

307 “In spirit and in truth” – 2

(Suggested: Copy, paste and read in Subfolder: Prayer and Bible Reading)

Whatever may be our circumstances within this deeply troubled world, we, as Christ-redeemed people, are bidden to worship God the Father “in spirit and in truth”, as the Lord Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman by the well (John 4.21-24). Last week we established what that means for us corporately, in our shared lives of worship, fellowship and service: any outward forms of worship with which we may feel at home have their place, but these outward forms are always to be secondary. The primary requirement in our worship is that our hearts, our inner lives, are truly “right with the Lord”, enabling us then to worship Him “in spirit and in truth”.

Now of course our hearts cannot be “right with the Lord” unless and until each one of us personally has been “born again ... born of water and the Spirit” – truths which Nicodemus, with his fine record of outwardly keeping the Law, struggled to understand in his night-time meeting with Jesus (John 3.3-12). Thanks be to God, in time Nicodemus was not afraid to show his personal allegiance to Jesus - in the daylight (John 7.50 and 19.39 – quite an example for each of us).

Later the risen Lord had much the same lesson for Saul of Tarsus, whose outward, meticulous Pharisaic credentials were crushed in those few moments in the dust of the Damascus road: Saul was vividly “born again, of water and the Spirit”, becoming “a new creature” by God’s grace and calling, with immediate and dramatic effects! (II Corinthians 5.17 / Acts 9.1-22).

We note that this precious process of being spiritually “born again” is passive, that is, it is something done to us, not by us; our only part is one of acceptance, and even that is far more God-wrought than we might realise (egs., Ephesians 1.4-5 / II Thessalonians 2.13 / John 6.37,39,44). As with physical birth, this spiritual new birth begins with conception itself, in which each of us is first re-conceived by God Himself, and is then re-born, “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1.13). Hence each of us, along with all those who have passed through this process of new birth before us, becomes “a new creature”, (the Greek word is also translated “creation”), now able to worship Almighty God, through the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, in the power of the Holy Spirit, “in spirit and in truth” (egs., Romans 10.9 / I Corinthians 12.3 / I John 4.1-16). Alleluia indeed!

In Ephesians Chapter 1.1-14 the Holy Spirit tells us through Paul – the former Saul of Tarsus and what a change there has been! - of God’s wonderful glories and mercies so freely poured out upon us in His Son Jesus Christ.

Then in Romans 8 the Holy Spirit emphasises the distinction between the old life “in the flesh” and the new life “in the spirit”, a distinction that is to be evident in all our Christian discipleship, including in the manner of our worship of God. In this life “in the spirit” we are freed from condemnation (v 1), and are “free from the law of sin and death” (v 2), because Jesus’ perfect sacrifice of Himself has met the demands of the law, not only for Himself but also for all who are now “in Christ Jesus” (v 1). We are taught: that “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (v 6b); that the body is now dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (v 10); that the Spirit “shall also quicken your (our) mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth with

you (us)" (v 11); that we are the sons of God, the children of God, His heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ, a status which will involve our partaking in suffering with Jesus as we pass along the road to being "glorified together" (vv 14-17). What is more, the Spirit intercedes for us (vv 26-27), and Jesus intercedes for us (v 34).

In the light of all these wholly-undeserved divine blessings, we see that the "new birth" into "life in the Spirit" leads us on in our discipleship and worship, singly and together, from a mere outward set of rules and habits into an inner, living relationship with Almighty God Himself, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, at every step and moment of our lives. As a result, "we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us", secure in the knowledge that nothing and no-one "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv 37 and 39b).

As we remember at this time the awfulness of the Great War 100 years after the Armistice, what a mercy it is also to remember the marvellous spiritual blessings which God the Father has bestowed upon us in Christ; and just one of those blessings is that we can now "worship Him in spirit and in truth".

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