

Vital Points in Worship

by Cled E. Wallace

For practical purposes worship may be considered the all-out adoration of the human heart. When a lawyer, questioned Jesus about "the great commandment in the law" he received a quick and a pointed answer. "And he said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the great and first commandment." The measure of a man's love for his neighbor or those who are closer to him is less than this. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Lk 10:27) "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Mt 10:37) So the Lord declares.

This all-out adoration is not even to be directed toward heavenly beings such as the angels. "For it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." A sense of awe has always taken possession of men when they were confronted by angels. An angel showed the apostle John some of the visions that are found in the last book of the Bible. "And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel that showed me these things." (Rev 22:8) This was a very natural reaction and John evidently considered it proper and right or he would not have acted in such a manner. He was a very intelligent and experienced Christian. He made a mistake and was instantly corrected by the angel at whose feet he lay prostrate. "And he saith unto me, See thou do it not: I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren the prophets, and with them that keep the words of his book: worship God." (Rev 22:9) There we have it. "Worship God." Angels are a higher order of created beings than man, but created beings nevertheless and servants of God, fellow servants with faithful men, and are even employed in the task of "doing service for the sake of them that shall inherit salvation." If it be improper to worship angels, how much more so it is to adore the saints, so-called images of the saints, or the mother of the Lord. To worship any man is not to be thought of even for an instant. "And when it came to pass that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Acts 10:25-26) The practice of bowing before the modern ecclesiastic who claims to be the successor to Simon Peter and vicar of Christ on earth is deserving of sterner rebuke than either John or Cornelius received. No true worshipper of God will be guilty of it. It is a presumptuous thing on the part of any man to either expect from or offer to any human being a token of adoration that even the angels reject. Worship must be reserved for God.

Abundant and revealed reasons exist for this. In his address on Mars Hill in Athens, Paul made clear the true relation existing between God and Man. God is "Lord of heaven and earth," the giver of "life, breath and all things." (Acts 17:25) He created man and appointed the bounds of human habitation. We live and move and have our being in him and we are his offspring. It is man's duty to seek and find God and "he is not far

from each one of us." The affection that a dutiful child exercises towards his father and mother is only a small measure of the honor that humanity owes Jehovah. Myriads of angels "fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power and might, be unto your God forever and ever. Amen." (Rev 7:12)

Righteous men on earth echo the praises of angels in heaven when they worship God. His name should never be lightly used or bandied about in irreverent conversation. Thoughtless people who would not speak disrespectfully of their parents often take the name of God in vain. More teaching is needed to enlighten men on what the Bible has to say about God. This is the sure way to generate faith in him "and without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarded of them that seek after him." (Heb 11:6) Man is weak and dependent and must have super human guidance. Human efforts to guide human destiny independently of God lead to ultimate ruin. This has always been and must always be true. "The world through its wisdom knew not God." (1 Cor 1:21) Apostate and ruined Israel wrung a cry of anguish from Jeremiah the prophet. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord; correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." (Jer 10:23-24) The most humbling influence that can take possession of a human heart is a true knowledge of God. It is a real pity that so many who seem inclined to worship him, like the men of Athens, do so in ignorance. Human arrogance appears in its ugliest form in the rejection of God from human knowledge. Nebuchadnezzar is both classical and typical as an object lesson. He was supreme monarch of the world. He walked upon the broad walls of Babylon and was swollen with pride. He took credit for it all "by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty." Jehovah intervened to teach him a lesson and leave it as a monument for the generations to come. The proud usurper of divine right was driven from men and given the heart of a beast. He ate grass as oxen, his body was wet with the dew of heaven, his hair grew like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. This horrible experience was followed by a return of his understanding and with it a sane and righteous recognition of the supreme place occupied by Almighty God. "And at the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and one can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Dan 4:34) Nebuchadnezzar in his pride and ignorance had set up a golden image and commanded all men to worship it. In fury he commanded that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cast into a burning, fiery furnace because they refused to bow before the image. In his humbled and chastened condition he expressed the profound truth that the Hebrew children chose a bath of fire rather than surrender. "Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase." (Dan 4:37) It is this doctrine of God that gives the Bible its supreme place in the literature of the world. Such a book must he divine for human power was no

more capable of producing it than it is of creating a sun or a star. Chance is the mother of neither the natural world nor the Bible. God is the only explanation of both and that explanation is the only rational one.

The question of how men can worship God acceptably is somewhat akin to the question of how a degenerate race can be saved from sin. Human wisdom can answer neither question. "For seeing that in the wisdom of God. The world through its wisdom knew not God, is was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe." (1 Cor 1:21) God sent a Saviour into the world and revealed a Plan by which man must be saved. There is, no substitute for it and it must be accepted by faith. Likewise man cannot be guided by intuition or reason to a true code of divine worship. No man can know what is acceptable to God in the way of worship except as God reveals it. "Even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. But we received, not the spirit of the "world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth; combining spiritual things with spiritual words." (1 Cor 2:12-13) So spoke Paul and the inescapable conclusion is that the Bible is the source of all information about what a man must do to be saved and how he is to render acceptable worship to God. The man who consults his own feeling or convenience and brings an offering to God is more apt to receive the curse of Cain than the blessing of faithful Abel.

The Old Testament system of worship with its "carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation" (Heb 9:10) was a divine kindergarten to teach the Jews the vital lesson that they must depend on divine leadership. Moses was given a detailed blueprint of the tabernacle and warned to build it according to the pattern which was shown him in the mount. The law carried this fateful warning. "What thingsoever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (Deut 12:32) The corpses of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron and princes in the assembly are grim monuments of the wrath of God toward men who are presumptuous enough to tamper with divine arrangements in worship. In burning incense, they offered strange fire which God had not commanded. They "were not even given time to mouth the hackneyed excuse "that God had not told them not to do as they had done. They had divine orders and it was their duty to stick to them without taking any detours in the way of experiments. They paid for their folly with their lives.

The time came for the old law and the old priesthood to be changed. They were "disannulled," permanently abolished. We have a new order of worship under the new and better covenant. (Heb 7:10; 8:6) Even though this new order is a "law of liberty" the "liberty" does not consist in allowing men to offer up to God in worship that which is right in their own eyes. Divine leadership is as essential as ever and it is fully as important for the servants of the Lord to maintain purity in worship as it is for them to be sound in doctrine. Men have no more right to introduce unauthorized practices in the worship of God than they have to change the conditions of pardon. When the church assembles to worship God it must do what God says. Let it be assumed that the church is right in "spirit," that the members are reverent, zealous and abounding in ambition honor him

who "giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." (Acts 17:25) They assemble on the Lord's day. Why? It is "the day that the Lord hath made," (Rev 1:9, Ps 118:24) a monument to his resurrection from the dead, a divine appointment. What is the nature of this meeting and what procedure shall be followed? Is human wisdom to decide? Shall it be a time of feasting and merry-making? God has revealed his will in the teaching of the New Testament, in the precepts and examples recorded therein. The early church met to break bread, teach, admonish, pray, sing praises and contribute money for- doing good. They did so because they were instructed to do so and the instruction they received was inspired. It would be folly to conclude that they did other things they were not told to do, that they happened to want to do, on the pretext that they were not instructed not to do them. They did not allow the rebellious rule that what is not forbidden is allowable. They respected the apostolic admonition to "hold the pattern of sound words which thou hast heard from me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim 1:13) The claim that worship is in the heart and cannot be embodied in specific acts is about as much lacking in both sense and faith as the like claim that a sinner can love the Lord as much in his heart out of the water as in the water, and therefore baptism is unnecessary. What God commands must be done and what he has not commanded must not be practiced in the realm of worship. It is all right to drink water and milk but it must be done somewhere else besides the Lord's table. It is very well on occasion to express personal exuberance in the singing of popular and secular songs and the playing on instruments of music, but not in the worship of God. He has not appointed such things in the worship which is directed to him. The whole situation is summed up in this. "Worship God" and do so as it is written. To try to do so otherwise exhibits a lack of faith which makes all worship vain.

Bible Banner – Feb 1942