

## BODY LANGUAGE

The life of the disciple is a continuous offering to God. Such a living sacrifice is incessant worship. Some actions are performed directly to God, such as our formal worship, while others are services to our fellowman which are accounted by Jesus as unto him. All of our communications with God, such as prayer and praise, are worship whether such devotion is private, with others, or in an assembly. Worship in spirit is in the heart but it is communicated by word and action.

Language is a means of communication with God. Much of the meaning of our verbal communication is expressed beyond words in what we call body language. Through bodily posture, motion, countenance, and gesture, we express feelings of the heart which words may fail to reveal. In fact, true body language may betray the falsity of our words. This body language, expressing the feelings of the inward person, also becomes worship along with the verbal utterances which it accompanies, enhances, and enriches.

There are numerous examples of people expressing praise beyond words. As Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on the donkey, the people spread their coats and leafy branches before him in worshipful gesture and rejoiced, praising "with loud voice." Zechariah, foreseeing this event, declared that they should shout aloud. Plain words could not express the feeling adequately without the shouting and demonstrations.

Perhaps, Mary was too timid to tell Jesus that she loved him, for there is no record of her doing so, but she worshipped him by her emotional action of anointing. So it was also with the sinful woman who washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair in worshipful adoration.

Numerous instructions would have us involve body language. Jesus told us that, when persecuted, we should rejoice and leap for joy. The bodily presence of the elders in the sickroom, along with the anointing and laying on of hands, is an unheard speech which adds to their prayer. The holy kiss and the veil, clothing, and hairdo of the woman all carry bodily messages.

One may not know what to say to the dying, the bereaved, or the distressed, but his or her presence speaks a comforting message. The embrace, kiss, handshake, and touch convey feelings louder than words. The emotions of the prodigal's father were communicated by his hugging, kissing, and celebrating with a feast, including music and dancing, in addition to his words. In our assemblies, the bodily presence and cheering countenance of each person is strengthening to the others.

Emotional body language is called for by Paul when he exhorts us to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice. Such feelings may bring forth sadness and tears or smiles, laughter, singing, leaping, exultation, and dancing. Like the lame man whom Peter healed, we may find ourselves "walking and leaping and praising God" with body language joyously expressing our praise.

The Corinthian disciples said "amen" to voice their approval. Such a meaning of approval is also expressed bodily by nodding, clapping, standing ovation, laying on of hands, and shaking hands.

Prayer is a form of worship, and so is the bodily posture which expresses submission, reverence, and adoration, whether it be bowing the head, standing, kneeling, falling prostrate, looking heavenward, or lifting up of hands. None of these postures is of value if it does not express worshipful feelings of the individual. They must reveal the spirit. The posture that best expresses for one person may not convey the sentiment of another.

Intensity of emotion and dedication may bring forth a sad countenance, downcast eyes, fasting, shouting, leaping, dancing, clapping, cheering, singing, or even the cutting (shearing) of the hair as in Paul's case once. Entering into the spirit of the singing, one may pat his foot or pulse rhythm with the hand. The preacher, intent with his message, may pace, gesture, pound the pulpit, and speak very loudly. His body language becomes a part of his message. If preaching is an action of worship, so must this unspoken part of it be worship also. If singing is worship, so must be all of the body language that is involved in the expression of the worshipful sentiments of the spirit.

A person may perform rituals of worship while his or her body language falsifies the words being uttered. Even in worship, haughty eyes and the condescending look, like the praying Pharisee displayed, convey an attitude that God hates. The richness of dress which puts to shame the poor and speaks of outdoing others in finery is immodest to the Lord. It humiliates those who have not. Such dress speaks the language of haughtiness and selfishness. To copy the styles of the immoral, as the women in Corinth were doing, identifies the woman with the immoral through unspoken communication.

In our serving today there is need of awareness of the power in physical expressions in order that we may employ them effectively in our service and worship.

The person who tries to limit us to five actions of worship is always faced with the problem of defining exactly what is included or excluded in those procedures. When defining worship to be in certain lawfully detailed formal exercises, one necessarily limits worship to a segment of the life. The whole-life, living offering concept, which Paul specifies, cannot be harmonized with the concept of worship being limited to certain activities at certain times.

Worship is not just formal actions, but it is an expression of the sentiment of the heart. Body language, with all its nuances, can communicate the mood and sentiment of the worshipper. Surely, all persons do not express adoring, prayerful, and exulting feelings in the same manner. Paul would neither bind nor prohibit prophesying and tongue speaking, but he would not permit prophets and tongue speakers to be disruptive in the assemblies, and we may look at body language from the same perspective. []

This is Chapter 6 of "Free As Sons."

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