

## **The Joyful Spirit Of Worship**

Maurice W. Jackson, Jr.

"I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Psa. 122:1). Whether these are the words of David, or of some other, they are Holy Spirit guided, and express an attitude worthy of God's people today.

Such joy is rare! The multitudes that never worship at all prove it. Even among the Lord's people there are those who worship as seldom as possible, and some not at all. Can it be said of all who worship regularly that they go gladly? Could it be that a mere sense of duty, maintaining a spiritual reputation, a desire to please family and friends, to avoid a lashing conscience, to escape reproof, simply to set an example, or only the force of habit motivates many to attend the worship services today?

### **Modern Day Solutions**

In our society when a business falters, solutions are sought through human innovations that excite and create renewed interest. A new approach to sales technique is initiated. Make the product more appealing as respects color, size, shape, etc. Promote an unusual sale, make better claims, offer a sweepstake, or a bonus reward. In short, simply out do the competition by redressing the externals.

All of this may be acceptable in secular affairs, but is this the procedure for creating a joyful spirit of worship in modern man? Preachers and church leaders in many places seem to think that the answer is "Yes! " Innovative worship services which catch the eyes and ears of the worshipers, stimulating curiosity, excitement and departure from the norm are adopted. Purpose: Increase interest, and supposedly, create a joyful spirit of worship.

We suggest that such an approach puts the cart before the horse. A joyful spirit of worship is not created by altering the externals of the worship service to arouse the worshiper, but to alter the worshiper through teaching, to fit into and enjoy the Divine plan of worship. We

must appeal to the New Testament as our pattern, not to modern innovations concocted by human ingenuity.

### **New Testament Worshipers**

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). This is how the early Christians functioned when they gathered together to worship God. This is how the Holy Spirit guided apostles directed. This same worship is what God wants from 20th century Christians.

That they were characterized with a joyful spirit of worship is seen, not only in what they did, but also in the interest and zeal that characterized the individual Christians. What a spirit of joy they must have felt when they learned that all they had to do to be forgiven of having rejected and crucified the Son of God, was to believe that He was the Christ, and upon repentance of their sins, be baptized for the remission of them (Acts 2:37-41). It was this spirit of joy that led them to receive the Word, complying with its teaching! As the King James says: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." Their unity of action brought them together in a spirit of joy. "And all that believed were together" (Acts 2:44). They willingly and sacrificially helped the needy among them. "They sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all according as any man had need" (Acts 2:45). In Acts 2:46 we read: "And day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple is further evidence of the joyful spirit that captivated those early Christians. As these saints praised God in their spirit of joy, the populous of Jerusalem perceived it and granted their favor (Acts 2:46). The key to their joyful spirit was a clear awareness of what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had done for them, and that their response was to love God back, guided by the will of God revealed by the inspired apostles. It created in them a spirit of joy to know, not only that they could please God, but how they could do so. It was a joy which they realized filled the need of the human spirit! This same awareness today will create, in those who are conscientious, a joyful spirit of worship.

### **Hindrances**

There are other factors that can dull the edge of joy in worshiping God. How could those at Corinth, who had lawsuits one with another,

worship together with a truly joyful spirit? In their perverted attempt to eat the Lord's supper, those who had not were put to shame. Such distinctions among themselves surely hindered a joyful spirit of worship in those who were left out. The state of confusion (chapter 14), which evidently existed in the worship assembly at Corinth, served to hinder the proper spirit of worship. The doctrinal differences of chapter fifteen did the same.

Brethren who are alienated from each other cannot worship together in a genuine spirit of joy. How can one go to the worship assembly with a joyful spirit when there is division, backbiting, and an atmosphere of coldness prevailing in the congregation? Sermons that are entirely too long, mote picking, faultfinding, hobby riding preachers who think more highly of themselves than they ought to think, hinder a joyful spirit of worship in the hearers. We understand that error must be opposed and exposed, and that gospel preaching is pointed and direct, but folks do not have to be clubbed nearly to death with every sermon!) Song leaders who seem to never be satisfied with the response they get from the worshippers can kill a joyful spirit of worship. Song leaders who ought to be in the pew, rather than before the congregation, can do the same. Who can enjoy worshipping God in song when they are constantly rebuked for some insignificant shortcoming, or the song service is dead-as-a-door-nail? Men who lead the prayers in the congregation should be ever conscious that they are to lead the minds of the worshippers as they pray. Prayers that are too long, repetitious, rambling, or inaudible hinder the joy of worship.

When knowledgeable brethren can only expect attending worship that borders on fanfare, or fanaticism, mere ritual or formalism, confusion and discord, or a funeral-like service, then their joyful spirit of worship ebbs toward an all time low!

### **Worship In Spirit And Truth**

Jesus told the woman of Samaria: "True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth." In fact, He said: "They that worship him (the Father) must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn. 4:23,24). In these few words Jesus told her (and us) how all true worshippers must worship.

The New Testament tells us how the early Christians worshipped. It is our duty to duplicate what they were told to do. Only when we do so do

we worship in truth (i.e. according to the teaching of the truth of God). We must learn to be satisfied with, and to enjoy, worshipping God in God's way.

The Lord's Supper. The first century church met on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). This consisted of eating unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine. This was as Jesus directed (Matt. 26:26-29). The elements represented the body and blood of Christ. As they ate, their minds went back to the cross. They remembered how, through His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, Jesus had rescued them from eternal condemnation and that He promised to come again and save the redeemed. This breaking of bread brought the early church together and kept them secured to the heart and core of the gospel story. So it does for Christians today. This supreme sacrifice of our Lord motivates us to have a joyful spirit of worship as we eat the Lord's supper every first day of the week.

Prayer. Prayer always characterized the assemblies of the first century church. In 1 Corinthians 14:15 the early church was instructed to pray, and to do so in a way that all present could hear and understand. In their prayers they praised God, expressed thanksgiving to him, and made requests for his continued blessings. They prayed for the spread of the gospel, and for strength and boldness to speak the Word. Prayers for each other, and for others, were made. "Prayer was made earnestly of the church unto God for him" (Peter). (See Acts 12:5; see also Acts 4:21-31; 1 Tim. 2:1,2.) They prayed to God in response to their needs, confident that God would hear and answer. The privilege of prayer gave them a spirit of genuine joy. Christians today experience that same joy for the same reasons.

Singing. The early Christians were instructed to sing with the spirit and with the understanding as they worshipped together (1 Cor. 14:15). Singing was not only to praise God, but also to teach and admonish one another. So they sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and that without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Singing in worship was, and is, an overt manifestation of a joyful spirit.

Preaching and Teaching. In their gatherings, the early saints heard God's word preached and taught. It was done in an orderly fashion, that all might be edified (1 Cor. 14:4, 26-33). Paul, on one occasion, prolonged

his speech until midnight (Acts 20:7). Those, then and now, who are interested in God's word anticipated with great joy the gathering of the saints to hear taught and preached the great truths of the gospel. Recently a good brother told me how the teaching and preaching of God's word had helped him in his daily life, and that he looked forward to every assembly. He has a joyful spirit of worship!

Giving. Laying by in store, as one may prosper, was a part of the first day of the week assembling of the early Christians (1 Cor. 16:1,2). This was done in order to help needy saints, and to further the work of the church in evangelizing the world, and the perfecting of the saints. The people of God realize that, in this way, they can have a part in the greatest work on earth - the saving of the souls of men and women. This not only gives one a joyful (cheerful) spirit, but satisfies the heart's desire of all who are Christ-like (2 Cor. 9:6,7; 1 Cor. 9:6-14).

No doubt there are some among God's people who even dread the worship service. We have discussed some of the things that contribute to this. All such hindrances should be removed. Christians are to look forward, with a joyful spirit to the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:25). They should enjoy each other's company, seek to bear each other's burdens, show a fervent love one for the other and realize a sense of community in assembling together with a joyful spirit of worshiping God. Then will our gatherings be a time of refreshment and a source of strength for daily living. God will be pleased and glorified. Heaven is the great reward!

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## Heaven: A Reunion

Maurice W. Jackson, Jr.

The word "home" is surely one of the most comforting and consoling words in the English language. There are so many enjoyable things associated with home that both time and space will disallow the mention of more than but a few. Home is especially looked upon as a place of rest, peace and happiness. Home is a place of relaxation from the toils of the day, or from a long and tiring journey. How many times we all have said, "It is good to be home!" But even more importantly a godly home is a place where love reigns supreme. It is our loved ones who live there that make the home far more than a house. The fellowship of a family, bound together by genuine love for each other and for God, makes the home what it ought to be.

It is significant to note that in 2 Corinthians 5:8 the apostle Paul expresses the desire of all faithful Christians: "We are of good courage, I say, and are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home ("present" - AV) with the Lord." It is surprising to no one in the family of God, the church, to find the word "home" used to describe the place where the faithful shall spend eternity! (cf. Eccl. 12:5)

But how could an earthly home be truly a home if no one knew or recognized each other? One of the great joys of home is knowing and enjoying the company of those that we love so dearly. A godly home here is indeed a foretaste of the heavenly home hereafter! Yet, even the most Christlike home here is not characterized with perfect love, peace, joy and happiness. Our earthly home is not entirely free of sorrow, pain, selfishness, and disappointment. But in our heavenly home there will be no imperfections or failures. God has promised to wipe away every tear, and "death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more, the first things are passed away" (Rev. 21:3,4).

Enlightening the Thessalonians regarding those who had died among them, Paul said that Christ shall descend from heaven, and will bring with him those who had "fallen asleep in Jesus." And together with them, the faithful then living on earth, would be "caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). To ever be with the Lord is to be with him

eternally in the heavenly home (cf. Matt. 6:9; Jn. 16:28; 1 Thess. 4:17). Heaven is a place of reunion! Who for a moment can believe that the Thessalonians to whom Paul wrote, and who recognized and knew each other on earth, would immediately cease to do so, upon being caught up to meet the Lord (had he returned within their lifetime)? Shall we know and recognize each other in heaven? There can be no doubt that we will.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remained alive after physical death, and maintained both their names and their identity (Matt. 8:11). Statements in the Old Testament, such as concerning Abraham, when he passed from this life, that he was "gathered to his people," teach us that heaven is a place of reunion, and where those there shall recognize and know each other! (See Gen. 25:8; Lk. 16:24-26; Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5.) There appeared with Christ, when he was transfigured before Peter, James and John, both Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:1-5). These apostles of our Lord had never before seen these prominent Old Testament characters, but evidently from what they saw and heard then they quickly came to know, recognize, and distinguish Moses and Elijah, and called them by name. We suggest to you that heaven is just such a place; where all will know, recognize, and enjoy each other.

While heaven is a place of reunion, and where love reigns supremely, and where all will know and enjoy each other, it will by no means be a place of inactivity. One of the most well known passages in the Bible is Revelation 14:13 "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them." But let no one think that while heaven is a place of "rest," that heaven will be a place of doing nothing. A place of eternal inactivity is not the heaven of which we read in the Bible. It is true that we read that God rested from "all his work which he had made" (Gen. 2:2). But this does not mean that he ceased from all activity forever. Jesus said in answering the Jews, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work" (Jn. 5:17). In Hebrews 7:25 we read that Jesus "ever liveth to make intercession for them," i.e. those who draw nigh to God through him. The labors from which those who die in the Lord will rest, are the labors which are characteristic of this sinful world which is left behind. In Revelation 7:14-17, those who come out of the great tribulation are seen before the throne of God serving him day and night. Heaven is by no means a place of inactivity. This same truth is again stated in Revelation 22:1-5 - "His servants shall serve him." Exactly what the nature of this service shall be has not been made known. But it

will be a glorious service, filled with joy and a happiness even beyond the most fertile imaginations of mortal man. A service that only the Divine mind can conceive and prepare! It is with great anticipation that the faithful look forward to that uninterrupted and eternal service rendered to him who deserves it all.

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**What Baptism Does for Us**

Maurice W. Jackson, Jr.

Baptism → Into Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27)

Baptism → Into His Death (Rom. 6:3-4)

Baptism → Saves from Sin (Mark 16:16)

Baptism → Washes Away Sin (Acts 22:16)

Baptism → Into the Name (Matt. 28:19-20)

Baptism → Into the Body (1 Cor. 12:13)

Baptism → Newness of Life (Rom. 6:3-5)

Baptism → Free from Sin (Rom. 6:16-18)

Baptism → Answer of Conscience (1 Pet. 3:20-21)

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## *ARTICLE 4 OF 4*

### **What About You?**

Maurice W. Jackson, Jr.

In no way can it be considered strange that the way to get into Christ, or to be saved, is found in the Bible. The Bible is our guide in all matters religious. It is strange, however, that men generally are unwilling to be led by what the Bible clearly teaches.

Should one desire to know what he must do to be saved he must go to the Bible to find out. In no other way can he be safe. We do not underestimate the value of a teacher, either by the printed page or word of mouth. But the teacher must speak as the oracles of God, or the student will not know nor obey the gospel of his salvation.

When one learns from the New Testament what men and women did in obeying the gospel of Christ, why cannot this be accepted and complied with. If those of whom we read in the New Testament were saved as a result of what they did, then why isn't it clear that doing the same things today will produce the same result? Our only guide and standard of authority in religion is the New Testament (Romans 10:17).

### **Hear**

One must hear the gospel of Christ before he can know what he must do. But the gospel of Christ is found only in the New Testament. On the day the church of our Lord was established the Holy Spirit-guided apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). Peter said, "Give ear unto my words" (v.14) .Why? Because his words came through the Holy Spirit of God and from Christ Jesus (Acts 2:33). In hearing Peter they heard what they must do in order to be saved. So must we today!

### **Believe**

If you do not believe the Bible to be the verbally inspired word of God, then you need to do some studying of the evidence in the Bible of its inspiration. The force of the evidence is overwhelming. If, on the other hand, you believe the Bible to be the inerrant word of God, then what it says you must believe in order to be saved. Philip preached "Jesus" to the eunuch as Acts 8 reveals, and the eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:35-37). This is what Jesus meant when He said one must believe or die in his sins (see John 8:24).

## **Repent**

The doctrine of salvation by Faith Only is fully exposed as false by Acts 17:30. God commands all men everywhere to repent. Repentance being different from and in addition to “belief” or “faith,” it is obvious that one is not saved by “Faith Only” (see James 2:24). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and, therefore, need to repent. Repentance is turning from sin and turning to God. It is a change of mind followed by a reformed life. All responsible humand beings must repent or perish eternally.

## **Confession**

It is with the mouth that the acknowledgement of one’s faith in Christ is made known. “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord . . . thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9-10). This is the confession that the eunuch made as he was converted to the Lord (Acts 8:35-38).

## **Baptism**

In obeying the first principles of the gospel of Christ, this is the final step.

Believe “UNTO” – Rom. 10:10

Repent “UNTO” – Acts 11:18

Confess “UNTO” – Rom. 10:10

Baptized “UNTO” – Gal. 3:27

Baptism is immersion in water, and it is for the purpose of forgiveness of sins. In Acts 8:38 both Philip and the eunuch went down in to the water. The thing that keeps those who practice sprinkling or pouring from going into the water, would also have kept Philip from doing so. The thing that compelled Philip and the eunuch to go into the water also compels those today who practice Bible baptism to do so. Baptism is a burial in water (Col. 2:12).

There is no way for one who has never obeyed the gospel of Christ to receive forgiveness of past sins without being baptized for the remission of sins. This is the purpose of baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16).

He who says that baptism is not necessary in order for one to be saved, in essence says that it is unnecessary to do what Jesus said to do. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned” (Mk. 16:16). If one believes, Jesus says he must be baptized to be saved; but there is no point in baptizing one who does not believe. Such a one will be condemned for his unbelief. In perfect

harmony with Jesus' teaching in Mark 16:16, is 1 Peter 3:21 which teaches that baptism now saves us.

Upon being baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ one is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). He walks in newness of life because he is a new creature (Rom. 6:3-7). Even this is not the end, but the beginning. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

If you have not obeyed the gospel of Christ we continue to plead with you, and pray for you, to do so without further delay.

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