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Where Christendom Has Gone Astray

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father... But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:20,21,23,24).

Where does everything begin in relation to God, and therefore, in relation to the enemy in his counterfeit? It begins in the realm of worship. The beginning of everything is worship, in relation to God. That is, God having the central and supreme place of recognition, acknowledgment, of government. In our complete obedience, surrender, in every part and phase of our being, God having supreme right. Worship begins there. It is a relationship, not only an exercise. It is not something that we do in specified ways and methods. It is some attitude of the life, some place which God has in the entire consciousness. That is worship.

Now if Satan is to counterfeit and take God's place, worship is his objective. With the first Adam that was his objective; to draw man away from giving God the supreme place, that he might take God's place. He supplanted God in the reverence and the acknowledgment and the obedience of man and captured worship and became "the god of this age". When the last Adam, the Second Man, came and entered officially, publicly upon the great work that He had come to do, the one thing that the adversary sought to capture was His worship. "All these will I give thee if thou wilt worship me." He

has betrayed himself; he has shown his hand. If he could do the same with the last Adam as he did with the first, he has defeated the object of a new race.

Now it is just here that we have got to have light. We have read John 4 from the twentieth verse. The woman is saying "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem men ought to worship." Jesus said unto her, "Woman, the hour cometh, when neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, will men worship the Father. Believe Me, the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." In spirit — a small "s", not a capital "S". Oh, what is this? This represents a new regime, a new order. This is the crisis of the Cross in the realm of worship, the basic thing. But what has happened? Jerusalem was definitely, divinely ordained as the seat of honour and worship. The Samaritans imitated with temple and mountain the system which was at Jerusalem and worshipped the same God. But God had brought into the world that system of worship at Jerusalem; He had projected that. It was a temple, a building, a piece of elaborate ecclesiastical architecture with priests, with robes and vestments, burning incense, offering sacrifices, making prayers, reading Scriptures, and many other things. Yes, God had brought that in, and now the Lord Jesus was setting the whole thing aside, and in so doing, implying as clearly as anything could be implied, that this is not true worship. It is a comparison which is almost invidious. "Neither in this mountain, nor at Jerusalem, will men worship the Father. But true worshippers shall worship in spirit and in truth." "God is a spirit."

Where Christendom is Astray

What has happened, then, if this is not the truth, what is the truth? That is where Christendom has gone astray. That is the divide between soul and spirit. Not something which was but a type, an illustration, a set of symbols. God never intended that to be the final thing, never intended man to make that a thing in itself, never intended that that thing should go on indefinitely. It was brought in to illustrate and represent something else and its time for duration was until the Lord Jesus came. It all pointed towards Him, led up to Him, spoke of Him and His Cross in which that which was merely of the soul would pass, and that which was of the spirit would come in. What is the spiritual life in the matter of worship? Oh, it is not ecclesiastical architecture, it is not vestments, it is not ordinances, it is not rites. They pass out with Calvary. The perpetuating of anything like that is a contradiction of Calvary. See where we are today. The maintenance of that sort of thing, beloved, is because of a failure to perceive what the Lord Jesus has brought in.

What, then, is spiritual worship? It is getting back behind all that and seeing the spiritual meaning. Those sacrifices which were brought and sacrificed were looked into and most carefully turned over, if peradventure there might be a flaw, a blemish, a taint, an inconsistency, a double element, two colours, two kinds. If any such mark could be found the whole thing was rejected. When, however, after careful inquiry and investigation not a flaw or a blemish could be found, and God's representative with the keen eyes of an expert could pronounce over them the familiar "Tetelestai" — "It is perfect", then they were offered to God. And the truth embodied in the type was this, that the only fellowship with God is on the basis of the spiritual perfections of the Lord Jesus.

Worship is no longer bringing of animal sacrifices but bringing up from the heart an appreciation of the perfection of Christ. That is worship. The vestments of old were only types and figures and illustrations. The priestly apparel was speaking all the time in type of a righteousness and beauty and glory which is the nature of the God-Man, the Lord Jesus. It is given, imputed and imparted to the one who by faith apprehends Christ. We who are in Christ, in the sight of God, are wearing

garments of beauty and glory and holiness. Why, then, perpetuate a system? The Lord Jesus put all that away in His Cross, it is all gone. That is what He means by worshipping in spirit and in truth.

The temple and the tabernacle were only types, speaking of that spiritual fellowship of the saints as joined to an exalted Head, one Body, the Temple of God. The boards of the tabernacle tied together by the bands only speak of saints with the imputed righteousness and holiness and glory of God laid upon them, bound together in one spirit, one Body, with the "joints and the bands". The fitting together of the stones of the temple wrought in the quarry and brought together without the sound of hammer or axe, silently fitted in, only speaks in foreshadowing of the living stones built together for a spiritual habitation. God now indwells not temples made with hands, but a spiritual body, the members of Christ joined to Him.

Why, then, perpetuate a thing which God has dismissed in the Cross, and keep to the lower, fail to reach the higher, the fact that "we who are many are one body"? Do you see where things are astray today? I know how sweeping this is, but all this has to do with worship.

Now note that when there is a failure to recognise, to know the spiritual meaning of all this and to enter into it, and a maintaining of the old thing, you are still on a soul-level and you are open to deception. The whole thing may be a ghastly deception. And how does that deception work? In this way, that so many good Christian people are absolutely in bondage to a traditional system which is cutting clean across divine revelation for them. It is their traditional system which is simply barring the way to the spiritual revelation. The Cross of the Lord Jesus represents the liberty in the spirit for God to lead into the fullness of His life and light. That is the whole purpose of the letter to the Hebrews. It was for that very purpose; that here was a people that had received light concerning the true nature of fellowship with God in Christ. The Lord Jesus had taken the place of the temple and the priesthood and the sacrifices and the ordinances, and even the sabbath. The sabbath was no longer merely a point of time but related to a Person. God had reached His rest in Christ. All God's works were finished in Christ. God had entered into His rest when Christ perfected the work of God in redemption on the Cross.

Now that is no longer a matter of form, ceremony, external rites, buildings, priests, sacrifices; it is all Christ. They had seen that; He had called upon them to go outside the religious, formal, historic, traditional camp, and that brought persecution, ostracism, isolation, loneliness and all manner of things. The official religious people made it very hard for them because of that. The price to be paid for what is truly spiritual and heavenly was and is great, and they were dangerously in peril of going back to the old thing. The letter to the Hebrews was just written to save them from that peril, and to more fully tell them about the great change that had come about in the Cross, the work of the Lord Jesus. One system had passed, the earthly representation, and the other, the heavenly reality, had come in. You know how that letter speaks about the "pattern of things in the heavenlies" and "the heavenly things themselves". The letter comes to the great conclusion in "We are come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the blood of sprinkling, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant", come to that in Him.

Now you see historic Christianity as such, traditional Christianity as such, may still keep us on a soul-level of worship where we must have a certain kind of building with certain kinds of windows, with a certain kind of music, and certain kinds of prayers, certain kinds of people and certain kinds of dress, and all this to "aid" our worship: all this to make real our fellowship with God. It is living back

on pre-Calvary ground and it may be all soulish, and it may just be obstructing the path to a full personal inward spiritual life with God.

Free from Outward Systems

To know the Lord in Life we must be free from the Grave Clothes of Outward Systems. Beloved, it is as true as anything I have said, that if you want to know the Lord livingly in greater fullness you have to be free from every external control of religion, you have got to be free and open to the Lord, you have to be free in the spirit. Formalism has got to go and reality and life have got to come in.

There must be a personal life in God, and that is not dependent upon place or anything outside and round us. That is dependent entirely upon our spiritual fellowship with Him. It can be as real, as blessed in a dingy rat-infested Bedford jail as it can be in the most gorgeous ornate cathedral. Oh, yes, some of the most wonderful fellowship with God has been in the most unlikely places. You need no "helps" of that kind when you know God. Your life is with God.

Now remember, that letter to the Hebrews was written in anticipation of something. The Apostle knew that before very long the whole of that Jewish system would be in ruins. The Lord Jesus had prophesied it, that there should not be left one stone upon another. It would be scattered to the four winds. There would be no temple, no altar, no sacrifice, no festivals, no priests. The whole thing would cease and be smashed in fulfilment of the divine prediction. What would happen to these people if their fellowship with God was bound up with that? It would go. It would go with the system, and He wanted to save them from that thing which, being bound to earth, would go, and to bring them into a new thing which belonged to salvation. Fellowship with God must be of *that* kind, that whether we can go to meetings or not we have still got the Lord. Whether we have nice soulsh music or not, we have still got the Lord. We are not in that realm. "Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."

Bricks and mortar cannot communicate with spirit. Man's soul can communicate with God only through the vehicle of his spirit in union with God. That is what Calvary has done. Of course, you can understand now why the message of the Cross is unacceptable, and if you are going to proclaim and stand for it, you will be outside the camp because of this strong cleaving to a historic traditional inheritance. The awful thing is this, that Satan has taken hold of the divine representation or typical system to appropriate it, when God has done away with it. That which God has had brought in for a temporary purpose Satan has captured for himself to obscure the real nature of fellowship with God.

Now no one will think that I am saying that there are no spiritual people in that system of things. I am not saying that, but I am saying that if that represents for them their spiritual life, and if they must have that, and if that is the realm in which they live, that they do not see beyond that and are not free from that as a thing in itself, then they have missed the meaning of Calvary, and they are bound to miss all the meaning of Christ crucified, the wisdom and the power of God. Wrestling with principalities and powers demands something more than a system of external things.

You see we are up against a terrific business, we are up against a spiritual position which is colossal and only a spiritual position is adequate to that, nothing less. I trust you have received enough light to see that what has been said is justified. We do not want to be in any position less than the Lord's first best for us. I am sure we are prepared to pay the greatest price to be in God's first place for us,

by His grace. May He enable us to be willing to go on with Him, "leaving the things which are behind and pressing on", or, to come to the Hebrews again, "Let us go on unto full growth". The toys, the picture books, the illustrations, the symbols, the types are for children who have little intelligence. They are taken away at a certain time when God's intention is not to have children, but to have sons, and there is all the difference between the two. And so Calvary dismisses the kindergarten of external things in relation to God and brings in the fullness of heavenly order to make of us full-grown sons of God. May we be so.