

Worship 2 - In Spirit and in Truth

(Number two in a series of ten)

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23-24)

These words were spoken by Jesus to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well as He taught her the truth concerning worship to God. He taught that there would no longer be just one place to worship God (such as Mt. Gerizim or the temple at Jerusalem) but that from the "hour" of the establishment of the New Covenant, the true worshippers of God must worship in a definite way and according to a fixed pattern indicated by this statement of Jesus, "in spirit and in truth."

What does this mean in practical terms? Understanding that worship is doing homage to God, what does it mean to worship in spirit and in truth? Let us examine the subject of worship from this two-fold perspective, as we open the Bible and let it speak concerning what it truly means to worship God in spirit and in truth.

_____Worship In Spirit_____

The apostle Paul in Romans 12:11 urges us to be "fervent in spirit." This means we are to have an attitude of zeal. To worship God in spirit is to do so with the right attitude or from the heart. The Bible heart is our mind and includes our intellect, volition, conscience and emotions. One's whole heart must be engaged in worship for it to be acceptable to God. As the Psalmist sweetly sang, "I will praise the Lord with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation" (Psalms 111:1). Worship in spirit involves doing those acts which please God with the right attitude. It is possible for one to be physically present at a worship service and not be worshipping God because his attitude toward worship may not be correct. Thus, he is not worshipping God in spirit. So it is vitally important that we understand the characteristics of worship that is truly in spirit.

First, worship in spirit must be with understanding. Paul taught this is 1 Corinthians 14:15: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." To worship with understanding, we must be able to comprehend what is said and done. We must appreciate the significance of each act of worship and think about what we are doing as we worship. For instance, we cannot be talking, daydreaming or sleeping during a prayer, sermon or song and be worshipping with understanding.

Second, worship in spirit is orderly. Some mis-guided members may like the "spontaneous" approach, which generally leads to confusion, but this is not God's way! Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not the author of confusion..." and later in the same chapter, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). We should have an expedient order to our worship services, so that all may know what to expect and do at the appropriate times.

Order is right. It is commanded of God and therefore it is good.

Third, worship in spirit is reverent or respectful to God. The Psalmist wrote, "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him" (Psalms 89:7). Our manner of worship should reflect our respect for God and other worshippers.

We are gathered to worship and praise Almighty God, therefore, we should act, speak and dress in the very best way of which we are capable. We should bring the best before God and show the highest degree of respect for Him.

Fourth, worship in spirit is sincere and springs from a holy life. We should assemble out of love for our Heavenly Father and a desire to praise Him and commune with Him. David expressed the right attitude in Psalms 122:1: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." The time of our worship should be an occasion of great happiness and joy. We should look forward to the moment when we can assemble with the saints and worship God. Also, our worship is not done to be seen of men, but is offered to please God (Matthew 6:1,5,16). Further, our worship should reflect a life of holiness. One cannot continue to live a sinful life and at the same time offer holy worship to God.

Fifth, worship in spirit must be edifying and without pomp or gimmickry. One major reason we assemble is to "provoke unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). Paul wrote that in our assemblies, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (1 Corinthians 14:26). Every act of worship in the assembly should be for praising and glorifying God, as well as edifying or building up the saints. Worship is not for entertainment, satisfaction of the lust of the flesh or self glorification.

Our efforts in worship should be to glorify God and be built up in the most holy faith. Our worship should be edifying to one another as we assemble to provoke one another unto love and good works. Any act of worship which is not directed to God is mis-directed and is not in spirit.

This is one reason we do not have choirs and choruses or entertainment acts in our worship.

These would fall into one of two possible categories: Worship or Entertainment. If they are worship, then where are we authorized to worship in this manner? They cannot be found in the New Testament! If they are entertainment, then where is the Lord's church authorized to provide entertainment? Again, this cannot be found in the New Testament! Therefore, we must reject such attempts of entertainment as being from man, rather than God. Of course, we recognize that there are some who want worship to be what they want it to be and desire to do as they please in worshipping God. Remarks such as "We like it this way" or "It sounds good to me" indicate the desire to please self more than God. Paul referred to some who were this way in Colossians 2:23, who were engaged in "will worship" or worship according to their own will, rather than God's will.

Worship In Truth

True worship, homage that pleases God, is also to be in truth, as well as in spirit. What does it mean to worship in truth? First, we need to define "truth." Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?"

The answer to that question is revealed in the prayer of Jesus in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." The Psalmist in Psalms 119:142 wrote, "Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and thy law is the truth." So when we speak of the objective truth, the truth of the Bible, we speak of God's Word or His law. In order for our worship to God to be in truth, it must be in harmony with His Holy Word. Certainly, we should understand that the law of Moses (the Old Testament) has been abolished (or taken out of the way) and we are not bound by its commandments today (Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14). The New Testament, the law of Christ, is now in effect and is binding upon all men everywhere today. So the question in regard to this subject is: "What acts of worship does the New Testament authorize for the church to practice in order to worship in truth?" First, worship in truth must include the teaching and preaching of God's Word. An example or pattern of this can be seen in the case of

the apostle Paul at Troas. Acts 20:7 states, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." This is an apostolic example of preaching being in the worship assembly.

Second, worship in truth must include giving or laying by in store, as a contribution upon the first day of the week. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 16:2, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." This emphasizes the personal, individual responsibility of each member to give upon the first day of every week a part of that which God has prospered us.

Third, worship in truth must include partaking of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross in our behalf. The church at Troas is an example of those who kept this memorial supper upon the first day of the week. Paul even tarried in the city of Troas so that he could observe the Lord's Supper with the church there upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:6-7). We are to partake of the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine (grape juice) in remembrance of the death of Christ upon the first day of every week.

Fourth, worship in truth must include prayer. In Acts 2:42 we read where the church at Jerusalem, "...continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." This passage includes the acts of worship which we have discussed so far.

The "apostles' doctrine" refers to their teaching and preaching of God's Word. "Fellowship" refers to their giving. "Breaking of bread" refers to partaking of the Lord's Supper together. And, "prayers" refers to the common practice of the early church to pour out their souls unto God in prayer and supplication.

Fifth, worship in truth must include singing. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." This teaches that the instrument we use is our heart. We are not to attempt to worship God with a mechanical instrument or a machine, because God has specified the human heart as the instrument. Further, we are to sing and make melody in our hearts "to the Lord." He is the one worthy of our worship, praise and adoration. We should point out that two of these acts of worship (giving and the Lord's Supper) are limited to the first day of the week, because this is the only time we find them commanded or practiced by the apostles. However, teaching, praying and singing can be practiced as acts of worship at any time the church is assembled. God will accept only one kind of worship: true worship. "God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Let us ever seek to worship our Heavenly Father with the right attitude (in spirit) and according to Divine truth (in truth) that our worship may be acceptable to Him and that we may glorify Him.

WORSHIP

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