

## Worship in the hour that now is

John 4: 23, 24.

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(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.