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CHAPTER

1

Worship in the Christian Church

CHRI^STIAN CHURCHES have come to the dangerous time predicted long ago. It is a time when we can pat one another on the back, congratulate ourselves and join in the glad refrain, "We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!"

It certainly is true that hardly anything is missing from our churches these days—except the most important thing. We are missing the genuine and sacred offering of ourselves and our worship to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the message of the Revelation the angel of the church of the Laodiceans made this charge and this appeal (3:17, 19):

Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. . . . As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

My own loyalties and responsibilities are and always will be with the strongly evangelical, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring churches. We have been surging forward. We are building great churches and large congregations. We are boasting

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about high standards and we are talking a lot about revival.

But I have a question and it is not just rhetoric: *What has happened to our worship?*

The reply of many is "We are rich and have need of nothing. Doesn't that say something about God's blessing?"

Did you know that the often-quoted Jean-Paul Sartre describes his turning to philosophy and hopelessness as a turning away from a secularistic church? He says, "I did not recognize in the fashionable God who was taught me, Him who was waiting for my soul. I needed a Creator; I was given a big businessman!"

None of us is as concerned as we should be about the image we really project to the community around us. At least not when we profess to belong to Jesus Christ and still fail to show forth His love and compassion as we should.

We who are the fundamentalists and the "orthodox" Christians have gained the reputation of being "tigers"—great fighters for the truth. Our hands are heavy with callouses from the brass knuckles we have worn as we beat on the liberals. Because of the meaning of our Christian faith for a lost world, we are obligated to stand up for the truth and to contend for the faith when necessary.

But there is a better way, even in our dealing with those who are liberals in faith and theology. We can do a whole lot more for them by being Christlike than we can by figuratively beating them over the head with our knuckles.

The liberals tell us they cannot believe the Bible. They tell us they cannot believe that Jesus Christ

was the unique Son of God. At least most of them are honest about it. Moreover, I am certain we are not going to make them bow the knee by cursing them. If we are led by the Spirit of God and if we show forth the love of God this world needs, we become the "winsome saints."

The strange and wonderful thing about it is that truly winsome and loving saints do not even know about their attractiveness. The great saints of past eras did not know they were great saints. If someone had told them, they would not have believed it, but those around them knew that Jesus was living His life in them.

I think we join the winsome saints when God's purposes in Christ become clear to us. We join them when we begin to worship God because He is who He is.

Sometimes evangelical Christians seem to be fuzzy and uncertain about the nature of God and His purposes in creation and redemption. In such instances, the preachers often are to blame. There are still preachers and teachers who say that Christ died so we would not drink and not smoke and not go to the theater.

No wonder people are confused! No wonder they fall into the habit of backsliding when such things are held up as the reason for salvation.

Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontius Pilate, died on the cross and rose from the grave to make worshipers out of rebels! He has done it all through grace. We are the recipients.

That may not sound dramatic but it is God's revelation and God's way.

Another example of our wrong thinking about

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God is the attitude of so many that God is now a charity case. He is a kind of frustrated foreman who cannot find enough help. He stands at the wayside asking how many will come to His rescue and begin to do His work.

Oh, if we would only remember who He is! God has never actually needed any of us—not one. But we pretend that He does and we make it a big thing when someone agrees “to work for the Lord.”

We all should be willing to work for the Lord, but it is a matter of grace on God’s part. I am of the opinion that we should not be concerned about working for God until we have learned the meaning and the delight of worshiping Him.

A worshiper can work with eternal quality in his work. But a worker who does not worship is only piling up wood, hay and stubble for the time when God sets the world on fire.

I fear that there are many professing Christians who do not want to hear such statements about their “busy schedule,” but it is the truth. God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us—to worship Him and to enjoy Him forever!

It is then, out of our deep worship, that we do His work.

I heard a college president say that the church is “suffering from a rash of amateurism.”

Any untrained, unprepared, unspiritual empty rattletrap of a person can start something religious and find plenty of followers who will listen and pay and promote it. It may become very evident that he or she had never heard from God in the first place.

These things are happening all around us because we are not worshipers. If we are truly among

the worshipers we will not be spending our time with carnal or worldly religious projects.

All of the examples that we have in the Bible illustrate that glad and devoted and reverent worship is the normal employment of moral beings. Every glimpse that is given us of heaven and of God's created beings is always a glimpse of worship and rejoicing and praise because God is who He is.

The apostle John in Revelation 4:10-11 gives us a plain portrayal of created beings around the throne of God. John speaks of the occupation of the elders in this way:

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.

But I can almost hear someone saying, "Is Tozer getting away from justification by faith? Haven't we always heard that we are justified and saved and on our way to heaven by faith?"

I assure you that Martin Luther never believed in justification by faith more strongly than I do. I believe in justification by faith. I believe we are saved by having faith in the Son of God as Lord and Savior.

But nowadays there is a deadly, automatic qual-

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ity about getting saved. It bothers me greatly.

I say an "automatic" quality: "Put a nickel's worth of faith in the slot, pull down the lever and take out the little card of salvation. Tuck it in your wallet and off you go!"

After that, the man or woman can say, "Yes, I'm saved."

How does he or she know?

"I put the nickel in. I accepted Jesus and I signed the card."

Very good. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with signing a card. It can be a helpful thing so we know who has made inquiry.

But really, my brother or sister, we are brought to God and to faith and to salvation that we might worship and adore Him. We do not come to God that we might be automatic Christians, cookie-cutter Christians, Christians stamped out with a die.

God has provided His salvation that we might be, individually and personally, vibrant children of God, loving God with all our hearts and worshipping Him in the beauty of holiness.

This does not mean, and I am not saying, that we must all worship alike. The Holy Spirit does not operate by anyone's preconceived idea or formula. But this I know: when the Holy Spirit of God comes among us with His anointing, we become a worshipping people. This may be hard for some to admit, but when we are truly worshipping and adoring the God of all grace and of all love and of all mercy and of all truth, we may not be quiet enough to please everyone.

I recall Luke's description of the throngs on that

first Palm Sunday:

The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying,

Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.

And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.

And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out (19:37-40).

Let me say two things here.

First, I do not believe it is necessarily true that we are worshiping God when we are making a lot of racket. But not infrequently worship is audible.

When Jesus came into Jerusalem presenting Himself as Messiah there was a great multitude and there was a great noise. Doubtless many who joined in the singing and the praise had never been able to sing in the right key. When you have a group of people singing anywhere, you know that some of them will not be in tune.

But this is the point to their worship: they were united in praises to God.

Second, I would warn those who are cultured, quiet, self-possessed, poised and sophisticated, that if they are embarrassed in church when some happy Christian says "Amen!" they may actually be in need of some spiritual enlightenment. The worshiping saints of God in the Body of Christ have often been a little bit noisy.

I hope you have read some of the devotionals left

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us by that dear old English saint, Lady Julian, who lived more than 600 years ago.

She wrote that one day she had been thinking about how high and lofty Jesus was, and yet how He Himself meets the humblest part of our human desire. She received such blessing within her being that she could not control herself. She let go with a shout and praised God out loud in Latin.

Translated into English, it would have come out "Well, glory to God!"

Now, if that bothers you, friend, it may be because you do not know the kind of spiritual blessings and delight the Holy Spirit is waiting to provide among God's worshipping saints.

Did you notice what Luke said about the Pharisees and their request that Jesus should rebuke His disciples for praising God with loud voices? Their ritual rules probably allowed them to whisper the words "Glory to God!", but it really pained them to hear anyone saying them out loud.

Jesus told the Pharisees in effect: "They are doing the right thing. God my Father and I and the Holy Ghost are to be worshiped. If men and women will not worship me, the very rocks will shout my praises!"

Those religious Pharisees, polished and smoothed and polished again, would have died right there in their tracks if they had heard a rock given a voice and praising the Lord.

Well, we have great churches and we have beautiful sanctuaries and we join in the chorus, "We have need of nothing." But there is every indication that we are in need of worshipers.

We have a lot of men willing to sit on our church

boards who have no desire for spiritual joy and radiance and who never show up for the church prayer meeting. These are the men who often make the decisions about the church budget and the church expenses and where the frills will go in the new edifice.

They are the fellows who run the church, but you cannot get them to the prayer meeting because they are not worshipers.

Perhaps you do not think this is an important matter, but that puts you on the other side as far as I am concerned.

It seems to me that it has always been a frightful incongruity that men who do not pray and do not worship are nevertheless actually running many of the churches and ultimately determining the direction they will take.

It hits very close to our own situations, perhaps, but we should confess that in many "good" churches, we let the women do the praying and let the men do the voting.

Because we are not truly worshipers, we spend a lot of time in the churches just spinning our wheels, burning the gasoline, making a noise but not getting anywhere.

Oh, brother or sister, God calls us to worship, but in many instances we are in entertainment, just running a poor second to the theaters.

That is where we are, even in the evangelical churches, and I don't mind telling you that most of the people we say we are trying to reach will never come to a church to see a lot of amateur actors putting on a home-talent show.

I tell you, outside of politics there is not another

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field of activity that has more words and fewer deeds, more wind and less rain.

What are we going to do about this awesome, beautiful worship that God calls for? I would rather worship God than do any other thing I know of in all this wide world.

I would not even attempt to tell you how many hymnbooks are piled up in my study. I cannot sing a lick, but that is nobody's business. God thinks I am an opera star!

God listens while I sing to Him the old French hymns in translation, the old Latin hymns in translation. God listens while I sing the old Greek hymns from the Eastern church as well as the beautiful psalms done in meter and some of the simpler songs of Watts and Wesley and the rest.

I mean it when I say that I would rather worship God than to do anything else. You may reply, "If you worship God you do nothing else."

But that only reveals that you have not done your homework. The beautiful part of worship is that it prepares you and enables you to zero in on the important things that must be done for God.

Listen to me! Practically every great deed done in the church of Christ all the way back to the apostle Paul was done by people blazing with the radiant worship of their God.

A survey of church history will prove that it was those who were the yearning worshipers who also became the great workers. Those great saints whose hymns we so tenderly sing were active in their faith to the point that we must wonder how they ever did it all.

The great hospitals have grown out of the hearts

of worshiping men. The mental institutions grew out of the hearts of worshiping and compassionate men and women. We should say, too, that wherever the church has come out of her lethargy, rising from her sleep and into the tides of revival and spiritual renewal, always the worshipers were back of it.

We will be making a mistake if we just stand back and say, "But if we give ourselves to worship, no one will do anything."

On the contrary, if we give ourselves to God's call to worship, everyone will do more than he or she is doing now. Only, what he or she does will have significance and meaning to it. It will have the quality of eternity in it—it will be gold, silver and precious stones, not wood, hay and stubble.

Why should we be silent about the wonders of God? We should gladly join Isaac Watts in one of his worship hymns:

Bless, O my soul, the living God,
Call home thy thoughts that roam abroad,
That all the powers within me join
In work and worship so divine.

Bless, O my soul, the God of grace,
His favors claim thy highest praise.
Why should the wonders He has wrought
Be lost in silence, and forgot?

Let the whole earth His power confess,
Let the whole earth adore His grace.
The Gentiles, with the Jews, shall join
In work and worship so divine.

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I cannot speak for you, but I want to be among those who worship. I do not want just to be a part of some great ecclesiastical machine where the pastor turns the crank and the machine runs. You know—the pastor loves everybody and everybody loves him. He has to do it. He is paid to do it.

I wish that we might get back to worship again. Then when people come into the church they will instantly sense that they have come among holy people, God's people. They can testify, "Of a truth God is in this place."