

## Weakness in Worship - Maurice Roberts

The basic unit of human society is the family, and the strength of religion lies very much in family worship. Where families worship God only once or twice on the Lord's Day and not also at home in the week the power of religion can only at best be average and mediocre. Its influence will be stunted in the lives of men and of the Christian community at large. If we are to progress to spiritual maturity we must be *daily* engaged in the worship of God and *daily* disciplined in our habits of family, as well as of personal and private, devotion.

We take for granted that Christian families will organize life in the home so that each member of the family will be daily at his and her Bible and daily on their knees in private. It is inconceivable that believers would begin their day without first kneeling before God in adoration, confession and intercession. The renewed soul craves fellowship with God early and late. The instinct therefore of a regenerate man is to seek God's face at the start of each new day. How else dare we launch forth into life's duties and conflicts? Where shall we find fresh supplies of grace and wisdom except out of the fulness of God's presence? Those who habitually neglect their morning devotions may expect a rough ride through this life.

Similarly at night we kneel down before we retire to our beds in order to plead for pardon for our many sins during the day and to thank God for our many mercies since we rose in the morning. Prayer and Bible reading open and close the day, and when we lay our head on the pillow we turn our thoughts to one or other passage of God's Word which we have committed to memory

It is important, in addition to this habit of private worship, also to have stated times for devotions in the family. The father gathers his family together morning and evening in order to recall the thoughts of every member to the eternal truths of God. He reads a chapter, leads in the singing of God's praise and then engages in prayer with and for the family as a whole.

We do not for a moment mean that our devotions are restricted to private and family worship and nothing more. There are, of course, the Lord's Day services. It is our duty also normally to be present at the weekly Prayer Meeting. Every believer should have it in his normal weekly routine to be at both of the Lord's Day services and at the main Prayer Meeting (the name of which may vary from church to church).

If business or ill-health at times interrupts this pattern of life they should not, as far as possible, be allowed to make us adopt any other pattern of life as our normal practice. The Christian lives and works in order to worship God and to enjoy him. Grace in the soul is not automatic like electric current from the national grid. It is rather to be compared to electric current from a battery, which needs to be regularly re-charged. Last week's grace, like last week's manna in the desert, is no use for today's or tomorrow's tasks.

The question might suggest itself to our mind, 'Why should so much of a Christian's time be taken up in worship, either public, or private or in the family?' The answer is, 'Because the Christian is in this life preparing for eternity, where all will be worship and adoration of God'. How else can we fulfill the inward aim of our existence except by making our life as believers one long service of devotion and praise to God?

One reason why so many children born into Christian homes are lost to the gospel is because they have not been brought up to regard the worship of God as the one thing in life which

supremely matters. Where children are naturally brought up to regard the worship of God as the priority of life, they are likely to follow in the footsteps of their parents and to respect their example. This is not always so, but it is often so.

There is something about the modern world which tempts many Christians to settle for a lower measure of worship in their lives than our forefathers regarded as normal for converted persons. However we explain it, it must surely come down very largely to our lower measure of love for Christ. As a generation we may have wider knowledge than our fathers had and we may be busier than they, but we generally fall shorter in the main thing, which is our hunger for fellowship with God. Hence, many allow the things of the world to have a place and an importance in their lives which they should not have.

The greatest hindrances to our worship of God are, however, not external things but our own indwelling sin. All coldness towards the worship of God in our heart arises from the unmortified remnants and roots of worldliness which remain in our nature. Generally speaking, neglect of worship in the church and in the home springs not from excess of necessary work or from pressure of other duties so much as from a secret reluctance to stir ourselves up to do what we could do if only we would.

It is the nature of sin to make all spiritual duties seem sour and unwelcome to us. Sin suggests a score of reasons why we should not commence attending to our duty to conduct family worship. It is so much easier to sit in front of the television, to listen to a favorite piece of music or to amuse ourselves in a thousand trivial ways.

To marshal our mental and spiritual faculties and to discipline ourselves to take out the Bible and get the children to sit quietly for a while (all toys and play-things put away) is a task which goes against our corrupt and fallen natures. It also goes against the easy-going spirit of our age which is ready to give in to pleasing self at every opportunity. But it is not the way of excellence, and our great need today is for excellent Christians, not just for average ones.

The thing then to aim at if we are ever to be perfect in our habits of worship is the mortification of our indwelling sin. We must put to death the residual enmity to holiness which lies in our hearts. 'I am too tired to go to the Prayer Meeting tonight', really, when translated, means that we are secretly disinclined to go to Prayer Meetings and are glad of any excuse to be absent.

Every spiritual duty is met with some opposition in our fallen nature. To do our duty in worshipping God, whether in public or in private demands that we do violence to something in ourselves, that is, to our natural distaste for worship.

The real problem with those who neglect the Prayer Meeting or leave out family worship is that they have no heart for it. This is easy to prove because in every church those who are zealous for Prayer Meetings are zealous for every other form of service to God. We make an exception of some whose work-patterns are an obstacle to regular attendance. But in general it is true to say that attendance at, or non-attendance at, services and Prayer Meetings is all part of a person's whole life-style. And our life-style is an index as to where our heart really is. This in turn is the thermometer which registers the measure of our spirituality and sanctification.

Here too is to be seen the deceitfulness of sin in our hearts. When we are reluctant to attend to family worship or to go to church services, we soon find our hearts forming crafty arguments to

say that 'we do not believe in family worship or in too much attendance at church meetings'. At the same time we notice in our heart another evidence of our corruption. We find a dislike rising up in ourselves, against Christians who *are* diligent in their habits of worship. Our hearts dislike them because their godliness condemns our carelessness and is a rebuke to us which we secretly resent.

One of the best starting-points for all personal reformation in the area of God's worship is to be sure of this The Christian and the Christian church are never more influential for good than when they are different from the world. The theory that we should be 'like the world so as to influence it for good' is fatally flawed. This idea, that the Christian should be 'in it to win it', does not stand up to biblical scrutiny. Which of the saints of the Bible ever sought to shape and conform his life to the outside world so as to be a blessing to it? Not Moses! Not Daniel! Not Paul! Least of all Christ.

If the believer does not fill his and her life with the things of God the world will come into their life to fill up the void. Nature abhors a vacuum. If Christians are not *wholly* taken up with their duties of obedience, worship and duty, they will soon be filling in the gap with worldly vanities, cheap music, worthless programs, a passion for professional sports. Such vanities do not promote godliness but only slow down the believer's progress in grace.

There is great gain to the believer in attending diligently to worship in the home, in the church and in secret. The father who conducts family worship twice daily is reading some seven hundred chapters a year to his family He is also teaching by his example. His children after him will remember all their lives how a father should lead his household in worship. If there are times when family worship and the Prayer Meeting are not 'exhilarating', there are also many times when they *are*.

If an angel were to come from heaven with a plain message to God's people today, it would not be surprising to hear him say, 'Repent and do the first works!' There are professing Christians everywhere who neglect the instruction of their young families very culpably. Members of other religious communities often far surpass Christians in the time and care which they take to instruct their children in their own religious beliefs. *Their* children go to special classes to learn by heart their 'holy books', while Christians children remain ignorant of even the elements of *our* precious faith. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation. (Ezek. 19:14).

But these lamentable omissions among many Christians are curable A holy resolution is needed to put matters right at once. Let every man examine himself and begin in right earnest to believe that the worship of God is a thing so precious that it *must* come first in our lives. Every day we are to worship God in our own homes. Every Sabbath we are to meet in God's house. Every Prayer Meeting is a privilege not to be missed. Let this be our conviction and on this conviction let us act. If all Christians in our nation did so it would bring a marked change to every congregation and in answer to our repentance and fervent prayers, who can say what God might do?

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