

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (23-2-1992 Cleland Baptist Church)

Philippians 3:3

Additional Bible reading: Isaiah 40:12-31

### Introduction

Paul started this chapter with the subject of rejoicing in the Lord. Now he goes on to speak of worshipping by the Spirit of God. The people who worship by the Spirit of God are those who glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh, i.e. self.

We are just going to take that first phrase, **worship by the spirit of God**, and look at what worship really means. We read it in the Bible, we sing about it, we have songs of worship, services of worship, etc. We will consider who the God is that we worship, the way we worship and its place in the service, and the means by which we worship.

### The God we worship

Definition of worship – bowing down before God in adoration, contemplation, service, honour, reverence, submission and praise. Setting forth God's worth. The Hebrew word means to bow down, prostrate one's self, submit and adore.

The Bible repeatedly shows us the people of God worshipping the Lord. It tells us of individuals worshipping Him, great Old Testament festivals of worship, psalms, and worship in the tabernacle and in the Temple. In the New Testament we see the Wise Men, and many individuals, worshipping, and Jesus teaches us how to worship. Paul worships the God of his fathers, and one of the marks of the early Christian church was their worshipping by the spirit of God. The last book of the Bible is full of the worship in heaven, by the angels and the redeemed. **Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"** (Revelation 5:13).

Here is the reason why God made us, then redeemed us. We were saved to worship Him. This is the ultimate aim of Christian living, and the chief occupation in heaven. Our present worship is preparing us for life hereafter.

So what happens when we worship? We begin with God – His greatness, glory, majesty, power, holiness and grace. He is the Creator, the Everlasting One, the Lord of Lords, and God of the nations. He is one God revealed in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*"God in three persons, blessed Trinity"*

This wonderful God whom we come before revealed Himself first to the men of the Old Testament, and later revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. He stooped to raise us from sin, death and hell. At His second coming He will wind up affairs of worship, and create a new heaven and new earth.

The God we worship, through His Holy Spirit, is at work in our lives, quickening us, sanctifying us, witnessing with our spirit, and leading us on to final perfection. When this God enters the centre of our lives, thinking and services, what else can we do but fall down in adoration, reverence and godly fear? He does not need us or depend on us. So in deep humility, awe and reverence, we submit to Him. We can only plead the merit of the Lord Jesus Christ as the only grounds on which this holy God should accept, forgive and bless us.

There is an enormous gulf separating the holy God from us sinful creatures. We need to consider our own smallness and meanness - even the nations are a drop in the bucket to Him, and as individuals we are the tiniest particles of the nations. We need to consider our sinfulness and depravity in contrast to His utter holiness. Yet this glorious and mighty God is our Saviour. **The Lord is the great God, the great King above all Gods. Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker; for He is our God** (Psalm 95:3-7). **Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together** (Psalm 34:3). We owe worship to God alone, above all else. It is His due. We give love to fellow men, obedience to our parents, but worship is given to God. Failure to worship Him is to rob Him of what is His due. It is not enough to obey, pray to and serve Him – we must worship.

What do we know about worship? It is purely and simply bowing down before the Lord in silent awe and adoration. This should be our highest joy and give us the greatest satisfaction, being occupied with and taken up with God. This will empty us of pride and self-importance, and show us up in weakness and vileness. Abraham described himself as “dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27); Isaiah as “a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5); Peter as “a sinful man” (Luke 5:8). Worship is a glorious and thrilling experience, but also a very humbling one.

#### The place of worship in our church services

Worship is for every area of life. It has its place in our private devotions, and we express it in our lives and service. I have seen a sign above someone’s kitchen sink – “Divine worship here three times daily”!

Worship is also our principle concern when we assemble together on a Sunday as a church. Why do we assemble? Out of habit? To escape life’s problems? To meet friends? Because we like to sing? Because a certain person is preaching – or not preaching? For entertainment and selfish reasons? At the end of each worship service, our thoughts should not be “What did I get out of it?” but “What did God get out of it?” Did He truly receive the worship of His people?

We are assembled above all to worship God, not to pray for our needs, or even to give thanks for blessings. The basic aim is His glory, not our blessing. The opening hymn and prayer ought to set this theme of God’s greatness and glory. Praying for others has a part, but should come later, and even then our prayer for others is that the blessing they receive will glorify Him.

Our offerings are part of our worship. And as the Word of God is read and preached, God speaks and shows His glory and His will, His Son and His goodness. The preacher, as a forgiven sinner, aims to magnify God and get the same response from

the congregation. All true preaching is to exalt the Saviour and humble the sinner. We respond in worship when we put our trust in God, and obey and love Him. As we grow through the Word, and experience more of God's grace, so the more we praise Him and glorify Him.

The Ordinances are linked to the worship of God. The Communion service brings us to the death of Christ, the amazing grace of God, the means whereby we show we have laid hold of Redemption. Preaching is the audible word; the ordinances are the visible word.

We should be challenged to make sure that nothing in our worship services is there for entertainment, centring on man, giving an opportunity to show off gifts and personality, stunts and gimmicks. True worship is God-centred, causing men to say **Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker** (Psalm 95:6).

Three practical considerations: firstly we should all prepare ourselves for the worship service. We should never enter His presence without realizing whom we are approaching, and ensuring we have no unconfessed sins in our hearts. There should be nothing between others and ourselves, otherwise we cannot worship with clear minds and heads.

Secondly, our worship needs to be from our hearts. The Old Testament prophets denounced the people of God for empty ritual and worship while their hearts were full of evil and sin. **These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me** (Mark 7:6; Isaiah 29:13). The right words and acts are a meaningless sham and an abomination unless our hearts are right. **If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened** (Psalm 66:18).

Finally, true worship is costly. The Old Testament worshipper had to bring an animal or basket of fruit (Deuteronomy 26:10), which was sometimes a great strain on limited resources. David said, **I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing** (2 Samuel 24:24). For us today, the cost may be in time, money, inconvenience, and self-denial. If we are easily put off by the distance, cost of petrol, hour of the service, friends who have dropped in, the rain, this says something about how unclear we are about God and ourselves. Our salvation cost our Saviour His position in heaven, glory and riches; He was rejected and despised; it cost Him the agony of Gethsemane and Golgotha; it cost Him His life. Worship what costs us nothing is worth precisely that – nothing!

#### The means by which we worship

**Worship by the Spirit of God.** Apart from the Holy Spirit, we could not begin to worship, because we would be spiritually blind to God's truth and deaf to God's voice. The Holy Spirit stirs our dead souls as He gives us new life. He uses the instrument of the Scriptures, which He inspired.

All our worship is to be in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. (This is the great test for the hymns we sing – not whether they have nice poetry or stirring tunes, but whether they conform to and set our Bible truth.) True praise in hymn singing

comes under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Our prayers and petitions are to be true to God's Word. Also our preaching must be able to stand the test of Bible teaching. The Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures must be central in all that we do, symbolized by a central pulpit, the throne of the Word of God. C.f. old Presbyterian tradition of the clerk carrying the Bible into the pulpit before the minister, indicating that the Bible is what governs proceedings.

The Scriptures are the Holy Spirit's gift to us and the instrument by which He controls and blesses. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God** (Colossians 3:16). The Holy Spirit warms our hearts, kindles a love for God, widens our sympathies and prayers, applies the truth of God to our minds, consciences and wills, and He moves us to repent, trust, worship and action. The truth of God grips us and move us. It binds us in unity and harmony with our fellow believers, and helps us encourage one another.

When the Holy Spirit is present in a service, the fellowship takes part with heart and spirit. It is not a duty, but a desire to worship. It is not a chore, but it rises spontaneously. We are not forcing ourselves to worship, but we are moved and led to worship. We are inwardly gripped and led and held by the Holy Spirit. Warm, loving and free worship because of the love of God, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. There is no cold formality about it.

One of the indicators of spiritual decline in the church is the modern stress on forms and dignity and outward pomp. Sadly in some circles there is a tendency to look down on our forefathers, with their greater liberty and free praise, which lacked solemnity and dignity. Not that we are advocating bawling and shouting, crudity and ignorance, but when the Holy Spirit is at work, there is less concern with forms and ceremonies, written prayers and liturgies. Rather, there is prayer from the heart, and true liberty and freedom. The Holy Spirit brings the presence of God to us. God is at our side. We can say, "Abba Father", with reverence and godly fear. Thus we worship in spirit and in truth, aware of His holiness and our unworthiness.

Never rush into His presence. Do not become so over-familiar with Him that we lose an awareness of whom it is we worship. But at the same time, let there be such warmth for the Father in heaven, who sent His Son to die for us and save us.

### Conclusion

Do we truly worship? Is it our concern that when we assemble together, there is true worship from beginning to end? Let us not slip into empty words and forms. Know what it is to prepare your hearts. Worship with your heart as well as your lips. Live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, and worship in the Spirit. Acknowledge your utter inability to worship aright, without the teaching, controlling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Whether in private devotion or public church service, look to the Holy Spirit to teach you to worship.