

In Spirit and Truth

by Rick Brumback

What general components are involved in worship? Of course, there must be an object of devotion or worship, and there must be an attitude and state of mind from the supplicant to the object of worship. Many objects of worship have been honored through the centuries. Surely this is because people have always been able to look about them and observe that the universe must have a creator. People have worshipped the sun, moon, stars, seasons, trees, animals, and so many elements of nature. In this process they have neglected the true Creator, but they see the evidence that someone greater has crafted all that is; the psalmist mentions this evidence in Psalm 19: 1-6.

Different religions demand different activities by the supplicants. Prayer is often involved, some giving, maybe singing or observance of special times. Some are required to make pilgrimages, while others are expected to offer sacrifices. In the past, human sacrifices were offered. Monks have engaged in self-flagellation or lived in very austere conditions because they thought it would bring them nearer to their gods. But contemplating what others have done in the name of religion reminds us that we want to worship the right God, have the right attitude and state of mind, and worship in the right activities.

The term "worship" is translated from a term literally meaning "to kiss towards." Worship carries with it the idea of reverence or a feeling of unworthiness expressed to someone or something judged or esteemed worthy. The term itself is derived from "worthship," pointing to the worth attached to the object of our worship.

As children of the Most High, we worship the Creator of the universe, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If we take ancient Israel as an example, and this is a good start, we can see that they had very elaborate forms of worship. They had a special place, special days, special activities, special clothing, etc. Of utmost importance is the fact that God determined these specifics.

So we step into the Christian era. Does God give any specifics about how He is to be worshiped in this age? Given His previous desires we might expect "yes," and that would be exactly correct. Some might wonder if there are special places to worship. When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman in John 4, she noted that the Jews and Samaritans both had particular locations associated with their worship. But

the Messiah pointed to a future age, the Christian age, where there would be no specifically assigned location. Jesus also pointed to two elements so crucial to our approaching God to worship: attitude/ spirit and truth (John 4:24). What we do in our devotion to God and the attitude with which we act matter to the Almighty

One of the great things about the New Testament is that it not only gives us direct instruction, but it also preserves "snapshots" of the early church that reveal the church in action in light of its instruction by God. We see the early church gathering on the first day of the week to worship (Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10). Are there specific activities in which the church engaged? Yes. We are shown images of the early church engaged in a number of worship activities.

- a. Giving (1 Cor. 16:1,2; Phil. 4:18)
- b. Preaching and teaching (Acts 20:7ff)
- c. Singing (Heb. 13:13; 2:12)
- d. Praying (Acts 12:12)
- e. Communion (Acts 20:7; 2:42)

What is important to note is that each of these activities in which the early church engaged were directed and regulated by God. Just as in the old system, the Creator has indicated how He should be worshiped by the creation. Our willingness to accept His direction allows us to embrace His truth coupled with our submissive, loving spirit. It is possible for some to go off in another direction. Jesus identifies that it is possible to engage in activities called "worship" that God does not respect (Matt. 15:9). Paul mentions that some are determined to have their own desires reflected in their worship practices. This is called "will worship" (Col. 2:23). This is "worship one devises and prescribes for self contrary to the faith." (Thayer, s.v.).

Our aim instead is to practice what the Lord directs, knowing our highest aim is to please Him with all we do and say. What is at the heart of this discussion is how we, a part of God's creation, can come before Him appropriately, exalting Him in ways that are meaningful to Him. Because of our respect for Him, and knowing our standing in His sight, it is right for us to seek His counsel, to approach Him in a manner He has deemed acceptable, and to do so in loving humility. Involved in our worship are the attitude and content found at the heart of our expression of devotion and praise (John 4:24).