

Are you a worshipper of God? Would you like to be? He has told us what He wants from us. Let's look first at some general principles that He has given us.

IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
(JOHN 4:23-24)

Christ here lays down the basic components of worthwhile worship: that it come from the heart or spirit and that it follow the pattern given by God in His word. So often we have one half of the picture and not the other, as the religious people of Jesus' day:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin,, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."
(MATTHEW 23:23)

They kept the law of Moses to a fault and even added to it, but the spirit was lacking..

Many people in our day believe that the actual acts of worship are unimportant, as long as one believes in God. While Jesus chastised the Pharisees for their attitude, he didn't want them to leave their worship undone. In the Old Testament we see God's attitude toward worship that is done, but not according to His "recipe":

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'This is what the Lord spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified.'" So Aaron held his peace." (LEVITICUS 10:1-3)

Note that they didn't do something God had told them not to do. They simply did something he had not commanded. We can see, then, that God expects us to offer the worship he's described and only that.

UNDER CHRIST'S COVENANT

It is confusing to some worshippers that God has not always asked for the same worship from everyone. He asked Noah to build an ark. The Israelite nation was told to offer animal sacrifices, incense, and to praise God with musical

instruments, among other things. What exactly are we to do?

It may be helpful to understand that mankind in the beginning was like a child, ignorant of God and His nature. God's instructions at first were fairly simple and concrete, as our instructions to a toddler would be. He communicated directly to men and spelled everything out. When the Israelite nation was singled out to fulfill His promise to Abraham, He gave them a written law through Moses. God used the law to prepare mankind for the law of Christ and His kingdom,as explained in the letter to the Galatians:

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."
(GALATIANS 3:24-25)

Many physical details of the Israelite worship represented aspects of the kingdom under Christ. The book of Hebrews talks extensively about such symbols in chapters 8-10, showing how our covenant under Christ is far superior to the Israelite covenant under Moses.

While *"the things written before were written for our learning,"* (ROMANS 15:4) the ordinances or rules of the old covenant were replaced by a new covenant, revealed by Jesus and his apostles, and it is there that we find what God would like us to offer him.

Consider the man who wants to give his wife an anniversary present. Last year she wanted daisies, but she has since told him that she prefers roses. He thinks daisies are nice and he can give her more of them. What should he give her? Obviously, the roses that she wants, not what she wanted last year or what he wants.

Let's not offer God last year's gift again, even if it is what we prefer.

INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

When asked if they worship God, many people would reply, "Oh, yes! I go to church regularly." While public worship is important, it is only part of our service to God and should be an extension of our individual worship:

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (ROMANS 12:1-2)

Our "service" or "worship" to God begins when we present our bodies to Him by making them holy, which means "set apart" to do His will. Setting ourselves apart or separating ourselves from sin and our selfish desires is described as a death

in the Bible, since death is by definition a separation (physical death being the separation of the body from the spirit). Baptism is how we put to death and bury the sinful man:

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (ROMANS 6:3-6)

Once we have given ourselves completely over to God in baptism we can begin the transformation that Paul speaks of in his letter to the Romans (above).

This is where individual worship comes in. The things we do in our daily service to God, as described in the following paragraphs, renew our minds, making us more like the Lord and motivating us to do more in His service. Let's look at the different aspects of individual worship.

Pray without ceasing

Essential to our relationship with God is two-way communication. He speaks to us in His word, and we have the opportunity to talk to Him in prayer.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7)

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-17)

We can pray to God about any concern we might have. James 5:13-18 tells us a few things we can and should ask for: help in suffering, healing for the sick, and forgiveness of sins. We are also to pray for people in power, according to 1 Timothy 2:1-2.

As in every aspect of worship, our motives must be pure. Jesus warns the worshippers of His day about hypocrisy:

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door,

pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." (MATTHEW 6:5-6)

James also warns us about motives:

"You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (JAMES 4:3)

If we pray sincerely, though, we are assured that God is happy to give us good things:

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"
(MATTHEW 7:7, 11)

Teach others also

Part of our service to God is sharing what we've learned with others. Timothy was told by Paul:

"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 TIMOTHY 2:2)

Peter writes:

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;" (1 PETER 3:15)

Sing

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (COLOSSIANS 3:16)

Singing can also lift our spirits in hard times, as Paul and Silas found when they were in prison (ACTS 16:25).

While Old Testament worship included instruments, New Testament Christians are simply told to sing, *"making melody in your heart to the Lord..."* (EPHESIANS 5:19)

Study God's word

It is only through study of the scriptures that we can learn more about God and grow in knowledge of the truth.

"As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the

word, that you may grow thereby. . ." (1 PETER 2:2)

The word prepares us in every way to be mature servants of the Most High. Paul told Timothy that:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17)

Care for each other

To serve God, we must also serve His children.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, . . . distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality." (ROMANS 10-13)

PUBLIC WORSHIP

The attitude of worship that fills a Christian's life naturally extends into public worship. When one finally finds a special relationship with the Lord, it's just natural to want to share that excitement. That is exactly what the very first Christians did:

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart. . ." (ACTS 2:41-46)

Immediately after his baptism, the apostle Paul (still known as Saul) *"spent some days with the disciples at Damascus."* (ACTS 9:19) *"And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples. . ."* (ACTS 9:26) The reason for this association is given with the commandment to assemble:

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (HEBREWS 10:24-25)

We need other Christians to keep us "stirred up" and they need us. God, in His wisdom, has given his children the best support group possible: a spiritual family.

When you come together . . .

Of course, we can and should worship God together in all the ways that we show him honor as individuals: in prayer, evangelism, song, study of the scriptures, and care for each other. In addition, there are a couple kinds of worship that we only find first century Christians doing as a group. As a result, we assemble regularly to worship together.

One of these reasons for coming together is to eat the Lord's Supper. Paul teaches the Corinthians:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes." (1 CORINTHIANS 11:20-26)

Early Christians did so on every Sunday, as is clear from early church historians and is borne out by the account in Acts:

"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." (ACTS 20:7)

Lay Something Aside

While they were gathered on Sunday, the disciples took up a collection for needs that existed among the saints:

"Agabus stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world. . . . Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul." (ACTS 11:27-30)

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of thee week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." (1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-2)

The money can also be used to help teach the gospel. This often involves supporting preachers and elders as they have need.

". . . The Lord has commanded that those who

preach the gospel should live from the gospel." (1 CORINTHIANS 9:14)

"Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" (1 TIMOTHY 5:17-18)

See also Philippians 4:14-16.

SUMMARY

Let's remember that worthwhile worship must be what Christ said God wants: in spirit and truth. We can't do anything other than what the New Testament pattern directs and expect God to be happy with it. Nor can we go through the motions and think that God can't see what's in our hearts. God, as our Creator, has the right to ask for any service he wants and we as His creation can do no less than to offer it with gratitude and love. Whether in private or with other children of God, then, let us worship God in spirit and truth.

Worthwhile

Worship

Serving the Lord as He Directs

Written by
Ink Man's Wife

Quotes are from the New King James Version of the Bible.