



A D E R E K P R I N C E

TEACHING LETTER

Free To Worship

No.6

Part 2

Dear Friend

In this letter I am continuing with the theme of my previous letter: worship.

In Psalm 96:8 the psalmist establishes one primary condition for approaching God: Bring an offering and come into His courts. In Exodus 23:15 the Lord affirms, “None shall appear before Me empty-handed.”

There are many kinds of offering that we may bring to God: thanks, praise, money, possessions, acts of service, the works of our hands. But it is in worship that we bring to God our highest offering: ourselves.

Any religious activity that stops short of the offering of ourselves to God is not true worship.

Of the various Old Testament offerings, the one which typifies the offering of ourselves to God is the grain offering (see Lev. 2:1–11). This contains some important principles that should guide us in our worship.

If our worship is to be acceptable to God, the lives that we offer to Him must be “finely ground” – fully submitted, that is, to all God’s disciplines. There must be no “lumps” of self-will or disobedience.

Two things accompanied the grain offering: oil and frankincense. The oil – typifying the Holy Spirit – reminds us of our dependence upon the Holy Spirit to make our offering acceptable.

Frankincense is an aromatic gum, not particularly impressive in itself, but when burned it emits a distinctive fragrance. This fragrance depicts our worship rising up before God.

Out of this offering only a handful of the oil and the flour was burned in the fire to the Lord; all the rest went to the priest. However, all the frankincense went solely and exclusively to the Lord. This warns us that no human being must receive even a whiff of the worship of God’s people. Leaders who permit their followers to offer them anything that amounts to worship come under the judgement of God. This is one reason why in recent decades some Charismatic ministries have ended in disaster.

No grain offering must be accompanied by either leaven or honey (verse 11). In 1 Corinthians 5:8 Paul speaks of “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” Leaven, therefore, represents any form of insincerity or untruthfulness.

This is further emphasised by the exclusion of honey. Honey is sweet on the lips, but – unlike frankincense – it cannot stand the fire. When burned, it becomes a black, sticky mess. In our worship we must avoid any kind of exaggeration or empty religious phraseology. We dare not make any professions or commitments that will not stand the test of fire.

Finally, every grain offering must be seasoned with “the salt of the covenant” (verse 13). God enters into a permanent relationship with man only on the basis of a covenant – that is, a mutual commitment between God and man. God commits Himself to the believer, but in return the believer must commit himself to God. Worship that does not proceed out of a covenant commitment is “saltless” and unacceptable.

Access to God

In Psalm 100:4 the psalmist defines two successive stages in approaching God: Enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. First, with thanksgiving, we enter the gates. Then, with praise, we pass through the courts. We thus have direct access to God. Otherwise, we may pray to God and He will hear us, but we are praying from a distance.

We will be like the ten lepers described in Luke 17:12–19. We may cry to Jesus from a distance, and He will hear us and have mercy on us, but we cannot come close to Him.

It is significant that the only leper who actually came close to Jesus was the one who returned to give Him thanks. Jesus said to him, “Your faith has made you well” – Greek, “has saved you.” All ten lepers were healed, but only the one who gave thanks was also saved.

In Psalm 95:1–7 the psalmist takes us through the same two stages of approach to God: thanksgiving and praise. But then he leads us one step further – into worship. Verses 1 and 2 describe loud, jubilant praise and thanksgiving. Verses 3, 4 and 5 give the reason for our praise: the magnificence of God’s creation. But in verse 6 we move on into worship:

*Oh, come, let us worship and bow down;
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Once again we see that worship is expressed in a posture of our bodies – bowing down and kneeling.

Verse 7 reveals the reason why we should worship: For He is our God. Worship belongs solely and exclusively to God. The One whom we worship is our God.

But the closing line of verse 7 takes us one step further still: Today if you will hear His voice. After the loud, jubilant praise of the preceding verses, there follows a special kind of stillness, which proceeds only out of worship. In the stillness we hear only one sound: the voice of the Lord. In such a setting God can speak to us with a clarity and an authority that can come in no other way.

Stillness is an essential part of true worship. We must come to a place where we have no prayer requests, no personal agenda, and no time limit. Our only desire is to be in the presence of God. What follows after that must proceed from God’s initiative, not ours.

Sitting at the Feet of Jesus

In Luke 10:38–42 Mary (the sister of Lazarus and Martha) provides a pattern for us: she sat at Jesus’

feet and heard His word. Martha, on the other hand, was “distracted with much serving.” She asked Jesus to tell Mary to help her, but Jesus replied, “One thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.”

How many dedicated servants of God today are like Martha, “distracted with much serving”? They are too busy to “waste time on Jesus,” simply sitting at His feet.

The outcome of the time Mary spent at Jesus’ feet is described later, in John 12:3–7. While all the other disciples were seated at table eating, “Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (v.3, NIV). This was an act of worship, expressing itself in the fragrance that filled the house.

The other disciples criticised Mary for her extravagance but Jesus gave her His approval, saying, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial.”

Apparently Mary was the only disciple who understood at that time that Jesus had to die. Had she learned this secret while sitting at His feet?

It was an accepted Jewish practice to anoint a body that was being prepared for burial. In anticipation of Jesus’ death, Mary anointed His body with the most expensive ointment she owned. She alone had this privilege. Later, other women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus (see Mark 16:1). But they were too late! He had already risen from the grave.

Oh, that God’s people today would take time to sit at the feet of Jesus! Surely we would then be more extravagant in our worship. Perhaps we would also be open to the special kind of revelation that comes no other way.

The Pattern of Worship in Heaven

Isaiah’s vision of the seraphim offers us a glimpse of worship as it is conducted in heaven (see Isaiah 6:1–8). The word seraph is directly connected with the Hebrew word for burning. The seraphim were fiery creatures. Each had six wings (whereas the cherubim in Ezekiel 1:6 had four wings).

The worship of the seraphim took two forms: an utterance from their mouths and an action of their bodies. With their mouths they proclaimed, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.” “Holy” is the only adjective in Scripture applied three times in one sentence to the Lord.

The seraphim used their wings in three ways. With two they covered their faces; with two they covered their feet; with two they flew. The covering of their faces and their feet was an act of worship. Flying was an act of service. They used four wings for worship, and only two for service.

God’s people on earth need to follow this pattern. First, we should place twice as much emphasis on worship as on service. Second, we need to recognise that effective service must proceed out of worship. It is in our times of worship that we receive revelation and direction for our service.

In Revelation chapter 4 we are taken up into the throne room of heaven. In this brief chapter of 11 verses the word “throne” occurs 14 times. It is from here that the universe is governed. The primary emphasis is on worship.

The six-winged living creatures apparently correspond to the seraphim of Isaiah's vision. Their theme is the same, the word holy uttered three times, "Holy, holy, holy."

In chapter 5 the focus is on the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is the slain Lamb, standing at the centre of the throne. His presence is an eternal reminder that victory comes through laying down our lives. Out from the throne there extend ever-expanding circles of worship that eventually include the whole universe.

First, there are the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, who prostrate themselves and sing a new song (verses 8–10). Then there are many millions of angels, who proclaim in a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (verses 11–12). Then all the other creatures in heaven, on earth, under the earth and in the sea join in a chorus of blessing to the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (verses 13–14). The climax is a final "Amen!" from the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (verse 14).

The only One worthy to occupy the centre of such worship is the slain Lamb. If our worship on earth is to conform to that of heaven, it will also have the same focus: the One who sits on the throne and Jesus the Lamb who stands before Him.

Yours in the Master's service



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For further study, we recommend the audio cassette
4390, "Worship."

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