

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

64.2 What Is the Christian View of Worship?

Part II

Scripture: Philippians 3:1-3

We may have sorrow in our hearts for the person who does not worship. To exclude God from one's life is to have no realization of "otherness" and to be left with a bleak humanism where there is no one to thank when reason dictates that gratefulness is the most natural thing to feel. It is to be crushed by a burden of self loathing with no offer of forgiveness, it is to pass through the depths of sorrow knowing no source of comfort beyond human sympathy. Indeed, not a few have been driven to faith in God because of the sheer intolerableness of supposing that man is alone in the universe with hope arising only by way of wishful thinking. The person who does not worship is a forlorn creature "fighting a lone fight against a vast indifference." In the penetrating words of another, "Man is a low form of cellular life on his way to a manure heap." Indeed, worship is no idle or useless pursuit.

Last week we noted several definitions of worship and sought to answer the questions: Why worship? Who is worshiped? This week we want to identify those who participate in the high act of worship and to note certain characteristics of worship.

III. WHO WORSHIPS?

For our purposes we will define worship as an adoring mental attitude toward God which shows itself in individual and corporate words and deeds. It is the sincere expression of devotion to God. The word of God describes people who worship in several different ways.

1. They Are a Believing People:

In Philippians 3:3 the Apostle Paul draws attention to three characteristics of worshipping people. They do so in the Spirit, they rejoice in Christ, they have no confidence in the flesh. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires worship by causing people to exult in the finished work of Christ as opposed to the tendency of the natural man to find standing

before God in his own merit. Worship, then, is mediated through Christ who has provided access through the veil into the heavenly sanctuary. (Hebrews 10:20) The principle teaching of the New Testament is that worship is acceptable to God when offered through belief in Christ. (I Peter 2:5)

2. They Are a People Who Worship in Spirit:

Here the word's of Jesus to the woman at the well are significant. In John 4:24 we read, *"God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* We have spoken of the three parts of man's nature in the past. Man is a Trinitarian being possessed of a body, soul and spirit. (I Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12) The soul is the seat of our emotions, affections, reason and will. As such it can be deeply moved in real worship. The spirit links man with God. There is a deadness about it until quickened by the Holy Spirit and that which meets with God and praises Him in an adoring way. Jesus was teaching this woman that worship need not be associated with where you are bodily and even emotionally. William Barclay has well described worship in this way. *"The true, genuine worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy only; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to God and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible."* (**The Gospel of John**, Vol.1. Westminster Press, 1958 William Barclay)

3. They Are a Bold but Not Proudful People:

One of my favorite verses in the New Testament is Hebrews 4:15. The word boldness here does not have to do with effrontery, it has the meaning of confidence. Basic to Judaism was the priest who officiated in the Tabernacle and the later Temple. The Christian church is built upon Old Testament foundations but with a better priest, a High Priest, now in heaven itself. Believers now need not stand at a distance, but with a holy boldness enter God's presence because Christ has identified himself with us. Christian worshipers do not boast in their works as did the boastful Pharisee of old. (Romans 8:1; I John 2:1)

4. They Are People of Understanding and Experience:

Associated with worship in the New Testament is the matter of intellect. There is a certain content in worship. There is some understanding of who God is and what he is like and what he has done. Hebrews 13:15 talks about lips that give thanks. In I Corinthians 14:15 Paul utilizes his mind in prayer. In I Timothy 3:16 we have the worshipful confession of a rational mind. Experience also has to do with worship as the Holy Spirit causes us to cry, *“Abba, Father.”* There is the figure of being cleansed in Hebrews 10:22:

5. They Are a United People:

In Acts 4:24 we read of Christian worshipers as *“with one accord, with one mind, they raised their voice to God.”* This same truth is seen in Romans 15:5. Other verses which emphasize unanimity in worship are Matthew 5:23, and Acts 4:31-32.

6. They Are an Expectant People:

There is an interesting word found in I Corinthians 14:23-25. Here the church is gathered in worship. An unbeliever is convicted by the prophetic word and confesses God is a reality there. Paul speaks of the outcome of worship when Christians gather. (14:26) In Acts 13:2 we have the example of the Holy Spirit's call upon the lives of Paul and Barnabas while at worship.

7. They Are a People Who Worship in Truth:

Jesus taught that God was to be worshiped in truth. God is to be approached sincerely. In Matthew 15:8-9 Jesus refers to pretense in coming to God. (Isaiah 1:11; 66:1-2) God is to be worshiped according to the truth of revelation. (John 17:17) Also, our worship is to be in the way God has ordained, in Christ. (John 14:6)

IV. WHAT DOES WORSHIP CONSIST OF?

In Acts 2 we meet a redeemed community of people gathered as a result of Peter's mighty sermon on Pentecost Day. The worship of the infant church seems to have consisted of the following:

1. Reading of the Scripture:

It seems clear from the following verses that when believers meet, someone read the inspired writings of the Old Testament and certain communications from the apostles. (Colossians 4:16; I Thessalonians 5:27; Acts 13:15; Revelation 1:3) There was also emphasis upon the apostles teaching, (Matthew 28:20) and preaching. We may say that preaching became a vital part of early church worship. (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 14:19, 26, 36)

2. Prayer:

Acts 2:42 speaks of being devoted to prayer. Two types of prayer are noted in the New Testament Church. There is much teaching about private prayer. (Matthew 6:5-8; II Corinthians 1:11) There was also corporate prayer, (Acts 2:46; 4:23; 5:42; 3:1,11, 5:12, 42, 20:36, 21:5) Prayers of the New Testament were free and adapted to the circumstances. The prayer-speech of the first Christians contained certain unusual expressions. The words **Abba, Amen, Maranatha, and The Thanksgiving** may be noted.

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
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