

IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH, PART TWO

by Dennis Prutow

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We are in the middle of a discussion of John 4:23-24 and the ramifications of these words for our worship today.

An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

We ended the previous lesson with examples of how *separation* of Spirit and truth perverts our worship.

We also saw Jesus Christ tells us His words are spirit and life. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life" (John 6:63). To over-emphasize either Spirit or truth moves us in the direction of the flesh. On the other hand, to be filled with the word of Christ is to have life. To be filled with the words of Christ and the Spirit of Christ is to be enabled to worship in Spirit and truth.

We continue our discussion of worship in Spirit and truth, with a look at Colossians 3:16. This admonition relates directly to the word of Christ.

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

It must be emphasized. Jesus declares, "The words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and are life" (John 6:63). He also says of the Father, "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The words of Christ are therefore truth because His words are the words of God. If the words of Christ richly dwell within us by the power of the Spirit, we are prepared to worship in Spirit and truth.

Now notice two things regarding the exhortation of Paul. We are to be filled with the words of Christ *so that* we may (1) teach and admonish one another with real wisdom, and (2) sing to God with whole hearts. The New International Version gives us the better translation of Colossians 3:16 showing this breakdown.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you

sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your heart to the Lord.

Beyond doubt, we know we are to teach and admonish using the word of God. The pastor or the counselor must preach and counsel using the word of God. Wisdom comes from God. The great repository of wisdom at our disposal is Scripture. Pastors, teachers and counselors who ignore the word of God, who teach and advise using the wisdom of the world are suspect.

Paul tells us in the same breath we must use the word of God in the same way in our singing, in our worship. We will look at this in more detail momentarily. For now, it is enough for us to see the parallel established by Paul in the two areas of teaching/admonishing and singing. The word of God takes priority in *both* areas. We must be filled with the word of Christ for the purpose of teaching. This means we teach the word of Christ and only the word of Christ. Who would deny this? In tandem with this, we must be filled with the word of Christ as we sing. If the parallel is maintained, we must sing only the word of Christ. Why do we so often vehemently deny this?

The principle is simple. In the first case, we give to others what God has given us. We dare not give to others something less. We keenly feel the weight of this. In the second case, the principle is the same. We also give back to God what He has given us. We should keenly sense the weight of this also. Do we dare give to God the imperfections of our own creations in worship? Oddly enough, at the heart and core of the church, her worship, our answer to this question is a resounding Yes. We demand the right to bring sacrifices of our own design, what we think is best. We maintain this parallel as we look at two psalm portions. First, Psalm 78:1-4,

Listen, O my people, to my instruction; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the

praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.

The duty of parents is to tell the story of the works of God, to relate His story, to their children. It is not another story, revised or reconstructed history, but His story, the story of the world and all that is in it from God's perspective. This is one side of our duty to God.

Psalms 107:22 relates the other side. "Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing." One of the ways parents relate the story of God to their children is through singing. If we must *tell* the story of God and of redemption using the word of God, must we also *sing* the story of God's works using the word of God? Is there any inherent difference? Paul links the two intimately in Colossians 3:16. We may not like this linkage, but it is present. It tells us we must give back to God *in song* what He gives to us.

The process of giving back to God what He has given to us is known as confession. To confess is to say the same thing. When we confess Christ as Lord, we say the same thing God says about Christ. When we confess our sins, we say the same thing God says about our conduct. We agree with God. When we worship, we *repeat* what God has said and done. It is not up to us to add or take away from what God has said or done. Our singing is one way in which we confess God's great works through Christ.

Look once again at what Paul says in Colossians 3:16.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Let's zero in a little more closely on what Paul means by "the word of Christ." First Peter 1:10-11 helps us at this point. [We continue the exposition of worship in Spirit and truth in the next lesson.]

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IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH, PART THREE

by Dennis Prutow

Let's zero in a little more closely on what Paul means by "the word of Christ" in Colossians 3:16. First Peter 1:10-11 helps us at this point. Peter has been expounding God's great salvation. Then he says,

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

Peter is telling us the Spirit working in the Old Testament prophets, who spoke of Christ, was the Spirit of Christ. Jesus Christ was speaking in them and through them. This means the Old Testament is the word of Christ even as we recognize the New Testament as the word of Christ.

I repeat myself here because it is so important. We are to teach and admonish one another using the word of Christ and *not our own words*. Wisdom comes from Christ. Therefore, "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."

In the same manner, because the parallel is so clear, we are to sing using the words of Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." We do not give back to God *our own words*. We give back to God the words He prepared for us.

God took the greatest of care in directing the worship of His people in the Old Testament. This was especially true in the directions He gave for offering sacrifices. Exodus 20:22-25:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. And if you make an altar of

stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it.'"

The explicit directions for the sacrifices included *how* the altar was to be constructed. The altar was to be made of *uncut* stones. "If you wield your tool on it, you will profane it." Altars fabricated by the ingenuity of man were profane. They were not God's altar.

Deuteronomy 27:5-6 gives us a similar emphasis and warning.

Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them. You shall build the altar of the Lord your God of uncut stones; and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the Lord your God.

When the people crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land, thanksgiving and sacrifice were appropriate. God directed them to build an altar on Mount Ebal, an altar of *uncut* stones. The altar upon which the sacrifices were offered was an altar of material shaped by God as it came providentially from the hand of God. Tools of human invention profaned the altar of God.

Look now at Joshua 8:30-31. Joshua carried out the command of God.

Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of uncut stones, on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings.

Just as the character and quality of the offerings themselves were strictly regulated by God, so the instrument of the offering, the altar, came from the hand of God. Human tools were excluded.

We do not worship with animal sacrifices as the Israelites did. We do however continue to offer sacrifices to God. We offer sacrifices of praise with our singing. Hebrews 13:15, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Our sacrifices to God are sacrifices of praise. These sacrifices are the fruit of lips in giving thanks

to God. These sacrifices rise from the altars of our hearts fashioned and renewed by the hand of God. The sacrifices themselves are the uncut gems of the word of God. When we see and understand this, we are better prepared to worship in Spirit and truth. We are prepared to worship by the power of the Holy Spirit with the truth of the word of God.

In worship we give honor to God because of His rank, dignity, and importance. We honor God for who He is. His rank, dignity, and importance cannot be separated from who He is. In other words, worship is a response to God.

Worship worthy of the name is also designed by God. Liturgy and service before God is just that. It is liturgy set forth by God. It is service stipulated by God. In other words, worship is not only response to God; it is divinely guided response. One of our college students jokes with others by saying, "You worship God the way you want; I'll worship God the way He wants." This captures our theme.

To worship the way God desires, we must worship in Spirit and truth. We must come before God to honor Him being *possessed* of His Spirit and *guided* by His word. This means taking Colossians 3:16 seriously.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly . . . as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

In taking this text seriously, we must examine what Paul means by "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." As we do so, we must bear in mind our main heading. We are looking at what it means to worship in Spirit and truth.

The first step in this examination is relatively simple. If you see and understand the parallel established by Paul in the text, you see the content of our teaching is Scripture and the content of our singing is Scripture. This means the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs spoken of by Paul are Scripture. Our next step is to confirm this point.

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IN RESPONSE - A PROOF THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD, PART ONE

by Dennis Prutow

By special request, I am reviewing a proof the Bible is the word of God. This is not popular. My Reformed colleagues say we compromise with the world when we engage in the argumentation I use. From my perspective, these dear brothers in Christ may be guilty of the very compromise they judge I am making.

I live in a college town and have a lot of interaction with college students. When I originally presented this material, one student said, "I wish I had known this argument for class." Her professor spent large segments of his time showing we cannot prove the Bible is the word of God. Oddly, his position was similar to many of my Reformed friends although this professor repudiated inerrancy and undercut Scriptural authority.

To begin, we do not assume the Bible is the word of God. I once asked a ruling elder how he knew the Bible was the word of God. His answer was simple, "The Bible says it is the word of God." This is circular reasoning. We ought not to assume the conclusion to be proved. This common logical fallacy is known as "Begging the Question."

My Reformed friends now depart. I remind my colleagues the sect known as the Mormons takes the same position. In addition, Mormons, for example, tell us if we ask God He will give us immediate assurance, warmth in our hearts, the Book of Mormon is the word of God. Subjective experience then becomes the primary proof of validity.

Christianity opposes such unabashed subjectivism. Christ and the apostles repeatedly appealed to external evidence supported by eyewitnesses. What about the subjective element? We have all encountered people who, when confronted with evidence of wrongdoing, repudiate the argument pointing to their guilt. Why? It is not the fault of the argument. The argument may be impeccable. Every loophole is covered. Denial comes because fallen sinful human hearts are inclined to reject even cogent arguments regarding their guilt. This is supremely true regarding the Bible. Sinful human hearts will undoubtedly reject the Bible even when flawlessly presented with impeccable care. We therefore maintain we must present solid arguments for the Bi-

ble as the word of God. At the same time, we must realize only God can *persuade* individuals to accept our arguments and embrace the Bible as the word of God.

Where do we start? We begin with the Bible as a simple historical record. We do not say any more about it or any less about it to start. Beyond doubt the Bible exists and purports to recount historical events. We therefore take the step of verifying the Bible is an *authentic* record. *Utilizing the procedures for verifying the authenticity of any historical document, there is no reason to deny the Bible's authenticity.* The only reason is a hostile disposition against the Bible. How do we go about this task?

First, we verify the Documents of the Bible were written by individuals close to the scene. Much research has been done in this area. F. F. Bruce says,

The New Testament was completed, or substantially complete, about AD 100, the majority of the writings being in existence twenty to forty years before this.¹

Bruce gives dates for each of the New Testament books ranging between AD 48 and 100. He goes on to say

the time elapsing between the evangelistic events and the writing of most of the New Testament books was, from the standpoint of historical research, satisfactorily short. For in assessing the trustworthiness of ancient historical writings, one of the most important questions is: How soon after the events took place were they recorded.²

The manuscript evidence to support this position is enormous.

There are over 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in whole or in part. The best and most important of these go back to somewhere about AD 350... [C]onsiderable fragments remain of papyrus copies of books of the New Testament dated from 100 to 200 years earlier still.³

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1994), p. 12.

² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 16-17.

When I was in high school, we studied Latin using Caesar's *Galic War*.

Perhaps we can appreciate how wealthy the New Testament is in manuscript attestation if we compare the textual material for other ancient historical works. For Caesar's *Galic War* (composed between 58 and 50 BC) there are several extant MSS [manuscripts], but only nine or ten are good, and the oldest is some 900 years later than Caesar's day.⁴

Do classical scholars deny the authenticity of such documents? They do not. In some cases ancient histories are accepted as authentic when the earliest copies are thirteen hundred years older than the originals.

We have nothing like this regarding the New Testament. In fact, many of these documents date within 100 to 150 years of the events. There is therefore little reason to deny the authenticity of these New Testament documents. As one of my seminary professors said, "We have more assurance regarding the authenticity of the writings of Paul than we have of Shakespeare's plays."

Having established the authenticity of the Biblical documents in this fashion, we ask if these documents are reliable. Authenticity is not confirmation of reliability. We examine both external and internal evidence. As to external evidence, we find history, geography and archeology bear out the Bible.

For example, Luke sets his gospel narrative in the historical context with dates, names, titles and places.

A writer who thus relates his story to the wider context of world history is courting trouble if he is not careful; he affords critical readers so many opportunities for testing his accuracy.

Luke takes the risk, and stands the test admirably. One of the most remarkable tokens of his accuracy is his sure familiarity with the proper titles of all the notable persons who are mentioned in his pages.⁵ [Continued]

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⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

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Luke's narratives hold up under intense scrutiny. This is true for the Acts of the Apostles as well as his gospel account. In Acts 21:27-28 Paul faces a riot and the accusation he defiled the temple by taking Greeks into the inner court. One of the Greek inscriptions found in Jerusalem in 1871 reads:

NO FOREIGNER MAY ENTER WITHIN THE BARRICADE WHICH SURROUNDS THE TEMPLE AND ENCLOSURE, ANYONE WHO IS CAUGHT DOING SO WILL HAVE HIMSELF TO THANK FOR HIS ENSUING DEATH.¹

There is also very recent archaeological evidence supporting the Bible.

Now the sands of the Middle East are yielding secrets hidden for thousands of years that shed surprising new light on the historical veracity of those sacred writings. In this decade alone, archaeologists in Israel have unearthed amazing artifacts pertaining to two important figures from the Bible: a ninth-century B.C. stone inscription bearing the name of David, an ancient Israelite warrior-king who killed the giant Goliath, and a first-century A.D. tomb believed to be that of Caiaphas, the Jerusalem high priest who presided over the trial of Jesus. In both cases, it was the first archaeological evidence ever discovered suggesting that the two existed beyond the pages of the Bible. "These are tremendously important finds," says James K. Hoffmeyer, chairman of archaeology and biblical studies at Wheaton College in Illinois.²

In many cases, archaeologists depend upon the Bible in understanding and interpreting artifacts and ruins. "Notes Trude Dothan, an expert on Philistine sites at Jerusalem's Hebrew University: 'Without the Bible, we wouldn't have even known there were Philistines.'"³

Although, problems still exist, the Bible is shown to be authentic. The documents were written by those pur-

ported to do so in a period close to the events described. The Bible is also shown to be reliable in the information it sets forth.

Internal evidence also indicates the documents of the Bible are reliable.

The Gospels make upon every unsophisticated reader the impression of absolute honesty. They tell the story without rhetorical embellishment, without any exclamation of surprise or admiration, without note and comment. They frankly record the weaknesses and failings of the disciples, including themselves, the rebukes which their Master administered to them for their carnal misunderstandings and want of faith, their cowardice and desertion in the most trying hour, their utter despondency after the crucifixion, the ambitious request of John and James, the denial of Peter, the treason of Judas. They dwell even with circumstantial minuteness upon the great sin of the leader of the Twelve, especially the Gospel of Mark, who derived his details no doubt from Peter's own lips. They conceal nothing, they apologise for nothing, they exaggerate nothing. Their authors are utterly unconcerned about their own fame, and withhold their own name; their sole object is to tell the story of Jesus, which carries its own irresistible force and charm to the heart of every truth-loving reader. The very discrepancies in minor details increase confidence and exclude suspicion of collusion, for it is a generally acknowledged principle in legal evidence that circumstantial variation in the testimony of witnesses confirms their substantial agreement. There is no historical work of ancient times which carries on its very face such a seal of truthfulness as these Gospels.⁴

A mere outline of the type of evidence available to provide adequate testimony concerning the authenticity and reliability of the Bible is presented. Many volumes

have been written on these subjects. Suffice it to say, we do have before us in the Bible a set of authentic and very reliable historical documents.

Now these authentic and reliable historical documents present Jesus Christ who is confirmed to be a true prophet of God by miracles. John 3:1-2 paints the picture.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Him by night, and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Here Nicodemus recognizes Jesus as a teacher sent by God because of the miracles Jesus performed. Even the Pharisees did not deny the miracles of Jesus. When Jesus healed the blind man, the healing was evident. John 9:30-33 tells us how the man responded to his critics.

The man answered and said to them, "Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing, and does His will, He hears him. Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, He could do nothing."

Knowing full well the man was healed, the Pharisees became angry. "They answered and said to him, 'You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?' And they put him out" (John 9:34).

Are we to believe Jesus performed these miracles? Secular sources such as Josephus report Jesus as a miracle worker. However, if the New Testament documents are truly authentic and reliable, there is no reason to dispute the miracles. We have the record of reliable eyewitnesses. We have reliable testimony even the enemies of Jesus did not dispute he performed many miracles. We will continue the argument in Part Three.

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¹ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents, Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1994), p. 93.

² U.S. News and World Report, April 17, 1995, p. 60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), vol. 1, pp. 584-586.