cannot separate the worship from the worshippers; and consequently, as the revelation of God is always the ground of the worship, and as He makes Himself known as the Father, He necessarily looks for and desires the loving praise of the children of God. He could not look for or accept any thing less than such worship. We deserve nothing indeed but judgment; but redemption has made us spotless according to the faultlessness of Jesus Christ before God. What has put us in this absolute purity before Him is the work of Christ already done, and the Holy Ghost is given to us as the power of enjoying it. The Holy Ghost is not given to us in heaven, but on earth. We shall enjoy and worship in perfection there; and no hindrance can be then. We shall be in eternal and complete enjoyment, and in the possession of all that God has given us through His own Son; but here we are brought by faith, yea, in the Spirit, into the reality of it, though we may make drawbacks many and great.

The immediate object of Christ’s becoming incarnate was to reveal the Father. He grew up perfect as an infant, as a boy, as a man. We find Him blending the most entire submission to His parents, with the consciousness of divine relationship. I refer to this to show the sense He had of His Sonship as man here below, for throughout all His life on earth He speaks of God as His Father. Yet when He on the cross made

atonement for sin, He poured out His soul unto death, and, as He did so, with these most solemn words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” On arising from the dead, He sends by Mary of Magdala the message, “I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Thus He addresses His own disciples in these two relationships, the one in which He had walked all His life, the other expressed in His dying upon the cross. But He puts His disciples in both His relationships after their judgment was past, after their sins were taken away from them so that all that God is as God, and all that He feels as Father, should be nothing but love and satisfaction in them as believers because of Christ’s redemption. What wisdom and grace! and therefore it is that we are brought into the enjoyment of Him not only as Father but also as God — so terrible before redemption, but now the source of the deepest blessing to the Christian. If we did not know Him as God, it would be a very great loss to our souls. We need to be kept with solemn thoughts of His majesty, as well as to rest in His love as Father; and the Son of God keeps the whole balance of the truth undisturbed, and lets us learn what He discloses of God as God no less perfectly than what He tells of Him as Father. He has now brought all to us in the way of perfect grace. So fully does His love make believers as Christ Himself, apart of course from His deity.

So it had been predicted of Him in the great psalm of atonement and its results (Ps. 22.) “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.” Who could declare it as He? and when could even He have declared it as when raised from the dead by the Father’s glory after having been

brought into the dust of death for sin? None but He could feel to the uttermost what it was to be forsaken of God and not heard when He cried; but now, heard from the horns of the unicorns, He enters as the risen man into the light and glory of God shining for ever on the accepted sacrifice of Himself and declares to His brethren the name (now we can say) of His Father and their Father, of His God and their God; and there and thus, in the midst of the church now set free for ever by and in Him, praises Him. Oh! what praises were Christ's, delivered now at length, and from so great a death! But are they not our praises too? And is it not "in our midst" that He sings them? What a character does not this communion imprint on the church's worship! The praise of Christ, after sin was judged as it never can be again, and He who was crucified in weakness lives by the power of God, gives the just and only full idea of what becomes God's assembly.

Are these your thoughts, brethren beloved of the Lord? Is this the standard by which you try your hearts and lips when you would present spiritual sacrifices to your God and Father? Be assured, He values none compared with those of the risen Christ, who deigns to be the leader of such as cleave to Him in this the day of His still continued rejection, though He be, as we know, glorified on high.

Truly His is in the highest sense a new song. Alone He had thus suffered; not alone does He praise, but in the full chorus of the consciously redeemed. How wondrous that it is not here merely "in" the congregation but "in the midst" of it that He thus sings! In the day of His power it will not be so for "the great congregation." Not that His praises will be lacking in that day; not that high

and low will not praise in the earth when all Jehovah's works shall praise Him and all His saints shall bless Him. Still it remains true that there is a revealed association on His part, with those who are now being called and gathered since His resurrection which exceeds in depth anything said of those who follow in that bright and blessed day. Not to the great congregation is He said to declare His God and Father's name. In it indeed will His praise of Jehovah be, but not in its midst as on the resurrection day for those who have not seen and yet have believed. Compare verses 22, etc., with 25, etc. For what is said of that jubilee for Israel and the earth would still be true if He praised alone on His ground, and all others on theirs. Neither does He call them His brethren as now, however He may pay His vows (in itself another distinctive mark) before those that fear Jehovah, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Him Lord, to God's glory, even to the ends of the world and throughout all kindreds of the nations.

Is not all this grace indeed to us who deserve nothing less, this true grace of God wherein we stand? May we appreciate the counsels and ways of the God of all grace who has called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever Amen. May our praises then abound; but may they be Christ's praises in our midst, who deigns to be where two or three are gathered to His name! He is not absent if we are called in aught to vindicate the truth or holiness of God: is He when we gather to worship His and our God and Father? By Him therefore let us offer sacrifice of praise continually, that is, fruit of lips confessing His name.

This then is what the Lord Jesus brings us into as true worshippers. He says that the worshippers should "worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Unspeakable goodness! We see this by the person He was then seeking Himself. The woman of Samaria — what was she? She thought Jesus was only a Jew; she did not know that He was the Son of God. But the Lord soon woke her from her dream. In a few words He brought before her all her life up to that moment. He told her of her five husbands, and that the one with whom she now lived was not her husband. Thus she was laid bare before the light of God. She felt that He was a prophet, and the Lord did not leave her until she knew that He was the Messiah, the Son, the Saviour. This was a worshipper the Father was seeking, and could she not worship in spirit and truth? He comes with power to make us what He seeks us to be. He does not look to find it in us. He seeks ourselves, no doubt; but He gives us a new life, a new power, the Holy Ghost; and the consequence is that we are thoroughly furnished, not only for every good work, but for Christian worship. This woman is just an instance of it.

But there is more. It is not enough that we worship the Father, as grace reveals Him in the Son. There is the two-fold relationship, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." When He speaks of the Father, it is the fulness of grace to make us what He wants us to be, but when He speaks of God, it is a necessity of His nature, and of ours too as born of Him.

Just so it is that one sees very beautifully in Romans 2, a witness of the latter truth. The apostle is going to bring in redemption through the blood and resurrection of

Christ: the one as the basis of justifying, the other manifesting its power. But before this he lets us see that God's principles are immutable. He shows us that it is only those that are found neither contentious nor disobedient, but on the contrary, that seek Him according to His own nature, who have eternal life. As he says in verse 6, "Who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first and also of the Gentile." God's moral principles are not at all hampered by the grace of the gospel. Here is the secret by which He makes an ungodly man a godly one. But though this is the grace of the gospel by which a man is brought out of guilt and sin unto God, the nature of God is not altered by the grace of redemption in Christ.

This may suffice for the general principles of Christian worship for the children of God, I should rather say for such as are capacitated by the Spirit of God to draw near in the love of Christ and in the knowledge of His redemption, by the power of the Spirit to praise and adore the God and Father of our Lord Jesus that has brought them into such a place, and has manifested Himself in such goodness to our souls. And accordingly, it is in this spirit that we should read the New Testament.

Take, for instance, Ephesians 1, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,

according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." I refer to this to show the condition, as also the spirit which alone produces worship. Is it any wonder that one cannot get the world to worship? It is not a question of educating men up to the point. The question is, when are people brought into the Christian state? It is then incumbent on them to worship in spirit and in truth. You see the same relationship here, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings. He is not merely going to bless. A man who is waiting to be blessed may be a hopeful person; but he is not yet set free, as in Romans 8:2, etc.

I remember, well, some time ago, during the revival movement, being often pained by rash expressions, from men talking lightly upon the grace of God. The truth is that bringing a man from darkness to light, from Satan's power to God's, is a serious thing; but I do not believe its reality unless there be a true (I do not say a deep) work in the conscience of the individual; I see this in the case of the women of Samaria. Christ brought the whole truth of her life into the light. She was convicted. There is no grace unless faith be accompanied by repentance. Here we see all these blessings, but the point I refer to is that it is a present reality. When the children of God

have the Spirit as a well within according to His word, then we have Christian worship.

I shall enter, of course, upon the helps as well as the hindrances according to the notice already given, but merely touch now on the principle of Christian worship. Take another passage from scripture, the Colossians. The apostle says in chapter 1, “Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, and to all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” Now just contrast these words with any liturgy that was ever invented. “Which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light!” Do you think that those persons who believe it would or could be afraid of sudden death? that is, of a speedy going to heaven to be with Christ? Why is it that professing Christians are in such dread of sudden death? It is because they think of a needful preparation for death. It all arises from an uncertainty about the Christian deliverance already effected. What is wanted even by real children of God is a better, a truer, knowledge of what salvation is — not as a state we are hoping for, but in which we stand virtually now. The Old Testament speaks not of the Father and the Son as the New, nor of salvation in the Christian sense of the word; but the one does not set aside the other, they are the complement of each other. In the Epistle to the Ephesians as referred to, salvation is always spoken of as past and present. It is a state that flows from what has been done by and in Christ. But then quite in another way we are waiting for salvation. We have got the salvation of our souls, we are now waiting for the salvation of our bodies. But the salvation of the soul is as

completely effected as it can be; redemption is wrought by Christ and accepted of God, and the Holy Ghost is already poured out on us. It is a solemn thing to affirm the possession of the Holy Ghost, but at the same time nothing is more sweet. Yet let me tell you that many good men are mistaken by fancying the basis of it to be something in themselves, instead of what Christ has done, sealed by the Holy Ghost. He never sealed until the work of redemption was done. In the Old Testament times there was never any saint without being quickened by the Spirit of God; but they could not have His seal until redemption was accomplished, as in Ephesians 1, 4.

So in Colossians we see the saints described as giving thanks unto the Father which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Without multiplying instances, I give one passage more: “We have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:10-13). The apostle takes advantage of a beautiful type in the law. When a victim was brought to the brazen altar, the blood was not brought into the holiest at all; the animal was killed outside. But when the blood was carried into the holiest, the body was taken and burned without the camp. This, he says, is what was found in Christ who suffered without the gate and is now gone into the presence of God, in order to place us within the holiest and without the world.

What if some look for a middle way: it is a poor comfort to have anything but the full grace and glory of God. We should not rest short of the truth of God on man's prudence. The way of prudence is unsafe in the sight of God. It is not faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God. Hold on, therefore, not to the reasonings of common sense, but to the revelation of the divine word. We are brought into the holiest because of that blood that has cleansed us and removed every trace of sin; and here, too, we who are brought into the holiest take the place of Him who was crucified, bearing His reproach.

Are you willing to be despised? to be nothing here, because made everything in the presence of God? This is the true glory of the Christian, and the Christian does most for God when he is most despised of men.

May our record be not in the newspapers, or on tombstones, but on high, where it is never forgotten. The Lord grant, meanwhile, that we be worshippers in the holiest, and witnesses without the camp, bearing His reproach.

Lecture 3 - Helps and Hindrances to Worship. 1 Cor. 14:15-26.

We have already seen, first, the necessary condition of those who are called to worship. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, Himself, expressly lets us know that the Father is seeking worshippers, and that the true worshippers are such as by grace worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Thus they are not only His children but have the Spirit of adoption given whereby to cry Abba, Father. We have seen, secondly, that God is made known in a two-fold manner as object of worship: first of all, in the relationship of Himself as Father; secondly, according to

His moral nature as God. The Father is the nearest and most intimate relationship in which it is possible for Him to be known; but it is also needful to worship Him as God, lest there should be a forgetfulness either of His moral nature or of His divine majesty. We have now to enter into a little more detail of a practical kind in order to deal with the third part of my subject: “helps and hindrances to Worship.”

You have already gathered, I trust, clearly, what can scarcely be called a help, since it is the necessary power for worship. Still it may be well for me to touch again on it to-night, because the hindrance from ignorance as to it or unbelief about it is of the greatest importance. I mean the presence of the Holy Ghost, and it is not merely to touch the question of the so-called gifts of the Spirit — for I speak now of His acknowledged presence. Clearly this is a capital truth in the matter now before our minds. It connects itself with the very being, not well-being only, of the church. So the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 4:4: “There is one body and one Spirit.” And none will ever be found to have a just acquaintance with the truth of the Holy Ghost in relation to the Christ and the church who have not been taught of God its nature as Christ’s body and God’s habitation.

So far from this, all attempt to sever the Holy Ghost from Christians and the church issues in errors of the most dangerous character, though perhaps in different, I might say opposite, directions. Where the Spirit is severed from Christ and the church, it then becomes a question of quakerism or of clericalism. The church is either ignored, or it is practically a matter of clergy as the men who assume exclusive possession, with perhaps even control, of the Holy Spirit of God. The one makes

the Spirit to be the universal endowment of man, apart from faith or life eternal, and thus blots out the existence in principle of the church of God in which the Spirit dwells as His temple apart from the world of unrenewed men; the other denies the privileges and responsibilities of God's assembly in effect by the unscriptural invention of the clergy as the one channel of His public and orderly action, the guide of worship, and of authority in discipline. They are thus, if errors at all (as I am sure they are), serious and destructive. I am not now thinking of the issue of souls, but characterise by the word "destructive," that which is opposed to the will and glory of the Lord Jesus, which surely ought to be of all things dearest to the children of God; and the more, because they are saved.

It is not only then the principle of a clergy (I do not mean ministry or the exercise of a divine gift, for this is of God) which is so grave; but there is another form of error that is apparently nearer the truth, but I think even more distant still, namely, the idea of the Spirit of God being given to every man without exception. The word of God most explicitly shuts out both these wanderings of men's minds. Nowhere in scripture is there such a thought as the Spirit given to man as man. Contrariwise He is given properly and exclusively to the believer.

And here it is we see the importance of distinguishing between the new birth and the gift (δωρεα) of the Spirit. No man receives the Holy Ghost when he is first awakened to God, but as a believer invariably. He is quickened as a sinful man; indeed, if it were not so, he never could be brought out of his wickedness. God deals graciously with him, spite of a rebellious history and all

the evil of his nature. Thus is he born again. He repents and believes in Christ; but the Holy Ghost is given to him, never as an unquickened, always as a quickened, soul. Such is the uniform doctrine of the New Testament. “In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.” “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba Father.” I do not attach any great importance to the question of the length of time that elapses since they believed; for though only a minute, it is just as real as if it were seven years. It is the believer who receives the Spirit of sonship, that he may have the joy and power of the relationship. But he is already God’s son by the faith of Christ; and, because he is a son, he receives the Spirit of adoption.

Now this is of great importance in the subject before us, because it is not the simple fact of being quickened on which worship turns, but of the possession of the Spirit. All the children of God that rest on the Lord Jesus in peace, according to God’s word — all such have the Holy Ghost. but they may be much hindered by wrong thoughts. The Holy Ghost has thus to do with the soul, when a man has judged himself, and has found in the Lord Jesus and His work all that he wants. He is, therefore, brought by the Spirit to judge himself before God, receiving the Son of God and life in Him. Such an one submitting to God’s righteousness then receives also the Holy Ghost.

But now, as we have seen, comes another and a very important connection with our subject; the bearing of this on worship. Now I affirm that, according to the doctrine of the New Testament, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven is the active agent and power of all

that is for the blessing and direction and instruction of the church, and also for the worship of God. It is He who, present in the assembly of God, acts among the children of God, and produces adoration, draws out the hearts in thanksgiving for the mercy that He has shown, and in praise for what the God and Father of Christ is and has revealed to them in His Son. This is worship accordingly, hence the Holy Ghost cannot be rightly or reverently called a help. He is really the one and only power of carrying on worship in the church of God according to His expressed mind. so we find in the New Testament that worship was invariably conducted, not by a few, still less by only one individual acting for the saints; it was the common joy of the saints of God expressed according to the sovereign and free action of His Spirit in the saints. Hence, therefore, with Christian worship we in due time find the assembly or church of God. Neither can the assembly with propriety be called a help. The one body and one Spirit are the necessary conditions of worship.

These two things, I repeat, are found in order to it: the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; and, again, the Holy Ghost acting not in the individual as an exclusive mouthpiece of praise to God for a congregation, but by whom He will in God’s assembly. Still less is there such a thought as man at large — fallen man — invited to draw near and take part in addressing and blessing God, as if capable of worship: a most offensive notion and wholly opposed to all the holiness, grace, and truth of God. I cannot conceive anything more foreign to the plain facts of the New Testament than the idea that the Holy Ghost was given to man as such. The Holy Ghost was given, to man indeed, but first to Christ who knew no sin, and

then only to those that believe in Christ. So far from this, He is only given to man when he takes the place of one dead before God, when he has come to recognize the great truth of Christ dead, the only hope for fallen man. but, then, in no case is the Holy Ghost given to a man as man, but to the man who is born again, when he has called on the name of the Lord as one needing the Saviour, and thus, confessedly dead before God, lives unto God as one henceforth dead to sin. Therefore it is that, as a matter of fact, until God brought out this great truth, there was no such thing as the gift of the Holy Ghost, which draws out the Christian in worship.

In fact, Christianity only began with the manifestation of these profound truths. In Old Testament times there was no such state of things. Then man was under probation; now there is an end of it, and man is lost or saved as to his soul. Supposing man has been proved guilty of every sin and iniquity, what is the use of trying him any more? Such is the sentence which is now pronounced on man under the gospel. The whole race is declared by God to be in this condition. No one can or would deny that from the beginning there have been saints, that is, souls that were born of God. But now that the Lord Jesus is brought out as the second Man, the last Adam; following Him there is the gathering out from the world of those who, both in nature and position, are according to the truth in Christ a new creation. They have derived their new character from Christ risen from the dead.

But, further, the Holy Ghost comes down from heaven to act in this new order of things, in this new creation that God has thus produced, founded on Christ the Lord. Therefore the notion of a clergy, an especially consecrated class, distinct from God’s children,

thoroughly carried out in popery, is utterly false. There one sees the pretensions of man to act as God. On the other hand, we have the opposite error in what is commonly called quakerism, that is, the Holy Ghost given to man as man; and of the two I think quakerism is, if possible, the more revolting. The whole theory is fundamentally evil and erroneous. I am speaking now not of the moral qualities of many Friends but only of the system of quakerism. It is well known that their doctrine on this grave subject is that the Holy Ghost is given to all mankind, to a Jew or a heathen, to an infidel, a Turk, or anybody else.1 Now I call this of all doctrines professed by Christians the most opposed to the truth of Christianity. Can any view be more offensive? For the teaching of the New Testament as to this is plain: namely, the Spirit is given neither to a man, nor to a caste of men, on the one hand, nor to the race universally on the other; but to those only who stand in Christ. Again, the Spirit, who is the seal and earnest of the individual Christian, baptizes them into one body. Thus may all see that there is “one body and one Spirit.”

But as for the application of this truth to the matter of worship, let us turn to 1 Corinthians 14. It is the just and the fullest statement throughout the New Testament how God intended His will in this respect to be carried out. The apostle writes thus: “What is it then? I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. Else when thou shalt bless with the Spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? for thou verily

givest thanks well, but the other is not edified" (Ver. 15-17).

We see from this and much that follows that hindrances to worship were very early brought in. Hence we can learn that it is not a mere matter of the absence or the presence of power that all turns on. There can be no question of the power that was with the Corinthians. It is a great mistake when we hear people talking about Christians without the power to worship. If they have the Spirit, they have the power. There is another and a serious question to consider, the allowance of fleshly motives that makes the coming together a dishonour to God. But it will not do virtually to reproach the Spirit of God with the blame of it, as all seem to do who sanction the question. Have we got the power? The Holy ghost is faithful and has never left the Church of God. He is always in and with us; He is present to guide and help the saints. It is no question of power, for the Christian has the Spirit to carry on the worship of God. It is rather the power of unjudged flesh which hinders the Spirit of God, and consequently dishonours the Lord Jesus.

So it was in Corinth. There was the fullest proof in that city that it is no question of power. The Spirit of God wrought among those saints manifestly and mightily. They spake with tongues, we are told; but they were carnal. They were in their ways a spectacle of shame, instead of being a practical testimony to the grace of the Lord Jesus. Is not this solemn lesson to us? We ought to be jealous for the glory of the Lord, and most watchful against anything that would detract from that witness to Him we are called to give as God's children. Now the Corinthians had forgotten this; and the apostle reproves them, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than

ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue" (1 Cor. 14:18, 19).

These philosophic Corinthians were occupied with the power they had received from God, instead of seeking His glory. So the apostle has to take them to task as children. He says, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be manly. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that they will not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in private persons, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? but if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or a private person, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying" (Ver. 20-26).

I refer to this not as if worship were the only matter for the assembly, but to show that it has a real place therein, and because we see clearly both what the will of God is, and the way in which His will was hindered. The will of God was that the church should come together as

His assembly to the glory of the Lord, and when they come together the Spirit would act in that assembly by this or that one in their midst, leading one out into prayer, another into thanksgiving, another into prophesying. But all must be under the hand of the Lord. This was the ground taken. The Corinthians overlooked this, because of pre-occupation with powers conferred, and slipped aside. They brought into the assembly what, if in fact the power of the Spirit, was His power wrongly used for self-display, not in order or for edification. Thus the very carnality of the Corinthians becomes, in the grace of the Lord, the means of great instruction to us.

The Corinthian church was in painful disorder; and I ask you, Have you profited by it? It is a poor sign of repentance, or moral profit, where men only see the faults of others; rather is it the invariable sign of a heart that is not right before God. Where there is an unexercised conscience, there may be an eye keen and sharp enough in detecting other people. But if you desire to walk with the Lord, I ask you, Have you learned His will? Where has God laid down, do you ask, the manner and order of the Christian assembly, how He Himself is to is to be worshipped in it, and how His children are to be edified? I answer, in His word. There can be no doubt what the will of God originally was for the church. Have we deliberately made up our minds not to seek His will for our worship now? Let us consider the undeniable facts, in the plain word of God, as to this.

I am speaking now in no mean city where Christianity abounds: at least one sees representatives of many denominations. But where, I ask you, among them all is faith in God’s word and Spirit as to worship? Where do you find the Holy Ghost left to act freely among the

assembled saints? Some may object that, if this were so, it would result in all sorts of disorder. What, the word and Spirit among God's saints lead to disorder! Is it not rebellion to refuse subjection to His will? The Corinthians were disorderly because they slighted it, and their correction is God's rule for us. And it is a far greater sin in the face of such scripture to set up a human order subversive of God's, than even to be as disorderly as they were. Where Christians are gathered to the Lord's name, God is there to set crooked things straight. But if they depart from the scriptural regulations of His assembly, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, it is no matter how admirably the substituted order may be conducted, it is a false state of things. No reform can set right what is radically wrong.

Do you question the facts? or misunderstand the case? I am bound then to explain. You object that the present lecture justifies the ways of modern Christendom. Supposing, for instance, you say we look at such a meeting as this: it is not left to the Holy Ghost's sovereign action in the assembly. Granted: no one contends for blotting out preaching of the word or discoursing to saints. We are not assembled now for worship, etc. One who has received a gift from the Lord Jesus is using it for the good of Christians. Thus we are not shut up to one mode or resource of action. Ministry is not the assembly, although gifts may be exercised there, but not there only. The word of God shows both to be divine without confounding them. There were individuals endowed by our Lord with power from on high to expound, exhort, teach, etc., and they are not only free but bound to do so: they wrong Him and the church, if they do not. But the exercise of ministry on

individual responsibility is quite distinct from the assembly where all come together (gifted or not) in dependence on the Spirit. If I have a gift from God, what is called in the parable of Matthew 25, such or such a "talent," I ought to go forth as Apollos or any other of old. God's word is plain; the Lord's call is binding. Woe to the man who refuses! The principle is just the same, whatever the measure or nature of the gift from the Lord; it may be for edifying the saints, or for the conversion of souls.

It is on this principle that all individual ministry is exercised; and therefore one should never find fault with any truly gifted for ministering to the church, or with others who labour to disseminate the gospel, using their gifts among souls converted or unconverted. On the contrary, one would desire to see more and more liberty, more and more power, more and more sense both of dignity and of responsibility in those who thus labour in the word.

But besides all this, and if possible more important still, is the assembly of God, their coming together as such in dependence on the Lord's presence and the free action of the Holy Ghost in their midst carrying them on either in the worship of God or in the edification of one another, perhaps both conjointly. Is this not a part of scripture obligatory on the Christian assembly to the end? Are you prepared to reject God's word as to this for old or new tradition? It is objected indeed that the Epistle to the Corinthians supposes there were tongues and other extraordinary powers. But the absence of tongues, etc., can never nullify God's word for all that abides. Have you given up this Epistle as God's principle? If you are not acting on this word of His, you

are acting on man's, on a mere innovation; in short you are clearly fallen into departure from scripture, and in this at least are not doing the will of God. No wise Christian looks for sign-gifts as things are; but their absence and consequently the non-application of what regulates their action in the assembly cannot efface for faith God's principle and regulation of all that remains.

Along with the fact that there is the one body as well as the one Spirit, there is the responsibility that God's assembly should give itself up to the Lord, in dependence on the Holy Ghost; that the assembly should come together looking to the Lord to work in them by the Holy Ghost. This is all one contends for; and every intelligent Christian must contend for this, or give up his profession of cleaving to apostolic authority and order. God's assembly with His Spirit freely acting in the midst is the essential condition as regards Christian worship. You may say that in the present ruined state of Christendom one can only have it in an imperfect condition. But this is the will of the Lord for all His saints; this is the one scriptural view of God's assembly meeting here below.

There were undoubtedly of old certain outward powers or signs, gifts that have lapsed or been withdrawn from the church. As to this I am far from agreeing with those who, particularly in this part of the country, some years ago, fell into a great delusion by yearning after the revival of miraculous vouchers and tokens. To my conviction, as the church is now, it was an unspiritual thought, and an unholy desire. The children of God would have shown a truer sense of what is due to God by humiliation in sackcloth and ashes, by repentance, and so seeking the path of obedience in the waste, rather

than by wistful aspirations after these outward displays of power which once adorned the church as the vessel of Christ's glory. I believe, if there had been a deeper and more just judgment of our fallen estate among those referred to they would have been kept from this error and been spared the terrible dishonour of the Lord's name that ensued, not only in wildfire and demon power but in false doctrine as to Christ.

They were right in feeling the Babylonish confusion of Christendom; but they ought to have ceased from all they knew to be contrary to God's word, and they ought, while humbling themselves for their own sin and that of all in setting Him at nought so long, to have praised Him for the presence of the Holy Ghost, and asked grace to act on it without anxiety or hesitation. But no, they were in the same unbelief as others, and prayed for Him to be given afresh, as if He were not sent down to abide for ever, and hence they fell into even greater abominations than the rest, as they saw the evil more, and yet set up higher pretensions, with no faith whatever. For nobody doubts what is the Lord's will as to the Christian generally. You can say and even teach any amount of truth, provided you treat it as mere theory by not acting on it: but where is the Lord, where is faith in this? Instead of doing the truth and abstaining from all inconsistent with it, they prayed for extraordinary power, and had the audacity to set up apostles, prophets, etc., once more, as a revived system.

Now it ought to be plain to any spiritual mind that such a revival could not be in our present ruin. If the Lord gave the public signs of faith to all, it would sanction the wicked, divided, faithless condition of Christendom; if He gave to you only, it would be a practical denial of all

His saints elsewhere. Impossible that the Lord would do either. He continues all the gifts needful for His work in man and in the church; but He would deny neither the faithful presence of His Spirit on the one side nor the ruin-state of Christendom on the other, as this delusion in effect denied both. He did pledge all that was necessary for perfecting the saints, and He has fulfilled it; He did not pledge Himself either to continue or if possible still less to restore, a series of sign-gifts, and He has done nothing of the sort. It was only a false appearance brought about by the enemy in a very presumptuous sect. Indeed no holy person could conceive the Lord bestowing such gifts indiscriminately any more than to a party.

For, if we test it, where can we conceive the Lord would begin? In Rome? “Oh!” says some good Protestant, “this would never do, give them to Rome!” Yet be assured that there have been not a few who, even in that idolatrous system, have lived and died in the Lord — nay, I believe, been not only pious laymen but priests, and monks, and popes. Yet you will all rightly feel that if the Lord were to vouchsafe the wonderful signs of His spiritual power, throughout that idolatrous system, it would seem His sanction of its iniquity.

Suppose in the next place that He gives powers to all (I do not know how many denominations there may be): still He gives them to all the denominations! “Oh, no,” some zealous Plymouthist would exclaim, “this would never do; it would sanction denominations contrary to His word.” To whom then could they be given? To the Plymouthists so-called? Let me tell you that the “Brethren” in question have just enough to do to be kept themselves aright; and I am perfectly persuaded that, if

they could have had these powers given to them exclusively, it would prove an intoxicating cup administered, ruinous to the Lord's glory and to their blessing. To my firm conviction nothing could more falsify all that we own to be His mind. We do confess the one body and one Spirit; we do not deny our present ruin-state, but mourn it. I would not, if such a thing could be, have for myself or desire for any saint, what would exalt us to the depreciation of the truth or to the ignoring of others, no less members of Christ than ourselves, but above all what would lower and misrepresent our Lord. There would be the utmost danger, yea, the moral certainty, of their becoming what their worst enemies say they are now. It would directly tend to their denying the Christian name to all other saints, and it would practically deny their testimony to the ruin of that which bears the Lord's name here below. Therefore, as it appears to me, when the Lord saw all going to ruin, He righteously and in wisdom discontinued those external powers.

The Lord Jesus said in Mark 16, that these signs should follow; but he never said how long they were to last. They did follow them that believed; and there is the simple truth of the matter. For their continuance or revival you have no divine warrant.

If you, brethren, believe in the presence of the Spirit of God, it will be no question to your minds but clear and sure that He acts by whom He will in the assembly, as certainly as by individuals in the way of ministry. It is as important as it is true, that the ministry is a permanent and divine institution; but, then, the same Spirit, who thus works individually, works corporately in the church. Do you doubt the competency, or willingness, of the Holy

Spirit to maintain order in the assembly? Suppose, for instance, it were only a human company: a gentleman asks a dozen of his friends to his house for dinner, what, I wonder, would be thought, if anyone were to say, “It is a very dangerous thing to have these twelve persons at dinner; I am afraid there must be grave disorder.” You would feel that this would be rather strong language; and if men can feel confident that at a decent table there need be no distrust of propriety, can Christians doubt that the Lord would give order among God’s children meeting in His name? Is God the author of confusion? What is it that accounts for such thoughts? The unbelief of the world, which neither sees nor knows the Holy Spirit, the fear that God’s children will be actuated only by fleshly motives on such occasions. The real presence of the Lord in His assembly is not thought of.

No doubt, if Christians came together as so many men, with no Lord to look to, as if God took no concern or control in His own assembly, there might be nothing but disorder. And this is the very thing I would impress on you who are gathered to the Lord’s name: we meet not merely with mutual love and courtesy as Christians, but as members of Christ who compose God’s assembly. Can any conceivable principle clothe with such confidence and solemnity the gathering together of souls on earth? It is no invention or assumption of ours; it is the will of the Lord for all that are His own here below. You, if a Christian, are unfaithful if you do not so meet, nor is it possible according to scripture duly to worship Him otherwise.

But the assembly of God, like the presence of the Spirit, is more rightly perhaps to be viewed as the condition of

worship in the hour that is now come, than as a help to it.

A most important help certainly in the worship of God is the Lord's supper. In the early church they were so filled with the Spirit and so enjoyed the fellowship of one another at the Lord's table that they came together for this purpose every day. At that day they first knew that Christ was in the Father, they in Him, and He in them. And no wonder. It was a new and truly divine thing, that holy fellowship; and when they met together, that which expressed this and more than this, the Lord's supper, was always before their hearts. So we are told in Acts 2:46; "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." This is the picture that is presented by the new-born church of God.

We have a view of the same supper of the Lord still later (Acts 20); and no doubt, as the Spirit of God has given us both, so each is for an important purpose.

From the first statement we gather that it would not be wrong to take the Lord's supper every day if circumstances called for it, simply and holily, as then. In Acts 20 we have the more ordinary state of things; and thence we learn that the habit of the church was to break bread on the first day of the week. We are further told that "Paul preached," though it is not properly preaching, but discoursing. There we find just what we may see elsewhere, liberty in the gathering together of the church for one who may be so led of the Lord to instruct or exhort the brethren. Assuredly there is nothing that shuts out the assembly from edification by

the word, even when met to break bread. Anyone that denies this seems to me fighting against plain scripture; for I have known persons, in their reaction from going to hear a sermon, allow themselves the thought that, because we come together to break bread, there is no room for the Holy Ghost to teach or exhort by whom He will.

The breaking of bread is and ought to be the standing service for the saints on each Lord's day, but not so as to exclude the action of the Spirit for the joy of faith and help of the saints. Only let all be simple and real, which the Holy Spirit alone can give or keep up.

It is common again to find saints who, if they do not despise, certainly neglect, the Lord's supper. Their fear of ordinances perhaps, or more generally their fondness for preaching, causes them to swing to the opposite side. Worship is thus well-nigh lost. Such a habit necessarily lowers the place of God's children or church into that of mere hearers. Not that it is not important to receive instruction; but it will be found that, where by grace you take and hold your place as true worshippers, you also receive the profit of the truth a hundred-fold more than when you sink into a mere auditory.

Those who are content to be no more than hearers never come to perfection, to use the apostle's words. They are stunted in their spiritual growth, instead of increasing by the knowledge of God. Nor wonder at this for the present aim of grace is forgotten or unknown. The object of God in bringing us to the knowledge of Himself in Christ is to draw out our souls to His praise in worship, and to His glory in service. The Lord's supper is the central feast. For the Christian to abandon this for

sermon-hearing is a woeful and disastrous descent, which settles him down to the means and not the end of God, not to speak of immense loss in every way. In short, then, the evangelical idea and practice of merging worship in sermons, besides being an evident departure from the revealed will of God, dishonours the Lord and His death, grieves the Holy Ghost who would glorify Jesus, and injures the children of God beyond calculation.

But we learn from a previous chapter (1 Cor. 11) of 1 Corinthians that, as the right use of the Lord's supper is of all consequence in God's worship, so there is danger in various ways to the saints. The Corinthians lacked gravity in this as in other things; and the Lord both resented and corrected the evil. They appear to have mixed up the love-feast or agape with the Lord's supper; and as they allowed nature to come in (probably from old habits as heathens), some were guilty of excess in eating and drinking, while the poor were made to feel their condition. This was in every way most grievous; and the apostle was led of the Lord not only to explain that His hand had been dealing with some in sickness, and others in death or falling asleep, but to separate in future the Lord's supper from any such feast.

Further great principles are laid down of the utmost value for our permanent good. "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not

discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (Ver. 26-32).

Thus, on the one hand, self-examination is urged on the Christian — never a doubt, but to prove himself, and this with a view to come, not to stay away. On the other hand, if one eat or drink lightly (that is, "unworthily"), he eats and drinks judgment (not "damnation," as it is most faultily rendered, but judgment) to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. Hence, when the Corinthians failed in self-judgment and treated the Eucharist unworthily, they fell under the Lord's judgment, which, however serious and humbling, was really merciful, for, when judged, they were chastened of Him that they should not be condemned with the world. That is, even this wrong brought not "damnation" but His chastening judgment.

Hence we see that the Lord's supper constantly before us is meant to call forth in the saints this constant habit of self-examination. And we see at once how important is its bearing on the worship of the saints. For if they come carelessly, the Spirit in very faithfulness will testify to it; and they will then, if honest, betake themselves rather to confession than to praise, and thus the proper worship of the assembly will be interfered with and hindered. If due self-examination go on, the conscience is kept good, and the heart can flow out, as the Spirit guides, in praise and thanksgiving unimpeded around the table of the Lord. Thus the instruction of the Lord lets us know what a help there is when the Lord's

supper holds its due place, what a hindrance when it is despised or abused.

Let me here notice what is often a difficulty to some persons respecting a hymn-book. We have a book of Psalms in the Old Testament, but none in the New Testament - only the certainty that the Christians in these the earliest days had in use among them such metrical compositions as are styled “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Why such a marked difference? They do not see through the cavil of such as harp on the inconsistency of written hymns and of extemporaneous prayers. But the truth in scripture is plain that in the apostolic age such were the facts. They had hymns, etc., to sing, whilst they prayed according to the moment. To have hymns then is quite right, according to God’s word. It is an utter error in all who think that hymns were impromptu compositions which the Spirit of God gave on the spot. There is no warrant for any such notion. For example, the Corinthian brethren came each with a psalm. This does not mean the Psalms of David, but a Christian psalm. Hence the fact is that, in all lands and tongues where Christianity is known, the believers are sure to express their Christian joy and thanksgiving in suited hymns, because the New Testament supposes a new state of happiness through the gospel such as must needs find such a vent spontaneously.

For now the saints are shown to be perfectly blessed in Christ, and having the Spirit as a well of water within springing up into everlasting life. They long for Christ to come, or to depart and be with Him. In the Old Testament, on the contrary, there was the fear of death which kept them all their lifetime subject to bondage. It was as to them an unexplored and dark region. Christ’s

death and resurrection have changed all for us. Whereas for the most part the joy in the book of Psalms is on this side of the grave, and hence in the presence and reign of the Messiah. On the other hand, in the New Testament, the Messiah having come and gone after accomplishing redemption, the church is being called. There is therefore no need of inspiring a book of psalms, for the Christian has the salvation of his soul, and can joy in God fully revealed and known, and hence he makes psalms and spiritual songs for himself. What a help and power to worship is not this!

But there is a remark I may be allowed, and not unnecessary in the use of these compositions. If the Spirit had to provide ready-made a praise-book for Israel, but left it for the Christian heart and mind to do this work according to their measure, there is nothing more needed than self-judgment and dependence on God in using hymns in the assembly. It is really a solemn thing to give out a hymn there, because thereby almost more than in anything else you risk, if wrong, drawing the whole congregation along with you, or you compel them to mark their sense of your error by an ominous silence. Thus it is plain that for giving out a hymn in the assembly, when if a man goes wrong there is or is not spiritual discernment, it becomes much more serious than those conceive who think there is nothing so easy as to spend a little while together in singing nice hymns. For this the Holy Ghost is required, for He, dwelling in that assembly as God’s temple, knows just what is wanted. But thanks be to God! He is there to guide according to the present mind and will of God. This should lead one to be not morbid but prayerful, to watch earnestly that it be the Lord’s guiding and not his own

will in any way. On the other hand, if the Spirit guides in a hymn, it is no less serious to slight it through a crotchet or perhaps a feeling against the person who gave it out. How all-important is the presence and action of God's Spirit in the church of God! I commend this not on the ground of common sense, but as the certain will of God to you as His children who stand only in faith. I might much extend this lecture by touching on many other helps and hindrances to worship; but this may suffice for the present.

May you have grace to be faithful in following out the truth as you learn it from God! If any deliberately prefer to His will for His church what man has set up, I must leave them in His hands to whom they shall give account. There is no reasoning that can stand before the word of God; and the Spirit will surely strengthen all whose eye is single both to know and to do the Lord's will.

1 A Christian, who thinks better of the doctrine of the Society of Friends than I can, sent me a recent document which sounds more than usually Evangelical. But even here those good words only disguise their unquestionable belief that Christ's redemption procures the Spirit for all men without exception, apart from the new birth or faith of the gospel. This is exactly what I tax them with and maintain to be evil and heterodox.