1 Peter - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Brief Expositions and Spiritual Meditations, True Worshippers, The

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The church of God is a true worshipper on exactly the same grounds, worshipping according to God's enlarged revelation of Himself. The true worshippers now are those whom the Father in His grace has sought and found, and their worship proceeds on this — that the Son has revealed the Father to them, and they have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This is still, like all the other cases of worship in truth, because of God's revelation of Himself.

But there is something beyond this in the present worship of the church; it is "in spirit," as well as "in truth" (John 4:21-24; 1 Cor. 12:12), because the Holy Spirit has been given us faculty to worship, enabling the saints to call God "FATHER" and Jesus Christ "LORD." There is now communicated power, as well as revelation for the ends of worship. The worshippers are sons, and also priests (Heb. 5:5-6); having access with filial confidence they are in the holy place — the brazen altar (the remembrance of sin) behind them, and the fullness of God disclosed, and all that must be for blessing. Everything is told to the worshippers now, for the second veil is rent before them, and they see their Father on the mercy-seat, on the throne of the sanctuary; the blood of the Son has introduced them there, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes them to worship in a way worthy of such a sanctuary, and the Father seeking such to worship Him does not rest on anything short of this, which thus the confidence and love and honor of children give Him. Such is worship, I judge, in spirit and in truth, for thus it is where it is according to revelation, and in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

But its materials or its form may be very different, as we may further notice; for, properly and simply understood, it is rendering glory to God in the sanctuary, according to His own revelation of Himself. Many things may gather around it or accompany it, but which are not so properly and simply worship. Abel worshipped when he laid his lamb on the altar, though that was very simple; but it was enough, for it was meeting God in the appointed way, and owning His glory.

So did Abraham worship when, he raised an altar to God, who appeared to him (Gen. 12:8). Israel worshipped when they bowed the head at God's revelation by Moses (Ex. 4:30-31; 12:27); as Moses did at another revelation (Ex. 4:8). So David worshipped (1 Chron. 21:21). And so Solomon's congregation (2 Chron. 7:3) and Jehoshaphat's (2 Chron. 20:18) worshipped; and though it be not so called, yet Jacob's anointing the pillar at Bethel was worship, because it was owning God according to His revelation; and so David's "sitting before the Lord" was worship, I judge, on the same principle (2 Sam. 7). Job worshipped when he fell down in subjection to God's dealings with him. Eliezer worshipped when he bowed his head, for in that act he owned the Divine goodness to him (Gen. 24:26,52). The nation of Israel worshipped when they presented their basket of first-fruits, for their basket told God of His own gracious ways — set forth His praises in the sanctuary (Deut. 26). The appearing of the males at the three annual feasts in "the city of the great King" was worship, for such feasts set forth God's own gracious acts and ways, and that is worship. What were all these acts but the thankful acknowledgment of God, according to what He had either done or spoken, and the acceptance of His mercy accordingly?

It appears to me that the congregation of the Lord should enter the sanctuary of the Lord now with like worship — with the purpose of showing forth God's praise — the virtues or praises of Him who bath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light — the praises which He has earned for Himself by His own blessed acts and revelations — and this is done in breaking of bread with thanksgiving, according to His ordinance. That is the service which sets forth what God has done, declaring that He has provided a remedy for sin. It is a remembrance, not of sin, like the legal sacrifices (Heb. 10:3), but a remembrance of "Me," says Jesus, and consequently of sins put away. Thus it is an act of worship, or a giving to God His own proper glory — the glory of His acts and revelations. To pray about the forgiveness of sins would be discord with the table; it would be (quite unintentionally, it might be) a reproach upon the sacrifice of the Son of God; it would be building again the things that Christ had destroyed; and, in the language and sense of Galatians 2, making Him the minister of sin — making His blood, like the blood of bulls and goats, only the remembrance of sin, and not the remitter of sin.

But to surround the table with thanksgiving, and wait on the feast with praise for redemption, this would be honoring the work of the Lamb of God which the feast sets forth, and, accordingly, it is always as thus accompanied that Scripture presents it to us. Jesus, in taking the bread and the cup, "gave thanks" (Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22). He did nothing else. The words blessing and giving thanks are, to all moral intent, used in the same sense; and, in the like mind, the apostle calls it "the cup of blessing which we bless," because by that cup, or by that death and blood-shedding of Jesus which it sets forth, He has richly entitled Himself to praise. It may be accompanied with confession of sin, for such confession would not be in discordance with this supper. But still we do not find that alluded to in any passages which refer to the Supper; by them it takes the simple form of being a Eucharistic feast, or a season of thanksgiving for the remission of sins. It says (at least the table has this voice in it) — "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts: let him drink and forget his misery, and remember his poverty no more." Yet, surely, the service of self-judging and self-examination may well precede this feast.

In due order the covered females and the uncovered males appear before the Lord, and they break bread (1 Cor. 11). This is taking the place the Lord has called them to, and this, therefore, publishes His name and praise, and that is giving Him the glory He has so blessedly earned; so to speak, it is like Israel presenting their basket. It is like bowing the head at the revelation of His mercy.

The service is Eucharistic. It is a feast upon a sacrifice. It is the Father's house opened upon the prodigal's return. And this is our proper worship, for it is "in truth," according to the revelation, according to that perfect provision which our God has made for our sins in the gift and sufferings of Jesus.

Accordingly, when the first disciples came together, it was to this act of worship or service (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:11). Other things may gather round it or accompany it, but this was their worship; this brought them to the sanctuary — this was their business there. I find in Deuteronomy

26 that other things might accompany the worship, for after Moses directs them as to their basket, he tells them about confession and prayer. So Moses prayed after his worship in Exodus 34. So the elders ate and drank in God’s presence, which was properly their communion or worship. But Moses had previously spoken to them about the covenant (Ex. 24), as in Acts 20 the disciples came together to “break bread,” but Paul addressed a long discourse to them; as also, at the first institution of the supper, the Lord gathered His disciples purposely for the supper, but He teaches them about other things also, and before they separate they sing a hymn; and most significantly is the same thing conveyed to us in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, where the house of God, or place of present worship, is widely opened to us.

For there the apostle shows the disciples mystically, and duly covered and uncovered, in the worship, a service of breaking of bread. He clearly tells us it was for that end they had met together. But then he considers “spirituals.” He considers what may accompany worship — the calling upon Jesus, or the ministry of the word in the life and power of the Holy Spirit given to the saints — and thus he unfolds the sanctuary and its actions and furniture, showing what the worship itself was, and then what might duly attend upon it. In 1 Timothy 2 we get directions as to the further service of the saints in the assembly — that prayer and intercession, as wide and free as the grace that had rescued themselves, should mark their union and fill God’s living temple. But still this intercession is not simply and properly worship. Their worship was still the breaking of bread, because that was the act which set forth God’s praise, or gave Him the glory of His present acts and dealings with them and for them, and that was what brought them together. The giving of alms also duly accompanied the worship, as prayer and ministry of the word may; but, in like manner, it is simply an accompaniment, like the releasing of the prisoner at the feast.

The two things are presented distinctly in Abraham’s history. He is a worshipper at his altar. But then we hear no supplication addressed to God by him. He is a supplicant about Sodom, and there we see no altar (Gen. 12: 23). This is very plain, clearly defining the character of worship, and showing that the breaking of bread is clearly the service of the sanctuary now, whatever else may enter with it. For God is to be worshipped according to Himself (John 4), and the taking of anything as authority in religion but what is from Him mutilated worship, as the Lord told the Jews in Matthew 15 (of which principle Deut. 12 is a further witness),1 shows us man is not to determine his own ways as a worshipper. Willingness in worship is right; wilfulness destroys it all. Of their own voluntary will they brought their offerings (Lev. 1:3; 7:16); but this was to be done as and where the Lord willed. So with us; we are to worship “in spirit,” that is most true — in the grace and liberty of the Holy Spirit which is given to us; but we are to worship “in truth” also, according to God’s revelation of Himself and of His worship. This I have already spoken of.

The maintenance of groves and high places in Israel was always the witness that the people had not duly prepared their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, the only true God, who had set His name at Jerusalem (2 Chron. 14:3; 15:17; 17:6; 19:3; 20:33).

On the subject of worship, I would still add that joy and a spirit of thankfulness and liberty have characterized it at all times. Adam’s enjoyment of the garden and its fruits was worship. Israel’s presentation of the basket and their keeping of the feasts was worship, and what gladness and thanksgiving suited such occasions! The saints surrounding the table of the Lord is worship now, and the spirit of filial confidence, of thanksgiving, and of liberty, should fill them. All these acts of worship at different times were marked by joy in different orders, for surely a God of love is a God of joy.

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It is not wickedness to be harassed by bad thoughts if you resist them. It is Satan's effort to get you to adopt them, and thus you are sifted. You will find, if you keep near the Lord, that you are more established after an assault of the kind than you were before; and the only way to combat Satan's attacks is by the word.... If Satan can lead you to become indifferent to these assaults, then they will lead you to great damage; but if, on the contrary, they urge you to be more dependent on the Lord Himself and on His word, they will eventually cease, and you will be "settled." "After you have suffered awhile make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you."

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