

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

WORSHIPING “*IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH*”

By Gary W. Summers

Many believe that all worship to God is accepted, but the Scriptures teach otherwise. God has no obligation to accept whatever worship is offered to Him. Worship must be according to what He desires and has asked for.

Many people do not think in terms of worshipping “*in spirit and in truth.*” They may wonder, “Won’t God accept any worship?” The Bible answers, “No.” The phrase under consideration is Biblical. Jesus used it in a conversation with a Samaritan woman at a well: “*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. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (Jn. 4:23-24).

“*IN SPIRIT*”

What does Jesus mean by “*in spirit and in truth?*” Most scholars think that worshipping in spirit refers to fervency as opposed to cold, formalistic religion. Some religions develop rites or rituals which must be repeated even though they have, by and large, lost any meaningful purpose. Even activities that God designed to be meaningful can deteriorate. Christians who once rejoiced in being able to offer worship to God, over time, can change: the *Singing* becomes less enthusiastic. *Prayers* are uttered as if by rote (habitual repetition). The *Lord’s Supper* degenerates into a mere ceremony rather than a time for reflection on one’s sins and the greatness of the Lord’s sacrifice. *Giving* no longer flows from a grateful heart. Many cease trying to follow the spiritual message being presented.

Evidently, the congregation in Ephesus had lost their enthusiasm; Jesus told them they had left their first love; they needed to repent from where they had fallen (Rev. 2:4-5). Paul expressed the problem this way in 2 Timothy 3:5; some had “*a form of godliness*” but denied its power. Therefore, true worshipers must have a genuine love of God and not just go through the motions.

Jesus exposed hypocrisy in the first century among the Jews. They had devised ways of trying to “get around” the command of God — particularly the one in which they were to honor father and mother (the fifth commandment God gave through Moses). What kind of person would try to circumvent God’s commandments? Not someone with a great love for Him. Jesus labeled them hypocrites, adding these words: “*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matt. 15:8-9).

Whenever someone’s heart is far from God, they cannot offer up true worship. Many people today have no real love of God. They would say they believe in Him, but true faith results in obedience. James says: “*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*” (Jas. 2:24). When James speaks of “*works,*” he does not refer to the “*works of the law*” (which Paul frequently wrote of); he speaks of “*obedience*” to God.

One can say, “I believe in God,” but such words are hollow if no obedience to Him follows. Likewise, no one can say, “I love God,” but then fail to keep His commandments. Jesus said, “*If you love me, keep my commandments*” (Jn. 14:15). Conversely, the Lord said, “*He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings*” (Jn. 14:24).

So, a person can speak about believing and loving God, but the heart can still be far from Him.

“IN TRUTH”

Fervency, therefore, is absolutely necessary. But by itself it is just as ineffective as formalism. The worshipers of Baal could become quite fanatical in their devotion. Elijah challenged Baal’s false prophets to get a response from their god (he would do likewise). They tried all day and could get no answer. Their failure did not lie in their lack of zeal. They called and called on the name of Baal. **“They leaped upon [around] the altar which was made”** (1 Kings 18:26). Receiving no response, **“they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them”** (1 Kings 18:28).

Does anyone doubt their zeal? They failed because Baal was a false god who had no power. Many Muslims today are so ardent in their support of Allah that they will willingly give their lives, but Allah is not the true God. Neither is Buddha, nor a plethora of gods in the Hindu system. Now, some become squeamish at this point. Nobody likes to condemn someone else’s religion; we live in a pluralistic society — about like the first century.

The Romans had numerous gods and goddesses; so did the Greeks and various other nationalities. Even in Palestine one would find paganism, Judaism, and the Samaritans (which were a mongrel mixture). To the Romans who ruled, Caesar was Lord, but to the Jews, Jehovah was the only Lord. To Christians, Jesus was Lord. Jesus was born into a pluralistic society, but it did not keep Him from saying, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (Jn. 14:6). The meaning is clear: No other religion than Jesus Christ is valid. The only way to come to the one true and living God is through Jesus. One cannot get to Him by calling on Allah, Buddha, or anyone else. God is not a pluralist.

Jesus never said, “Come to me any way you desire to.” In our era, Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5). Did the Father himself not say that Jesus was his Son and that we must hear him? Yes, he said those words on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5). What Jesus taught (and His apostles after him) even replaced the Law of Moses (Heb. 8:6-7) and the words of the prophets such as Elijah. They were both on the mount with Jesus. But God made it plain that Jesus is the One who now possesses his authority. After his resurrection, Jesus corroborated this fact when he said, **“All power [authority] is given to me in heaven and on earth”** (Matt. 28:18).

No matter how many religions exist on earth, God recognizes only one —Christianity. God spoke in the days of Isaiah: **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”** (Isa. 55:8-9). Therefore, if the thinking of this age contradicts the words God has spoken, guess which one is incorrect? Jesus was not bashful in what he declared in John 14:6. He was also brutally frank in what he told the woman at the well. When she perceived that Jesus was a prophet, she asked a pertinent and important question of him: **“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship”** (Jn. 4:20). Jesus tells her that the time was coming when neither place will be authorized as “the location” for worship. In fact, Christians would be worshiping all over the world. This answer probably would have satisfied the woman, but just before he comments about worshiping in spirit and truth, Jesus added these words: **“Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews”** (Jn. 4:22).

One can hear a collective gasp from Oprah’s television audience upon hearing those words. Jesus told the woman that she and, by implication, the Samaritans did not know what they were worshiping. Could anyone get away with saying this today without society’s wrath coming down upon him? We can imagine the outcry: “Who do you think you are to judge some one else’s religion that way? Why, all religions are equally valid. You ought to apologize immediately and then go enroll in a sensitivity training program.” However, the Samaritan woman shows no indication of being insulted. Maybe she found it refreshing that someone would actually speak the truth to her. And certainly the Lord was not mean or vindictive in what he said; it was a truthful answer to her question, undoubtedly spoken in love. She told Jesus one thing she was sure of — that when the Messiah came, he would tell them all things. Jesus proved bold in commenting on that pronouncement: **“I that speak unto thee am he”** (Jn. 4:26). Notice, He did not hedge in the slightest by suggesting that he might be the Messiah. He affirmed the truth of the matter. She brought the city out to hear Jesus.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORSHIP

Many believe that all worship to God is accepted, but the Scriptures teach otherwise. One need only read as far as Genesis 4 to discover that truth. Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God; He accepted Abel's, ***"But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect."*** That made Cain very angry (Gen. 4:5). Cain does not ask why God refused his offering; perhaps he knew the reason — that it was not a blood sacrifice, as was Abel's (Heb. 12:24). God asked him why he was so upset and asked him, ***"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted"*** (Gen. 4:7)? In these few words are implied certain truths: 1) Abel had done well; he and his offering were accepted. 2) Cain had not done well; he and his offering were rejected. 3) God has no obligation to accept whatever worship is offered to Him. Worship must be according to what He desires and has asked for. Abel complied; Cain did not — instead he gave God what he wanted to give — not what God required of him.

We do not think the way God does. What is important to us may not be to him, and vice versa. He gave instructions to Israel on the way to conduct worship. The priests in particular had many instructions to keep. Nadab and Abihu apparently did not see the value of following them. They were two of Aaron's four sons. Maybe they thought they could get by with making what (to them) might seem like a frivolous change. God had specified what fire to put in the censers they used, but they used fire from a different source. The Pulpit Commentary (2:1:149-150) suggests that, although the law had not yet been recorded, they knew the fire was to come from the brazen altar. They probably used fire from the altar of incense instead, which God had not authorized. This fire was more conveniently located, but since it was not the fire God specified, fire went out from the Lord and consumed the two brothers (Lev. 10:1-2).

Concerning worship, man is not at liberty to do what is convenient. Neither can he do what he prefers to do, as opposed to what God commands. Some violations of God's plan for New Testament worship include: 1) using dramas in place of preaching; 2) having fund raisers to support the church instead of the members giving as they have been prospered; 3) reading prayers from printed texts instead of praying from the heart; 4) omitting the Lord's Supper except for a few times a year instead of observing it each Lord's day; and 5) adding (without Bible authority) instruments of music or hand clapping to the singing.

If we are going to be true worshipers, we must worship ***"in spirit"*** AND ***"in truth"*** (Jn. 4:24), which means we ought to maintain a level of enthusiasm, along with a sense of how privileged we are to worship the Almighty God who created us; and, worship him in the way he has instructed us to do it. Our fervor should be matched by our desire to make certain that we are doing what he has authorized. Only then can we be confident of blessings and rewards. ■

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONE ANOTHER

By Doy Moyer

Christians share together a bond in Christ. We often stress the need for personal responsibility and individual accountability, yet we should also see that Christianity is built upon a ***"one another"*** model. God did not intend for us to walk alone in our journey of serving the Lord. This is demonstrated through a number of passages, but perhaps the most obvious way to see it is in Jesus' own statement: ***"I will build My church"*** (Matt. 16:18).

"Church" (*ekklesia*) refers to a group or assembly and does not refer to one person alone. Christ promised to build a group of people who would serve Him, and, again, while individual responsibility is vital (Eph. 4:16), the idea was never for one Christian to be an island with no contact, help, or love from other Christians. Paul wrote that walking in a ***"manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called"*** includes having humility, gentleness with patience, and ***"bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*** (Eph, 4:1-3). ***"One another"*** is a key to our walk.

Jesus told His disciples to ***"love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By***

this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:34-35). The relationships we have with other Christians are important enough that Jesus said this would serve as proof of discipleship. Paul told his readers that ***“through love”*** they are to ***“serve one another”*** (Gal. 5:13). Christians cannot afford to try to walk alone in serving the Lord, for they would be neglecting one of the most important features of love and service: one another.

Not only are Christians to love and serve one another, but they are also to ***“outdo one another in honor”*** and ***“live in harmony with one another”*** (Rom. 12:10, 16). They are to ***“welcome one another”*** (Rom. 15:7) and ***“Greet one another”*** (Rom. 16:16). Paul wrote, ***“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you”*** (Eph. 4:32). They should speak to one another in song (Eph. 5:19) and submit to one another in reverence (Eph. 5:21). James wrote, ***“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed”*** (Jas. 5:15). We can keep going with a multitude of such ***“one another”*** passages, each strengthening the idea that Christians are meant to be together so that they can support and help each other.

One of the most important aspects of our togetherness is that of strengthening each other and lifting each other up in the face of potential discouragements. Encouragement is necessary for edification, and these require ***“one another”*** interactions. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, ***“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing”*** (1 Thess. 5:11). The Hebrews writer is clear on the need for encouragement, especially given the context that there were Christians who were tempted to leave Christ for their old ways.

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Heb. 3:12-14).

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23-25).

These passages show us the importance of patiently encouraging and strengthening one another in faith because there is always a danger of drifting away from the Lord. To that end, God has given His people the gift of each other, and this is not to be taken lightly or dismissed. Through pride one might like to think, “I don’t need help” and “I can do this on my own,” but the Lord knows us better than that. He built His church so that His people would not be alone and could lean on one another through the good and bad.

Relationships are vital in Christ and God knew what He was doing in His wisdom to create a circumstance in which people must cooperate, work together, love together, and edify one another. This is such a critical aspect of Christianity that John wrote, ***“And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”*** (1 Jn. 4:21).

Let us, therefore, take care of *one another* and never neglect this special gift that is so integral to being His church. ■

“And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Revelation 14:6-7, KJV).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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