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Worship - Introduction To Worship

Introduction

Many years ago I heard the story of two men who met and began to discuss where they had been on the Sunday morning. One gentleman said he worshipped at such and such a church, the other responded (perhaps thinking himself to be better because of where he went), that he worshipped in Heaven. It all sounded very pious but it begged the bigger questions which are, "Did either of them worship, and what is worship?" The second man may well have remembered the Lord but is remembrance worship? Could both have remembered the Lord as individuals where they were? In the situation of the second gentleman, others in that gathering may have stood up and thanked God for being among those who thus gather, but is that worship? They may collectively sing hymns about the cross but is that worship?

I say this because Satan is the greatest counterfeiter eternity will ever know. Consequently, as he does with the way of salvation, baptism, and the Lord's supper, so he does with worship. Some time ago I saw something which astounded me. There were people on a balcony in a church service (I have no doubt they were sincere) and they were moving about in their area waving flags! I thought they were moving material which was wafting in the breeze through the open doors, so I watched, and realized they were waving flags. I asked what they were doing? The response was, "They are worshipping God". That is not worship. It is a counterfeit for worship and is something an unsaved person can do for many an unsaved person waves a flag. Furthermore, worship is a spiritual exercise resulting from the awe one has for God, not a place to show my ability to wave a flag.

Definition

There are groups of saints who meet to remember the Lord each Sunday, and having been with them for over fifty years, I have heard that gathering called by three names, the worship meeting, the remembrance meeting, and the Lord's Supper. Now it would seem to me that if an individual has attended the "worship meeting" fifty times a year for ten years, that is five hundred times and it ought to be exceedingly easy for them to tell what worship is and what promotes it. Yet, when asked, "What is worship?" I get the following explanations. Worship is:

- a) The Christian's highest occupation, a statement which does not help me at all.
- b) An act of homage or respect
- c) To be in awe of a person
- d) To show devotion towards
- e) To adore

However, I see these as possible, and I stress possible manifestations of worship, but they do not tell me what worship is for the following reasons:

- a) I have great respect for my father and mother, but I do not worship either of them
- b) I have an attitude of awe for the Queen due to her position, but I do not worship her
- c) I praise my daughter for a good meal, but I do not worship her
- d) I give thanks to folk I stay with, but I do not worship them.

Therefore, what is worship? In its highest level, worship is the automatic outflowing of a heart that has been caused by the Holy Spirit to appreciate some particular wonder, moral excellency, ability, or kindness of God or Christ.

There are other definitions which to my mind are closer to signifying what worship is. They are:

- a) The outpouring of a spirit at rest with God
- b) The overflowing of a grateful heart due to divine kindness
- c) The overflowing of a bowed heart which has been made aware of the wonder of God or Christ
 - i) These convey the truth of the Psalmist when he wrote: "My heart is inditing (bubbling up and overflowing) a good matter" (Psa. 45:1) and the good matter is the wonder of God.
 - ii) Again in Psalm 23 it is recorded: "My cup runneth over" (Psa. 23:5)
- d) Worship is not the occupation of the individual with their needs nor even thankfulness, but with God or Christ. This was the experience of David when He wrote: "When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers What is man, that Thou art mindful of Him?" (Psa. 8:3-4), or when after He sat before the

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Lord he recorded his musings in the words: “Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee” (2 Sam. 7:22).

Distinctions

Worship is distinctly different from:

- a) Emotion. While that is a characteristic of true worship, it is impossible to worship God or Christ and not be emotional. Let me illustrate. I recall in the remembrance meeting when there would be sung the hymn, “When I Survey The Wondrous Cross” and immediately afterward a brother would ask to sing the verse, “See from His hand His hands and feet” and to sing it softly. Of course one is moved but was it emotionalism, the words of the hymn, or the tune it was being sung to? Is there a difference between emotional maneuvering and spiritual worship? To what, if any extent, do they overlap?
- b) It is also different from praise which one can do due to their ability to speak or do something. I certainly have no hesitance to speak about the brilliance of Yehudi Menuhin the classical violinist or Glen Gould the magnificent pianist, but that is not worship.
- c) The same goes for thanksgiving which again is taken up with my blessings, temporal and spiritual from God, or prayer which is also taken up with present needs in its petitioning God for blessings to be received.

The Word “Worship” In The Scriptures

The word “Worship” with its associated words is used 106 times in the Old Testament and 70 times in the New Testament. Thus, in the scriptures there are 182 references to worship, however, they do not all indicate the worshipping of God.

The first reference to worship was when Abraham said to the servants, “I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you” (Gen. 22:5). In this case there are two men going to worship the Lord and they do it in two different ways.

- a) The first reference to worship in the New Testament was when the wise men came to Herod and said, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:2). And again it is a collective group for we do not know how many there were who came to worship the Lord.

We must observe the sharp contrast between the first and last references to worship in the two testaments.

- a) The first reference in the Old Testament is when Abraham, at the revelation of God and putting all his faith in God, went with his son to worship the Lord (Gen. 22:5). The last reference to worship in the Old Testament is in connection with the judgment of God on those who will not worship the King, the Lord of hosts (Zech. 14:17).
- b) The first reference in the New Testament is when the wise men came to worship the Lord. Note the preciseness and exclusiveness of the wording, “And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh” (Matt. 2:11). The last reference in the New Testament is a warning against worshipping the wrong persons, namely another man (Rev. 22:9) and the command to “worship God”.
- c) Two truths come into focus from these references:
 - i) The only two persons to be worshipped in the Bible are God and Christ. This is of major importance when today man worships Satan, stars, movie personalities, the earth, possessions, prestige, and power.
 - ii) If people refuse to worship God then they will invariably worship wrong persons or things and will ultimately be degraded (Rom. 1:23-31; Psa. 115:4-8).

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Is There A Correct Position To Be Taken When Worshipping?

There is no Biblical instruction as to an exclusive posture when worshipping. It all depends on the situation. In the scriptures there are at least twelve different postures individuals take when praying but none has precedence over the other in degree of spirituality. Today, in some places, men stand to pray, but is this so that the voice can reach further, as when they give out a hymn, OR is it an act of reverence for God as when brought before the monarch or a judge? There must be no legalism as to what posture or tone of voice to be used, as if tone of voice indicates more spirituality. Man can worship by bowing down or kneeling (Psa. 95:6); by singing (Psa. 66:4); by obeying the commands of God (Mk. 7:7); or by serving God (Rom. 1:9).

Who Can Worship?

When an individual reads the Biblical narratives it is evident that an individual can worship alone or with a company of people. The following are some of the individuals and groups I have found, and as I read them I see how I could fit into at least one of these categories.

The person	Reference	Characteristic
The servant	Gen. 24:26, 48, 52	One of the working class
Moses	Ex. 34:8	A leader among God's people
Gideon	Jud. 7:15	A man who did not know what the future held
Job	Job 1:20	A business man who had lost possessions and family
The Leper	Matt. 8:2	An outcast because of deformity
The ruler	Matt. 9:18	A political figure
The Syrophenician woman	Matt. 15:25	A mother concerned for her child
The man of Gadara	Mk. 5:6	A man about to be saved
The blind man	Jn. 9:38	A man who was given sight
Jacob	Heb. 11:21	An old trickster, always contriving

Some who worshipped and will worship collectively:

The group	Reference
Abraham and Issac	Gen. 22:5
The children of Israel	Ex. 4:31
Hezekiah and the congregation	2 Chron. 29:28-29
The wise men	Matt. 2:2
The disciples	Matt. 28:9
All the celestial and terrestrial hosts	Rev. 5:11-14

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But that does not mean that man is always worshipping God

Man is a worshipping creature, but sadly and tragically if humanity does not worship God they will find someone or something else to worship. From Romans 1:23 we learn that man in his own perception lowers God until He is likened to a man, someone who one can debate with; then like an animal, something useful; thus lowering God on two levels. Going further, man shows his attitude toward the Almighty by degrading Him to the likeness of a creeping thing, which means nothing and can be removed, apparently without consequence. As man lowers the god he worships, then consciously and subconsciously that God becomes his ideal, that which he fashions his life after, that from which he decides the doctrines that will form his opinions and decisions. As the scriptures say, he becomes like the god he makes and worships (Psa. 115:6; 135:18; Jer. 10:8). Some of the persons and objects man worships.

Person or Object	Reference
Angels	Col. 2:18
Idols	1 Kgs. 12:30
Created life	Rom. 1:23, 25
Creation	Deut. 4:19; Zeph. 1:5
The image	Dan. 3:5
A man	Rev. 13:8
Demons	Rev. 9:20
Satan	Rev. 13:4

. . . . To be continued

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