

More Questions about Worship

Many profitable studies about worship have been made lately. That is good, for we have lacked definition in our understanding of its nature. Perhaps, if I had read all those researches, I would have all the answers. But I am still asking impertinent questions and pestering you with them.

Does God desire praise? A foolish question! Well, why does He delight in praise? In answering this, let us not think of God as being like ourselves with pride, self-image problems, feelings of insecurity, emotional inadequacy, or depression. Do you suppose that his seeing masses of people in awe feeds his pride? Is it possible that he has an egotistical craving that is satisfied by hearing our songs of adoration? Is his status more secure when the multitudes bow in prayer to him? Do our cheerful songs lift him from depression? Does our performing of prescribed rituals reinforce his sense of majesty and power? What is your concept of the God we worship?

Lessons concerning worship tend to involve more ancient and awesome concepts of God than the New Covenant depictions of a caring Father. Is Jesus presented to us as a deity demanding abjection before himself? Jesus accepted gestures of reverence, homage, and worship, but he did not demand them of any who approached him. He did not require his disciples to prostrate themselves and sing praise to himself in a devotional each morning. Worship is voluntary expression of reverence and thanksgiving. If it is compelled, is it really praise?

The Almighty wants us to worship him "for such the Father seeks to worship him" (John 4:23). Does that mean that he is seeking us out demanding, "Sing to me! pray adoringly to me, and shout 'Praise the Lord' to me at appropriate times!"? The context to the reference above indicates that both Jew and Samaritan were already worshipping him; now he desires that it be modified so that it is in spirit and in truth. He wants a different kind of worship. Why?

It is not that he wishes to be "kissed toward" (*proskuneo*) to give him a divine delight, but that he is concerned by the alienation of people. He wants evidence of our proper respect and recognition of him. He wants people to show devotion to himself without reference to localities and typical Mosaic offerings but in a spiritual realization of a relationship with divinity in spirit and in truth. In this manner man is brought into a reconciled relationship. Isn't that why he wants worshippers?

Is the Object of our adoration and homage more concerned with our *proskuneo* or our *latreuo*? Another foolish question? Those are two Greek words for worship. *Proskuneo*, to make obeisance, do reverence to, is the word most frequently rendered to worship (Vine). *Latreuo*, to serve, to render religious service or homage, is translated variously as to worship and to serve.

God's concern is the saving of man, and he enlists our help in saving one another. Through lives dedicated to worship and service, or more accurately worship/service, that is done. It involves two facets of worship: (1) communication with God (*proskuneo*), and (2) serving one another, by which means we serve (*latreuo*) him. Putting it in another perspective, it means loving both God and man demonstratively.

These two elements cannot be totally independent of each other. For his holy ones there is no dichotomy of the moral and the spiritual, the secular and the religious, service and worship, or the good deeds to our fellowman and offerings to God. Efforts to compartmentalize our lives are frustrating.

Our sacrifice (offering) to God is self, not certain portions of self in a segmented life given at certain times and places. All that we are and have are holy, devoted to the Lord, given to him as a living sacrifice/service/worship (Rom. 12:1f). Acting as both a priest and a sacrifice, we lay ourselves on the altar in our conversion, and continually thereafter. Our *latreuo* is in serving human needs, both ours and those of others, which is an extension of worship that God calls us to do. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). Our sacrifice is one of praise, both in direct communication with God and in manner of life. We cannot offer meritorious sacrifices, but "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name" (Heb. 13:15). The heart and life are to be consistent with the fruit of our lips, as verse 16 urges.

In a more specific manner worship may be through prayers and hymns directed to God. But feeding and bathing the baby should also be an offering to God. These actions all emanate from the same whole-life offering and are both actions intended to glorify him in every thought and deed of our God-conscious lives. Really, I think that the Lord may be more concerned with our nurturing the child than our offering words of praise to him. He may prefer our singing spiritual songs to the child than to him. The child needs them; God doesn't. Both are in order, however, as expressions of dedication and praise.

Am I being irreverent in these assertions? There is validity in them. We do not assemble in order to worship and serve properly. We who worship and serve as a way of life gather at times to do these things together in programs for mutual edification. Assemblies are for the good of man, not God. God has no needs! (Or do his desires indicate an emotional need?) Their primary purpose is horizontal in up-building through songs, prayers, teaching, praise, reaffirmation in Communion, and association. Even a collection is for man's welfare. That does not eliminate the vertical element of praise for that also uplifts man, intensifies his sense of God's presence, makes him humble, and reinforces his faith. Otherwise, would not our praise be to gain points with God? Or can a child give pleasure to the father without thought of gaining favor?

So we ask: Is worship an effort to please the Lord? Another foolish question? If so, then how much of what actions suffice in gaining his approval? Must we stress ourselves in extensive activities of praise to gain favor? Would that not become approval gained by actions of merit? Is praise a commending of ourselves to God? Or is it not a response to the favor he has already shown us? Is it the attitude or the ritual that pleases God? It is better to have both. As an illustration in weighing attitude and performance, was not the medieval Catholic believer who was so awed by "Christian" superstitions praising God by proper attitude even though he was misdirected about his rituals?

There are questions in my contorted mind yet. May we "improve our worship" by such things as rehearsing songs and sermons for better performance? Is the artistic rendition impressing God or man, or both? If improvement in the technique is better praise, does that not become meritorious? Does she who sings best praise best? God hears and observes while we practice singing a hymn (often in mirth). Do we then flip a switch at the proper time so that it goes out as solemn worship? Is the rehearsal secular and the performance spiritual? Or, could it be that practice is *latreuo* (service) while the rendition is

proskuneo (worship)? Or, are both the rehearsal and the exhibition exercises intentionally honoring God in all that we do? Viewing it from any perspective, if the poetically extravagant expressions exceed the feelings of the heart, is it acceptable worship? Does God enjoy flattery?

The questions continue to bubble up. Is singing praise worship? Is a recording of it praise? Is listening to the recording worship? What about getting a copyright on praise and selling it? May singing hymns be a kind of entertainment? Is Amy Grant, or a paid song leader, a professional worshiper?

Is preaching worship? Then is writing and publishing messages worship? Is listening to a recording, or reading the published word, worship? May our edifying messages be copyrighted, restricted, and sold for profit since we worship/serve through them?

Let's consider all the acts of worship/service together, whether they be singing, preaching, writing, visiting the widows and orphans, or any others. May they be professionalized with our services being bought and sold?

Our Maker loved us enough to send His Son to bring us to him. We are invited to come to him in boldness, without fear, shame, or timidity. There we are accepted and honored to sit at his table of provision as his friends and sons. His very Spirit lives within us. Nothing can separate us from his love. We come to him rejoicing and we live in him in continual praise.

Does the Lord then delight in the prostrate body, the abject mind, the wretchedness of soul, the broken and contrite heart, the trembling fear before him, the groveling supplicant?

The alienation of the rebellious grieves God. So he may be pleased to see these attitudes work to bring a soul back to him in penitence. The broken and contrite heart will not be considered lightly (Psa. 51:17). But does he want one to continue in such a wretched state of mind? He welcomes that one to share the joy of salvation. The response will be joyful adoration and service, not for God's benefit but for our own.

One more question and I will leave you in peace. What about lapses in our holiness? What about selfish moments, indulgent gaps, and times of inattention? Our intentions are for total dedication, but we stumble. God knows our frailties. Only he can make us perfect, and he doesn't do that. He credits Jesus' perfection to our account. His dedicated ones are cleansed from all sin. Jesus lifts us up to the Father as perfected offerings of praise.

I have asked many questions. Some answers have been suggested for further weighing. Other questions I leave for your continued pondering.