

Self-Denial, an Element of Worship

by George H. Morrison

The sermon highlights self-denial as an essential component of authentic worship, emphasizing its necessity in giving, community, and personal approach to God.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 24:24, Psalm 95:6, Matthew 5:23, Luke 4:16, Luke 19:8, Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:3, Hebrews 10:22, Hebrews 13:16

Topics: "True Worship", "Self Denial"

Description

George H. Morrison emphasizes the importance of self-sacrifice in worship, highlighting the need for thanksgiving, spiritual need, indebtedness to Christ, and self-denial to truly worship in spirit and truth. He delves into the significance of giving in worship, stressing that true giving must involve self-denial, as seen in examples like King David and Zacchaeus. Morrison also discusses the attitude of the heart in worship, pointing out that worship requires humility, patience, and interior sacrifice. Furthermore, he explores the idea of fellowship in worship, emphasizing the need for mutual consideration, self-denial, and a constant willingness to yield for the sake of others in the congregation.

Transcript

IN PUBLIC WORSHIP IN the sanctuary there are certain 'demands made of every worshiper'. There are certain elements which must be present, if the worship is to be in spirit and in truth. There is, for instance, the element of thanksgiving for the goodness of God to us from day to day. There is the sense of spiritual need, and the knowledge that none but God can meet that need. There is the sense of indebtedness to Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us; in whose death there is our only hope, and in whose Spirit is our only strength. All these elements must meet and mingle if our worship is to be worship in reality. Without them, a man shall come to church, and go from it no better than he came. But there is another element, not less important, yet one which is very frequently ignored, and that is the element of self-sacrifice. We all know that worship calls for praise. We must remember it also calls for self-denial. There are many to whom worship is a joy; but it is more than a joy, it is a duty. And it is a duty, when we conceive it rightly, of such a lofty and supersensual nature, that to perform it rightly is impossible, save in a certain measure of self-sacrifice. On that thought, then, I am going to dwell-on the element of sacrifice in worship. I want to impress upon you that to worship God must always make demands on self-denial. And my prayer is, that so considering the matter, our common worship may become a nobler thing, and we may escape that lightness in regarding it which is so prevalent and so pernicious.

Giving in Worship

To begin with, that element of sacrifice is seen in the matter of the money-offering. "Bring an offering, and come into His courts." No Jew came to his worship empty-handed. To give of his means was part of his devotions. Of the thirteen boxes in the Temple treasury, four were for the free-will offerings of the people. And this fine spirit of the ancient worship passed over into the worship of the Church, and was enormously deepened and intensified by the new thought of the sacrifice of Christ. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift"- that was the mainspring of Christian liberality. It was the glowing thought of all that Christ had given, which quickened the poorest to be givers too. And that so sanctified the Christian offertory that Paul can speak of the resurrection triumph, and then, as if unconscious of descent, can add "now as concerning the collection."

Now while all such offerings were acceptable to God, and while all brought a blessing to the giver, yet from earliest times it was felt by spiritual men that true giving must touch on self-denial. You remember the abhorrence of King David against offering to God that which had cost him nothing (2 Sam. 24:24). It is such touches amid all his failures that reveal the Godward genius of the king. And we have read of Jesus Christ, and of His judgment upon the widow's mite, and of all the riches that He found in that, because there was self-denial in the giving. It was a wonderful cry that broke from Zacchaeus' lips when he came face to face with Jesus Christ. "Lord," he cried, looking upon Jesus, "Lord, I give half of my goods to feed the poor" (Luke 19:8). He had always given, in his Jewish way. He had never entered the Temple without giving; but now, under the gaze of Jesus, he felt that he could not give enough...Brethren, that is the mark of Christian giving. It reaches over into self-denial. You may give as a citizen and never feel it, but I do not think you can give as a Christian so. I do not think we give in the spirit of Jesus until like Him we touch on self-denial, until His love constrains us to some sacrifice, as it constrained Him to the sacrifice of all. Let us then seriously ask ourselves: Have we been giving to the point of sacrifice? Have we ever denied ourselves anything, that we might bring an offering and come into His courts?

It is only thus that giving is a joy - only thus it bring us nearer to Christ - only thus it is a means of grace, as spiritual and as strengthening as prayer. Thus far, then, upon the very surface, but now we shall go a little deeper. For, gradually, as men became more spiritual the thought of self-denial deepened also. It was not enough, if one were to worship God, that he should bring an offering in his hand. Slowly it was borne in upon the Jew that the truest offering was in the heart. And nothing is more instructive in the Scriptures than to watch the development of that idea - the gradual deepening of self-sacrifice as an element in acceptable worship.

Think first of the case of David, a man who had been trained in ritual worship. You may depend upon it that from his earliest years he had never worshiped with that which cost him nothing. He had brought his offering, and he had paid for it, and he had denied himself something so that he might pay for it. The God whom he had found when he was shepherding was not a God to be worshiped on the cheap. And then there came his kingship and his fall, and the terrible havoc of his kingly character, and David found that all the blood of goats could not make him a true worshiper again. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart. Let him give his kingdom for an offering, and he would not be an acceptable worshiper. He must give himself, he must deny his lusts; he must lay aside his pride and be a penitent, or all his worship would be mockery, and the sanctuary a barren place for him. He knew from the first that worship meant denial. It was his thought of denial that was deepened. He found there was no blessing in the sanctuary unless his heart was penitent and humble. And that was a mighty truth for him to grasp, and it has enriched the worship of the ages, and has passed into the newer covenant, and into all the

gatherings of its saints.

The Attitude of the Heart in Worship

Now turn to David's greater Son, and listen to the words of Christ Himself He is speaking in the Sermon on the Mount, about bringing the offering to the altar: "Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23, 24). Now mark that Jesus is talking about worship. His theme is not the patching up of quarrels. He is teaching us what elements are needed if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth. And not only does He insist on giving - He takes that, we may say, for granted but He insists that at the back of every gift there shall be the self-denial of the heart. It is far easier to give up a coin than it is to give up a quarrel. It is easier to lay down a generous offering than to lay down a long-continued grudge. And what Jesus Christ insists upon is this - that if worship is to be acceptable to God, the worshiper must lay aside his pride, and humble himself as a little child. That is not easy it never can be easy. That is far from natural to man. That is hard to do, and Vety bitter, and quite opposed to natural inclination. And it calls for patience, and interior sacrifice, and prayerful if secret self-denial; and only thus, according to the Master, can one hope to be an acceptable worshiper. Who, then, is sufficient for these things? That is just what I want to impress upon you. I want to teach you that worship is not easy. I want to teach you that it is very hard. It is not a comfortable hour on Sunday with beautiful music and a fluent preacher. It is an attitude of heart and soul that is impossible without self-denial. I thank God that in the purest worship there is but little demand upon the intellect. The humblest saint, who cannot write a letter, may experience all the blessing of the sanctuary. But there is a demand upon the soul; there is a call to sacrifice and cross-bearing. For the road to church is like the road to heaven-it lies past the shadow of the cross.

Gathering Together for Worship

Well, now, to come a little nearer home, consider our gathering to public worship. In the very coming to church every Sunday, there must be an element of self-denial. In country places it may be different, for in country places life is often lonely. And men, in virtue of their social instinct, are glad for the weekly gathering in the church. But in the city there is always company, and the difficulty rather is to get alone; so in the city there is no social instinct to reinforce the call to public prayer. Were a man just to consult his inclination, it is probable that he would seldom come to church. And he is tired when the week is over, and is not Sunday a day of rest? And perhaps he is not feeling well, and the morning looks as if there might be rain. Not only so, but he tells you seriously that he gets more good at home than in church. And if he wants a sermon he has them on his shelves, written by the great masters of the heart, and reaching him as he is never reached by anything he hears from his own pulpit. All that may be the flimsiest excuse, or all that may be literally true. But in either case what it reveals is this, that natural inclination is not church ward. And making all allowance for old habit, and a certain lingering of social pressure, the fact remains that self-denial is needed if one is to be every Sunday in the sanctuary.

The point is this that very self-denial is good for man and pleasing to God. It is the best of al I beginnings to the week just to crush a little our easy inclinations. To do on Sunday what is our Christian duty, and doing it, to bring our will into subjection, is a better augury for a bright week than the finest sermon in the easy chair. "Then Jesus as His custom was, went into the synagogue" (Luke 4:16). Did you ever meditate upon these words? He was the Son, and heaven was His home, and yet as His custom was, He went to church. He never said, "I do not need to go I can have fellowship with God at home." He took up His cross

and He denied Himself, and He has told us to follow in His steps.

Fellowship in Worship

Pass now from the approach to worship to worship itself, and think of this first - that worship is fellowship. In public worship we are not simply hearers; we are a fellowship of Christian people. You go to a lecture just to hear the lecturer, or you go to the theater just to see a play. It does not matter who is there beside you. They are nothing to you and you are nothing to them. Not one of them would do anything for you, or seek to help you if you were in difficulty, or go to visit you if you were sick, or try to cheer you in the evil day. At the theater you have an audience; but you have not an audience in the church. You may call it so, but it is not really so, in any sanctuary that is blessed. It is a fellowship of men and women, bound together by their common faith, united by the very deepest things, and loving one another in Christ Jesus. In every fellowship must there not be a certain element of sacrifice? Is it not so in the fellowship of home, if home is to be other than a mockery? In all communion there must be self-denial, and a constant willingness to yield a little. If that be so in the fellowship of home, it must also be so in the fellowship of worship.

Just as a mother, worthy of the name, loves to deny herself for her dear children; just as a husband will regard his wife in every choice he makes, and every plan; so in the fellowship of public worship there must be mutual consideration, a constant willingness to forgo a little, for the sake of others for whom Christ has died. The young have their rights, but they will not insist on them, when they know it would vex and irritate the old. The old have their claims, but for the sake of the young, they will welcome what may not appeal to them. And when a hymn is sung, or when a word is preached, that seems to have no message for one worshiper, that worshiper will always bear in mind that for some one else that is the word in season. All that is of the essence of true worship, and all that calls for a little sacrifice. A happy home is impossible without it and also a happy congregation. A tender regard for others by our side, with the denial that is involved in that, is an integral part of public worship.

Our Approach to God in Worship

The same truth is still more evident when we think of worship as our approach to God. Worship is our approach to God by the new and living way of Jesus Christ. Now, it is true that we were made for God, and that in Him we live and move and have our being. It is true that as we awaken and as we sleep, He is not far away from any one of us. Yet such is the immersion in the world, even of the most prayerful and most watchful, that the approach to God with the whole heart demands a real effort.

Of course, you may come to church, and be in church, and never know the reality of worship. For you may think your thoughts, and dream your dreams, and be in the spirit a thousand miles away. But quietly to reject intruding thoughts, and give oneself to prayer, praise and reading, that is a task that never can be easy, and for some it is incredibly hard. If there were anything to rivet the attention, that would make all the difference in the world. In a theater, you can forget yourself, absorbed in the excitement of the play. But the church of the living God is not a theater, and in the day when it becomes theatrical, in that day its worship will be gone, with all the blessings. If you want to wander, you can always wander. There is nothing here to rivet the attention.

There are only a few hymns, and a quiet prayer, and the simple reading of a page of the Scriptures. And it is for you to make the needed effort, and to shut the gates and to withdraw yourself, and through that very effort comes the blessedness of the public worship of God in Jesus Christ. It is thus that worship becomes a heavenly feast - when we bring our will to it and take it nobly. It is thus that worship becomes a means of

grace, in a hard - driven and exciting city. Make it as attractive as you please, but remember, if it is to be blessed to you, you must deny yourself, you must take up your cross, you must bring an offering and come into His courts.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/george-h-morrison/self-denial-an-element-of-worship/>

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