

www.ShepherdServe.org

You are welcome to distribute printed copies of this document, or copy and paste this document to distribute via email, as long as the document is unaltered and kept in its *entirety* (including copyright notices), and is not sold for profit. However, if you wish to post this material on your website or anywhere else online, you must first contact us to get permission. ©2007 by David Servant

The Disciple-Making Minister

Biblical Principles for Fruitfulness and Multiplication

By David Servant

Chapter Twenty **Praise and Worship**

The woman said to [Jesus], “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father....But 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” (John 4:19-24).

These words from the lips of Jesus lay the foundation for our understanding of the most important aspects of worship. He spoke of “true worshippers” and described their qualifications. This indicates that there are people who are worshippers but not *true* worshippers. They may think they are worshiping God but really aren’t because they aren’t meeting His requirements.

Jesus declared what characterizes true worshippers—they worship “in spirit and truth.” Thus it could be said that false worshippers are those who worship “in flesh and insincerity.” Fleshly, false worshippers may go through the motions of worship, but it is all a show, as it does not stem from a heart that loves God.

True worship of God can only come from a heart that loves God. Worship, therefore, is not just something we do when the church gathers, but something we do every moment of our lives as we obey Christ’s commandments. Amazingly, the woman Jesus with whom was speaking had been married five times and was now living with a man, and she wanted to debate about the proper location to worship God! How representative she is of so many religious people who attend worship services while living daily lives that are in rebellion to God. They are not true worshippers.

Jesus once rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for their false and heartless worship:

You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, “*This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men*” (Matt. 15:7-9, emphasis added).

Although the Jews and Samaritans in Jesus’ day obviously placed great emphasis on the location where people worshiped, Jesus said that the location was unimportant. Rather, it is

the condition of each person's heart and his attitude toward God that determines the quality of his worship.

Much of what is called "worship" in churches today is nothing more than dead ritual acted out by dead worshipers. People are mindlessly parroting someone else's words about God as they sing "worship songs," and their worship is in vain, because their lifestyles betray what is really in their hearts.

God would rather hear a simple, heart-felt "I love You" from one of His true obedient children than endure the heartless droning of a thousand Sunday-morning Christians singing "How Great Thou Art."

Worshipping in Spirit

Some say that to worship "in spirit" means to pray and sing in other tongues, but that seems to be a strained interpretation in light of Jesus' words. He said that "an hour is coming, *and now is*, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth," indicating that there were *already* those who met the conditions for worship "in spirit" when He made His statement. Of course, no one spoke in tongues until the day of Pentecost. Therefore, any believer, whether he can speak in tongues or not, can worship God in spirit and in truth. Praying and singing in other tongues can certainly aid a believer in his worship, but even praying in tongues can become a heartless ritual.

An interesting insight into the worship of the early church is found in Acts 13:1-2:

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers; Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. And while they were *ministering to the Lord* and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (emphasis added).

Notice this passage said they were "ministering to the Lord." It seems reasonable to think that means they were worshiping Him, and thus we learn that true worship actually ministers to the Lord. That is only true, however, when the Lord is the object of our love and affection.

Ways to Worship

The book of Psalms, which could be said to have been Israel's hymnbook, exhorts us to worship God in a number of different ways. For example, in Psalm 32 we read:

"Shout for joy all you who are upright in heart" (Ps 32:11b, emphasis added).

Although quiet, reverent, worship has its place, so does shouting for joy.

Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; praise is becoming to the upright. Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy (Ps. 33:1-3, emphasis added).

We should, of course, sing to the Lord in worship, but our singing should be *joyful*, which is another outward indication of one's heart condition. We can also accompany our joyful singing with various musical instruments. I must mention, however, that in many church gatherings, the electrical musical instruments are often so loud that they drown out the singing completely. They should be turned down or turned off. The psalmists never had that problem!

So I will bless Thee as long as I live; I will *lift up my hands* in Thy name (Ps. 63:4, emphasis added).

As a sign of surrender and reverence, we can lift our hands to God.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth; sing the glory of His name; make His praise glorious. *Say to God, "How awesome are Thy works!* Because of the greatness of Thy power Thine enemies will give feigned obedience to Thee. All the earth will worship Thee, and will sing praises to Thee" (Ps. 66:1-4, emphasis added).

We should tell the Lord how awesome He is and praise Him for His many wonderful attributes. The Psalms are an excellent place to find appropriate words with which to praise God. We need to go beyond the continual repetition of "I praise you, Lord!" There is so much more to say to Him.

Come, let us worship and *bow down*; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker (Ps. 95:6).

Even our posture can be an expression of worship, whether it be standing, kneeling or bowing.

Let the godly ones exult in glory; let them sing for joy *in their beds* (Ps. 149:5, emphasis added).

But we don't have to be standing or kneeling to worship—we can even be lying in bed.

Enter His gates with *thanksgiving*, and His courts with praise. Give *thanks* to Him; bless His name (Ps. 100:4, emphasis added).

Giving of thanks should certainly be a part of our worship.

Let them praise His name with *dancing* (Ps. 149:3, emphasis added).

We can even praise the Lord with dancing. But it should be dancing that is not fleshly, sensual or purely entertaining.

Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with harp and lyre. Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe. Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord (Ps. 150:3-6).

Thank God for those who are musically gifted. Their gifts can be used to glorify God if they play their instruments from a heart of love.

Spiritual Songs

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done wonderful things (Ps. 98:1a, emphasis added).

There is nothing wrong with singing an old song, unless it becomes a ritual. Then we need a new song that comes from our hearts. In the New Testament, we learn that the Holy Spirit will help us compose new songs:

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 (Col. 3:16).

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father (Eph. 5:18-20).

Paul wrote that we should be singing to one another with “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” so there must be a difference between all three. A study of the original Greek words offers little help, but perhaps “psalms” meant an actual singing of psalms from the Bible accompanied by musical instruments. “Hymns,” on the other hand, may have been general songs of thanksgiving composed by various believers in the churches. “Spiritual songs” were probably spontaneous songs given by the Holy Spirit and similar to the simple gift of prophecy, except that the utterances would be sung.

Praise and worship should be a part of our everyday lives—not just something we do when the church gathers. Throughout every day we can minister to the Lord and experience close fellowship with Him.

Praise—Faith in Action

Praise and worship are a normal expression of our faith in God. If we truly believe the promises of God’s Word, then we will be joyful people, full of praise to God. Joshua and the people of Israel had to shout *first*; then the walls fell. The Bible admonishes us to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4) and “in everything give thanks” (1 Thes. 5:18a).

One of the most outstanding examples of the power of praise is found in 2 Chronicles 20 when the nation of Judah was being invaded by the armies of Moab and Ammon. In response to King Jehoshaphat’s prayer, God instructed Israel:

Do not fear or be dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours but God’s. Tomorrow go down against them....You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 20:15b-17).

The narrative continues:

And they rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa; and when they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, “Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the Lord your God, and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed.” And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the Lord and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, “*Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting.*” And when they began singing and praising, the Lord set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mt. Seir destroying them completely, and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When Judah came to the look-out of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped. And when Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found much among them, including goods, garments, and valuable things which they took for themselves, more than they could

carry. And they were three days taking the spoil because there was so much" (2 Chron. 20: 20-25, emphasis added).

Faith-filled praise brings protection and provision!

For further study on the subject of the power of praise, see Phil. 4:6-7 (praise brings peace), 2 Chron. 5:1-14 (praise brings God's presence), Acts 13:1-2 (praise brings God's purposes and plans to light), and Acts 16:22-26 (praise brings God's preservation and prison release).