

? - THE HIGHEST FORM OF WORSHIP

“What do you think is the highest form of worship?” If you ask those in the Body of Christ this question, invariably you would get a vast array of answers. I am sure that included in these answers would be things such as singing unto the Lord; making music and playing instruments unto

the Lord; dancing before Him; bowing down before Him; praying unto Him; etc. These are all wonderful expressions of our worship unto the Lord through praising Him. In fact, as we are all well aware of, there are many more such expressions of praise found throughout the scriptures. However, it is important for us to grasp the understanding that there is a definite difference between worship and praising the Lord.

For many of us, when we here the term “praise” we immediately think of fast, upbeat music, singing, clapping, dancing, etc. When we hear or think of the term “worship” we immediately think of softer music with a slower beat. We think of times of kneeling or lying prostrate before the Lord. In reality, these and all the previous things mentioned in our discussion are actually aspects and expressions of our “praising” the Lord. Praise is an action word. However, the term “praise” and the very many expressions of praise should and must come from what is known as a heart of “true worship.” Worship, very simply is an attitude of the heart that acknowledges and recognizes God for who He is. What comes forth out of this attitude of heart is then expressed through the many manifestations of praise, as previously mentioned.

For many within the Pentecostal or Charismatic circles we have been taught that the highest form of worship is our “singing in the spirit.” This is because now through Jesus we have been filled with the Holy Spirit and we now enter into this “higher form” of worship. This may be true, however, it is important to note that “singing in the spirit” is not only a “New Testament, Spirit filled, child of God” phenomena. It is found in the Jewish scriptures as well as within Jewish tradition.

As born again spirit filled believers we are familiar with the Hebrew term "tehillah." The word, "tehillah" means a "laudation in song to God" from deep within one's being. This has been referred to within the Body of Christ as “singing in the spirit” or uttering a “spirit song.” However, this Hebrew word, "tehillah" is found within the Jewish scriptures. In Psalm 51:15, Psalm 104:33 and Psalm 22:25, the word translated to "praise" used in these scriptures is “tehillah.” In 2Chronicles 20:22 we read, “*They sang in the power of the spirit with a **spirit song** to go before them in battle.*” Actually, the Book of Psalms itself is referred to by the Jewish people as “Sefer Tehillim.”

In many Hassidic and Orthodox circles, the Jewish worshippers have been known to enter into such joy as they are praising and singing their songs to Yahweh, that there have been times when they seem to be “speaking another language.” This should not be so strange for as to grasp. we know that in the Jewish Scriptures prior to Jesus and the infilling of the Holy Spirit within the believer, the Holy Spirit would “come upon” individuals and they would do miracles and other works of God, as well as sing a “spirit song” as we just read in 2Chronicles. We read in the New Testament as found in 1Corinthians 14:15 that Paul exhorts the believer to “*sing with or in the spirit.*” As we can see this is a wonderful and powerful expression of an individual’s heart towards the Lord. However, as we just mentioned, this would still be considered an action of praising the Lord.

I believe that the “highest form of worship” that we, as believers, are now able to enter into and bring before the Lord in such a way that no one previously was truly fully able to do before the born again experience through Jesus is, “loving God.” I believe loving God is the highest form of worship because it truly is an attitude of a person’s heart in which everything else branches out from. This is the root and foundation from which every other action of praise and worship originates. You may be thinking that this is a no brainer. However, please, let me continue.

In both the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament, we are repeatedly exhorted to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (with all that is within you).” Jesus, Himself expresses this many times. Unfortunately, when the topic of worship comes up, most of us really do not think about this aspect of what true worship really is. As mentioned previously, our thoughts go to many other things. So how is “loving God” the “highest form of worship?” How is this related to our worship unto our God?

Let’s take a look at one of the most well known and most used verses concerning worship – John 4:23-24. In these verses we read, “...*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.* ²⁴ *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*” Most of the time when we read these verses, our thoughts immediately think of wonderful times of spirit filled music, song, dance etc. We are taught that the worship that pleases God is that of wonderful singing and wonderful songs that are truly heartfelt. To this I am not in disagreement. However, is that what Jesus was speaking about as He was conversing with this “woman at the well?”

Let’s take a look at the Greek word used in verse 24 which is translated into our English word, worship. It is the Greek word, "proskyneō." It means to turn towards in acknowledgement of a deity, person or thing for the purpose of paying homage to or giving reverence (respect) to them. It means to adore and to "kiss towards" a deity, a person or thing that is held in the highest regard. It infers that there must be an act of lying down prostrate or bowing down. It also means to "draw near to" the one that you desire to be with. However, a most interesting aspect of the Greek word, "proskyneō" is that, figuratively speaking, it refers to being, "like a dog licking its master's hand." So what does this have to do with an attitude of heart concerning worship?

I have had the tremendous blessing of having dogs throughout my life. One of the great things about dogs is that no matter what happens they are the first ones at the door when you get home. They want to lie down next to you when you are watching TV. They are always willing and wanting to play, no matter how tired they get or no matter what time it is. Why? Because that dog knows that you are their source, not only of their food, water and shelter, but you are their source of joy. They express their “love” of who you are to them in the only way they can. They give you their highest adoration with a “doggy heart attitude” of gratitude and love by licking you so much that you have to push them away and tell them to stop because it was getting to be too much for you. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we all would kiss towards our Heavenly Father with such a heart attitude of gratitude and love, so much so that He would have to tell us to stop because it was too much for Him to take?!!!

Getting back to our text in John 4, if we read these verses in their context within the conversation between Jesus and the woman, we see that nowhere, nor at any time were the topics of music, song, dance or anything else as such being brought up or mentioned by Jesus concerning her question of worship. Within the context of the conversation with the woman it was really all about her lifestyle. We can see by the woman’s question to Jesus that she truly wanted to know the truth concerning true worship. She was fed up with just going through the religious rituals and motions of what she was told “true worship” was. It was just not working for her. Now, she wanted to know the truth.

First of all, the important thing we must take note of is that this woman was open to the fact that her concept and ways of worship may have been faulty. Wow!!! Imagine that. Someone was actually willing to admit that maybe their concept of worship was incorrect. Hmmm... Let’s take a “Selah” moment and pause and think on that!!!

Okay, let’s continue.

We see that Jesus tells her that now is the time for the true worshippers to worship the Father in *“spirit and in truth.”* These are those that the Father *“seeks after”* and delights in. Jesus never mentions any expression of praise and worship. What He does mention is *“the time will come and now is...”* The time is now because of Jesus. It is only through Jesus and His Blood that we have access to the Father. It is only through Jesus that we can now truly worship the Father in a way that is not only pleasing to Him, but also in the way that He is seeking after.

What is this worship that the Father seeks after? It is a changed life that has occurred by believing in and receiving the Son of God. It is a changed life that is now seeking after no one or nothing else simply because through Jesus they have been restored back into relationship with the one and only true God. It is a heart that has been changed by the love of a loving Heavenly Father. It is a heart that has now experienced and has been filled for the first time with true love. It is a heart that recognizes that they were lost and “poor in spirit” but they have been found and restored back to the Father. It is a heart that has received true, pure, unadulterated love. The “robe of righteousness” has been placed upon them. The “ring with the signet of the Kingdom of God” has been placed on their hand. God has “placed the shoes back on their feet” symbolizing that a once broken relationship has now been restored. (*ref.* The Parable of the Prodigal Son)

What else can we do but have a heart that is so full of gratitude and love towards the One who still loved us even when we were dead in our sin. Worshipping the Father in “spirit and truth” is not about anything else other than having a heart filled with love towards that very same Father who loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us.

Many times when I am teaching concerning worship, I would ask another question. I would ask, “Do you think Jesus was a true worshipper, worshipping the Father as He lived His life here on this earth?” The answer is, yes. Of course Jesus was a worshipper of the Father!!! Even though Jesus was God, while here on this earth in human form, He, in every way, was our role model in all things concerning being a child of God because He was the Son of God – even in the aspect of worship. So how did Jesus worship the Father?

Nowhere in any of the Gospel accounts do we read of Jesus singing, playing an instrument, dancing, etc. According to the way we view worship today, many of us, if we didn’t know it was Jesus, would say that He was not a true worshipper because He was not doing the things that we believe a true worshipper should be doing. Yet, we hear the Father tell us that Jesus was His, *“...beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.”* (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) What was the Father pleased with? Was He pleased with Jesus’ singing? No. Was He pleased with His musical ability? No. The Father was pleased by Jesus’ love for Him which was expressed in, through and by His obedience to the will and the Word of God. He lived the lifestyle of true worship through His obedience.

This is what real worship is all about. It is a worship that comes from an attitude of the heart that is filled with love towards the One who first loved us. This love puts a desire within our heart to be that *“living sacrifice”* that is *“holy and acceptable unto Him.”* It is the worship from a heart whose only desire is to surrender totally to the will of God, which is found through His Word. Why? Because our heart’s desire should be that of which we simply desire to please and bless the heart of our Father, Abba God. We do not do anything out of fear or out of bondage or because we are forced to. We do and obey His commandments and His Word because we love Him without expecting anything in return. He has already given us everything through bringing us back into relationship with Him.

Jesus, in John 14:15, makes it very clear what the “expressions” now of the true worshipper, who loves God should be. He states, *“If you love me you will keep my commandments.”* Jesus tells us what true worship really is. He tells of the kind of worship that the Father truly seeks and longs for. It is a worship that obeys and keeps His commandments.

This attitude of true worship through loving God extends to and is also expressed in the obedience to God's commandment of loving others. We fail to realize that loving and being a good, Godly, loving spouse; being a good, Godly, loving father or mother to our children; being a good loving neighbor, as well as just being a good member of society are all expressions of our "heart attitude" of loving God. This pleases and blesses the heart of God, as well.

A true attitude of true worship for the true worshipper is a willful, joyous, surrendered, lifestyle of obedience to the Word of God. We live this kind of Christ-like lifestyle simply because we love our God. It is an attitude of heart that desires to simply bless the heart of our God by worshipping Him in the way that He desires to be worshipped – not the way we think He should want to be worshipped.

This was the problem with Cain's offering. He brought to God what he thought would please God but not with what God said pleases Him. The result of his "worship" that seemed good in his own eyes was that God did not accept it. This was the problem with Nadab and Abihu's worship. It was "strange fire" unto God. It was not what He delighted in. The result of their "strange worship" - they were consumed. This was the problem with Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They made a mockery out of the way God had commanded to worship Him through sacrifices. The result of their perverted "worship" - they were slain. Needless to say, we can add Ananias and Saphira to this infamous list. Maybe there is a lesson for us in these examples of what happens when we worship God in a way that is pleasing to us but not pleasing to Him. Hmm... Let's take another Selah moment.

As we conclude, I would like us to take a look at another very familiar scripture passage found in Psalm 51: 15-19, *"¹⁵ O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. ¹⁶ For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. ¹⁸ Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar."*

David begins this section in verse 15 with his concept of worship as he asks God to open his lips and he will praise his God. Then in verse 16, we see that David catches himself and realizes that what he thinks would be pleasing to his God may not be what God really desires. David realizes that God doesn't want, nor does He need more songs and music. He has the angelic choirs for that. No, David realizes that what pleases the heart of God is a "broken and contrite heart." It is a worship that comes from a heart that recognizes that it is nothing without God and His great love and mercy that has been given to it. It is a heart that is "poor in spirit." It is a heart that has been given true love and now desires to pour it right back onto the One who first loved it. This is foundational to worship. This is what true worship truly is. Notice, it is after David recognizes that this is truly the "heart of worship" that he then states he could then offer up all the other actions and expressions of praise.

What is the highest form of worship? It is an attitude of heart of the individual who loves God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. This is the root and foundation of the heart of the true worshipper who the Father is seeking after. Every other expression of praise must branch out from this root of worship otherwise it is worship that may not be pleasing to the Father. Are you and I true worshippers?