

LESSON 197

WORSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Related Scripture: II Corinthians 3

KEY VERSE: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—II Corinthians 3:18.

Lesson Scripture: Matthew 18:18-20;
John 4:20-24; Acts 2:40-47

Introduction:

"Worship," we are told, really means "worthship" or worthiness. God is worthy of all honor, respect, and reverence: His creatures ought to worship only their Creator. Accordingly, He strictly commands us to worship Him, and forbids us to have any other gods before Him.

Further, we ought always and everywhere to worship God, because He is always and everywhere present. The fact is, however, that we are prone to forget His unseen presence, and so have need of reminders and helps to worship. These reminders and helps under the New Testament are different from those that were under the Old Testament.

Old Testament aids to worship included patriarchal altars, tabernacles, temples, and synagogues, with all the offerings and activities of the ceremonial law. The chief New Testament aid to worship is the organized church, with its preaching and teaching of the word of God, its administration of the ordinances, and its provision of fellowship in the worship and service of God under Christ as its Head and the Holy Spirit as its Guide.

Under both Testaments (or Covenants) the use in worship of images or pictures and statues is forbidden. On the other hand, both Old and New Testaments encourage the use of music, both instrumental and vocal, in the worship of God. (See various Psalms and Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16.)

This lesson on "Worship in the Church" may be outlined as follows:

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Notes on the Printed Text:

Faithful Savior, Matthew 18:18-20.

Jesus was speaking here to His disciples as church members, as is obvious from verse 17. Professed disciples with no church connection could not obey His instructions here given and so could have no claim on related promises. But if we are members of the kind of church that Jesus had organized and was here speaking to, we can be sure that He will be as faithful in keeping His promises as He was in giving instructions.

Limited Authority, 18.

Faulty translation here has obscured the truth, so that absurdly pretentious claims have been made to authority that God never delegated to anybody. The church has only administrative authority, with no legislative authority whatever. Let us read it in correct translation:

"Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

So the only authority a church has is to carry out orders from heaven. It has no right to do whatever is pleasing to the flesh of pastor or membership on the presumption that God is bound to endorse such wickedness. Rather its authority is limited to finding out from the scripture, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what has been already bound or loosed in heaven, and then acting in accord with what is already settled in heaven. (Ps. 119:89.)

Licensed Appeal, 19.

Vagaries of human nature are such that no two of us can agree perfectly about anything unless we are led by the Holy Spirit. When we are so led, we can depend upon it that the same God Who directed our prayer will answer it. Within the bounds of His holy will (I Jn. 5:14), our prayers are the licensed means of obtaining the blessings of God. (Jas. 4:2.)

Loving Approach, 20.

Jesus did not condition the promise of His presence in His church upon a big crowd or a fine meeting house. The only condition is that at least two or three members meet in His name: that is, under His authority, subject to His will, with a view to His glory. When we so come together, we have a right to claim and recognize His presence in our midst, whether our church be large or small.

Father Spirit, John 4:20-24.

Where and What and Who is God, and how can we worship Him when we can neither see His form nor hear His voice? Questions like these plague the minds of mortals, so that false religions supply visible and tangible images as idols to usurp the place of the invisible God, the eternal Spirit. Jesus calls us back to the worship of this Spirit.

Where to Worship, 20, 21.

Apart from appointment and convenience, one place is no better than another for the worship of God. Who fills heaven and earth. The Samaritan woman had been taught that one mountain was peculiarly holy; the Jews doted on another: but genuine worship of the true and living God cannot be limited to this place or to that. Much superstitious sentiment is wasted on so-called holy places.

What to Worship, 22.

More important than the place of worship is the Object of worship. A false system of religion, even if it starts with some knowledge of the true God, will more and more obscure that knowledge until the worshipers will no longer know what they are worshipping. God's appointed Savior of sinners and His salvation are "from the Jews."

Whom to Worship, 23.

God is not merely a What, a first great Cause, or a philosophical concept. He is a living Person, with all the attributes of the only Personality without beginning or end, the spiritual Father of His born-again spiritual children. Contrary to the delusions of some religionists, sinful man does not seek after this God (Ro. 3:11); but Jesus assures us that the Father does seek true worshipers to worship Him.

How to Worship, 24.

"God is Spirit." Therefore, as Paul told the Athenians, He is not worshiped by men's hands. (Acts 17:25.) They that worship Him acceptably "must worship him in Spirit and in truth." That is, in the Holy Spirit and in the truth of His word.

Favored Souls, Acts 2:40-43.

Peter was preaching on the day of Pentecost. Part of his sermon is recorded in verses 14 to 36, 38, and 39. In v. 37 we read that the listeners "were pricked in their heart," and asked, "what shall we do?" Correctly translating from v. 38, Peter told them:

"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you upon the name of Jesus Christ because of remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Personal Salvation, 40.

With all the manifest power of the Holy Spirit, Peter did not hesitate to extend the invitation "with many other words." Salvation is personal, and involves personal responsibility. Yet it should be pointed out that the exhortation "Save yourselves" is from a Greek passive imperative which would be better translated "Be saved" or "Get saved."

Progressive Salvation, 41.

In the sense of regeneration, or in the sense of justification, salvation is instantaneous, not a process but an instant experience which stands for eternity. But in the sense of sanctification or consecration of life, it is a progressive work of grace. So baptism and church membership are no part of salvation in the first sense, but they do have a part in working out the salvation that God has worked within. (Philp. 2:12, 13.)

Note that only "they that gladly received his word were baptized." In reference to the new birth or to the remission of sins, they were saved when they believed, and before they were baptized. (Jn. 1:12, 13; 5:24; 6:47; I Jn. 5:1; etc., etc., etc.) Note also that when they were baptized they were added to the membership of the church, and so to that extent their lives were saved to an effective testimony for their Savior.

Persevering Salvation, 42.

"They continued stedfastly" — and thereby showed themselves to be genuine disciples. (Jn. 8:31.)

Perceptive Salvation, 43.

Where God is known, He is feared. The "wonders and signs" done by the apostles were recognized as miraculous works of God. False Christs and false prophets may show "signs and wonders to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect." (Mk. 13:22.) But if these modern miracle mongers have not the doctrines of the apostles, souls saved by grace will perceive the difference.

Fruitful Service, Acts 2:44-47.

We are saved to serve. Salvation is not only a deliverance from death; it is living a life.

Possessions Sacrificed, 44, 45.

This experiment in communal living was unique in being a spontaneous sacrifice by the wealthy members of the church for the support of their poorer brethren. Perhaps no one will dispute that if ever the communal principle should have succeeded in this world, it should have succeeded in the church at Jerusalem, where the Spirit of God manifested more power among His people than ever before or since. But even here there arose an Ananias and Sapphira, "a murmuring of the Grecians," and eventually shared poverty in the place of shared wealth. (Acts 5:1-11; 6:1; 11:27-30.)

Possessors Satisfied, 46.

Apparently, at least for a time, all were satisfied with this arrangement. The former possessors of private property were satisfied with spiritual blessings and fellowship, so that all the members ate their food "with gladness and singleness of heart." In total contrast to atheistic communism, there were no owners "liquidated," but only their material goods, and that was of their own free choice. So everybody was happy and satisfied—for a time.

Professors Sanctified, 47.

Whatever the last sentence meant to the King James translators, it is impossible for modern English. We may better translate:

"And the Lord kept on adding daily to the church those that were being saved."

So the church at Jerusalem did not limit its ministry to the preaching of the gospel. Those who professed faith in Christ were led to sanctify their lives to Him in the ordinance of baptism and in church membership and service.

Key Verse:

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—II Corinthians 3:18.

The "glass" or mirror here is the word of God. God uses the ministry of His word in His church to make His people more like Himself. Compare Ephesians 4:11-15.