

PRAISE
AND
WORSHIP

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Bracketed comments following some scriptures assist the reader in understanding the intended meaning of these verses

We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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PRAISE AND WORSHIP

In some Christian circles today, there is a strong emphasis on praise and worship. However, often there is a lack of understanding concerning the purpose of praise and its place in the Christian walk. This brief teaching on “praise and worship” outlines what the scriptures declare true praise to be and what the Christian can expect as they seek to worship God “*in spirit and in truth*”, as John 4:23-24 tells us to do.

Background Reading: Psalm 111

Let's begin by turning to Deuteronomy 32:3-4.

DEUTERONOMY 32:3 . . . I will publish (proclaim) the Name of the Lord: ascribe greatness unto our God.

DEUTERONOMY 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgement (just): a God of truth (faithfulness) and without iniquity (injustice), just (righteous) and right (upright) is He.

These scriptures are part of a song which Moses recited in the presence of all Israel. Through the words of this song, Moses declares the greatness and magnitude of our God. He proclaims that God is “*the Rock*,” a term which denotes a place of refuge and strength. He states that everything our Lord does is perfect and honourable, for He is a God of truth and His integrity is beyond question. He is faithful to all His promises for He cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). Therefore we can rely on God implicitly and take Him at His Word.

Notice that in describing the greatness of God, Moses did not do so by proclaiming His immensity and immortality, or by describing the brightness of His glory. Rather he spoke in relation to God's character - His faithfulness to His Word, the perfection of His works, and the wisdom of all His judgements. In all these areas, God's integrity and faithfulness shine clearly to all.

“ . . . Everything our Lord does is perfect and honourable, for He is a God of truth and His integrity is beyond question. . . ”

Let's turn to Psalm 33 which speaks of God's goodness and power, and shows us why He is worthy of praise:

PSALM 33:1 Rejoice (here means “shout for joy”) in the Lord, O ye righteous: for praise is comely (becoming and appropriate) for the upright.

PSALM 33:2 Praise the Lord with harp: sing unto Him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings.

PSALM 33:3 Sing unto Him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.

PSALM 33:4 For the Word of the Lord is right (absolutely true); and all His works are done in truth.

PSALM 33:5 He loves righteousness and judgement (justice): the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord.

Israel was exhorted to offer up praise which was loud, both vocally and musically, to the Lord of creation, the Lord of glory. They were to make “a loud noise,” praising their God Whom the scriptures show to be worthy to receive all praise, worship, honour and glory (Revelation 5:9-14). The theme of praising and worshipping God is prominent throughout the Bible but is found especially in the Book of Psalms.

DEFINITION OF PRAISE AND WORSHIP

The words “praise” “thanksgiving” and “worship” are linked very closely and at times can be synonymous. Generally, however, “praise” is an utterance whereas “worship” is primarily an attitude of heart. We praise God with our voices, magnifying Him and exalting His Name. We praise Him vocally for Who He is and we celebrate

His great love for us. “Thanksgiving” is closely related to praise and is also an utterance, for we thank God audibly for what He has done. We enter His gates with thanksgiving and then proceed into His courts with praise (Psalm 100:4). Both of these expressions are usually vocal, audible, noisy, obvious, etc. “Worship,” however, is an attitude of the heart and can at times be expressed without vocal or physical evidence. Others will see when we are praising God, but only the Father knows when we are truly worshipping. As such, worship is concerned with awe, reverence and devotion.

***“...Others will see when we are praising
God, but only the Father knows when we
are truly worshipping. . .”***

The Greek word “to worship” (“proskuneo”) also means “to make obeisance” (to bow respectfully), “to pay homage” etc. It denotes an act of reverence, stresses the feeling of awe or devotion, and includes the giving of honour.

The English word “worship” is derived from the word “worthship” and denotes the worthiness of the individual receiving this special honour. And this is particularly so in regard to God.

The word “hallelujah” is a universal term and is frequently used in relation to worshipping God. It is simply the Hebrew equivalent of “praise ye the Lord.” The Bible frequently speaks of praising the Lord, meaning that He is to be praised for all He is and has revealed Himself to be. Praise usually precedes and prepares us for worship, and can be viewed as the gateway through which we enter into God’s courts. But worship takes us into the throneroom of grace, into the very presence of God.

We can praise God at any time or place by acknowledging His greatness and giving Him glory. However to come to a place where we can worship God requires reverence, time and a mind free from distractions. As we have said, praise and thanksgiving can provide the springboard from which we can enter into true worship - and true worship ushers in a real intimacy between the worshipper and God. In true worship we can touch the heart of God and communicate with

Him in a song of love which flows between us and our Heavenly Father.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP AS A LIFESTYLE FOR THE CHRISTIAN

Background Reading: Psalm 100

A reason for the emphasis on praise and worship throughout scripture is that man was created to worship his Maker. Originally, when God created man, Adam and Eve were meant to forever be partakers of His Divine Nature. With this empowerment energizing their minds and hearts, Adam and Eve would have had a genuine desire to praise and worship God and to serve Him wholeheartedly. The Divine Nature would have ordered their thoughts and desires through the passion it produces within for truth, justice and love. Due to the Fall, however, the desire to worship God (and to serve Him) has been corrupted and perverted to varying degrees across different cultures. Some cultures worship their ancestors, others worship and hold fast to the sacredness of the natural creation, others pay homage to evil spiritual beings and actively seek to gain empowerment through them.

Even those in the secular world will find something to worship, for this is how we have been designed. Some will worship their family, others their bank account, their material possessions or their sport, all of which are really extensions of themselves.

“. . .Due to the Fall, however, the desire to worship God (and to serve Him) has been corrupted and perverted to varying degrees across different cultures. . .”

Any form of idolatry, which is to worship something in place of God, is a corruption of the true need in man to worship his Creator, that being God, our Heavenly Father. If man does not worship God, he will find a substitute for his true need - even if it doesn't appear obvious. However as Christians we can praise God that through regeneration, our spirits are surrounded by God's saving presence

and we are set free to begin to worship God as we were originally intended to do.

Some Christians retain inhibitions relating to self-consciousness and embarrassment which have sprung from their upbringing or culture, while others may be held back by bondages such as fear, pride or intellectualism. Such things hinder the outward expression of praise and even the ability of the Christian to enter into worship. When this is the case, these bondages need to be acknowledged and dealt with, by seeking God's grace and empowerment, so that the Christian concerned can worship God freely with their whole being. Through Jesus, we can learn to express ourselves freely, in spirit, soul and body, and to come before the Lord without embarrassment or inhibition.

The praise and worship of God is meant to be a significant part of the Christian life, on both personal and corporate levels. Unfortunately, many Christians tend to restrict worship to what happens at church on Sundays and so miss out on the benefits which praise and worship provide if they are entered into on a daily basis. Indeed part of our daily prayer life should concentrate purely on God Himself. We can praise and worship Him and declare our love for Him, remembering His greatness, power, majesty, sovereignty, love, grace and mercy, etc. We should be liberal in our praise which He so richly deserves, and express our love for Him. True praise and worship, energized by the graces and energies of the Divine Nature, can help unlock doors to a deeper fellowship with, and a greater love for the Lord - and we can, in this way, experience His presence in our lives in a greater way. Another of the benefits of taking time to worship the Lord on a daily basis during our quiet-time is that we will be preparing ourselves to enter more fully into corporate worship on Sundays. This is another blessing that God has given to Believers - to be able to corporately come together to give praise and to worship in the power of the Spirit as a unified group. In this God commands a blessing that is different to the blessing we gain from individual praise and worship (Psalm 133). What can we say except that it is a different experience when this happens.

***“...True praise and worship, energized
by the graces and energies of the Divine
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greater love for the Lord. . .”***

The Book of Hebrews tells us:

HEBREWS 13:15 By Him (through Jesus) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name.

This means we are to be conscious of our God on a daily, hourly basis, and to be offering up praise to Him in faith, from grateful, humble hearts.

Indeed praise should be a natural response of the heart - for the Lord saw our plight and reached down to provide for us and to pluck us from destruction and eternal damnation. He gave first, and we should naturally respond to His love and His care with praise and gratitude, being now connected through the Divine Plan of Redemption to our Creator, and in living relationship with Him. We express ourselves in this relationship as we tell the Lord how much we love Him and how thankful we are for all He has done for us. This includes expressions of adoration, praise and thankfulness.

In this way, as we respond personally to the Lord, we can gain more insight into the magnitude of His love, and grow in our relationship with Him. It is possible for every Christian to relate on an intimate level to the Lord and to enjoy the special bond that He has with all of His children. We can see from all this just how vital praise and worship is to the Christian walk, for it is a means by which we can open up to the Lord and communicate with Him on an intimate level.

Therefore our whole Christian life should be devoted, in both word and deed, to the praise and glory of God. All this should come as a response to His great love and mercy which has been so freely given to us. Through yielded committed lives lived in the power of the Divine Nature, this praise becomes holy praise, acceptable to God.

HOW ARE WE TO WORSHIP ?

In John 4:23-24 Jesus stated that the Father desires His people to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Indeed, we see from scripture that the Father is actually seeking those who can do so:

JOHN 4:23 But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

JOHN 4:24 God is a Spirit (a spirit being): and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (man worships the Lord through and by his personal spirit, which is moved upon by the Holy Spirit; otherwise it is not worship which God will accept : E.S.B.).

If men seek to worship God with little truth, but chase only after signs and manifestations (physical evidences of God's presence), then excesses will be the order of the day. And very, very little true worship will take place, because the scriptures tell us that in order to worship properly, TRUE worshippers (John 4:23) . . . MUST (John 4:24) worship Him in spirit and in truth."

***“ . . . Through yielded committed lives
lived in the power of the Divine Nature,
this praise becomes holy praise,
acceptable to God. . . ”***

We are told in John 4:23 that “*the Father seeks such to worship Him.*” Sadly it would seem to appear that “*such*” are not easily found.

God is not looking for “holy worship” but rather “holy worshippers.”

To worship God in spirit and in truth requires two necessary conditions to be met. Firstly we must have a sincere love for God and His will. Secondly we must have faith in God and His Word.

And to be real, in a spiritual sense, both of these conditions require the graces and energies of the Divine Nature to be energizing our human nature. Only when all these conditions are fulfilled can we worship God in spirit and in truth.

Calvary gave to man the graces to worship God “*in spirit and in truth*.” Before this, worship was reduced by necessity to ceremonies and rituals because no one was “regenerated” in spirit, and so man could not worship God with a “spirit” worship that God could accept. But after Calvary things changed. Regenerated man worships God by his own spirit as his human nature is energized by the Holy Spirit. Thus it is only through God Himself that we are able to offer up the spiritual sacrifice of worship, once again showing our complete dependence on God for anything and everything of a spiritual nature in our daily life.

Simply said, it is man’s own spirit which is energized by the Holy Spirit. In other words it is when, for the purposes of worship, the Saint partakes of the graces and energies of the Divine Nature, that this then enables that person to worship “*in spirit*” as well as “*in truth*.”

So true worship can only take place when we have:

(a) True love for God and His will - which can only come through the Divine Nature, as man yields to God and flows with Him.

(b) Faith in God and His Word - which can only be developed as the Divine Nature energizes man to both believe and trust.

As stated, “*in spirit*” refers to a man’s spirit being moved and motivated for the purpose of worship by the Holy Spirit through the empowerment of the Divine Nature. “*In truth*” refers to a man worshipping God according to his knowledge of the Word of God which has been written by the finger of God on his heart.

“. . . Calvary gave to man the graces to worship God “in spirit and in truth.” Before this, worship was reduced by necessity to ceremonies and rituals. . .”

The Believer cannot properly worship the Lord except by the energies and graces of the Divine Nature, and the truth given and written on the *“fleshy tables of the heart”* (2 Corinthians 3:3). Therefore we understand that worship cannot just be *“in spirit”* - it must be *“in spirit and in truth.”* Only through prayer (which results in constant communication) and study (which includes hearing the Word via preaching and teaching) can a Believer come to the place of “truth revealed.”

Also, just having access to the Divine Nature will not bring us to the place of worship. We need to become one with His very Nature by yielding to the Holy Spirit. This will bring us to a conditional or experiential level of empowerment. As we do this, we will then be able to truly praise and worship God, flowing with the energies of the Divine Nature.

So in order for true worship to take place, there has to be heart-knowledge of God, true faith in Him and His Word, a humble walk before Him, an attitude of reverence, and commitment to His will. All this, of course, begins with the knowledge of the Cross. Then as our hearts respond, physical gestures will also follow. Such gestures include singing, speaking to the Lord silently or audibly, kneeling, raising our hands, etc. If these gestures are made without a proper heart attitude, they will be empty and so will not constitute true worship - for the outward actions which form part of our worship cannot be a substitute for the vital inner core of faith and love. Such “praise” and “worship” will not be acceptable to God - He will not receive it or even hear it.

Let's turn to Psalm 47:

PSALM 47:6 Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.

PSALM 47:7 For God is the King of all the earth: sing praises with understanding.

To “sing praises with understanding” means to have a heart belief which accompanies the confession of our mouths. It means that we are to be sincere concerning the words we are singing. If we simply become absorbed by the melody, we will not be praising with understanding. We thus need to be concerned more with what we are singing than the music itself, but like a marriage the two can complement each other, or give an atmosphere in which the head of the union, that being truth, has its rightful place.

“...The outward actions which form part of our worship cannot be a substitute for the vital inner core of faith and love. . .”

Knowledge from the Spirit written on our minds and hearts will enable us to focus our God-given faith on the proper object, that being truth. But all knowledge must be anchored at the Cross - us identified in the death of Christ, and then us in Christ and His Resurrection. We must know that the Atonement has given us freedom in the knowledge of this truth. Christ and His finished work at the Cross must always be central to our praise and worship, for every grace proceeds from it.

In Ephesians 5:19-20, we are encouraged to be living our daily lives in an attitude of praise, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.

EPHESIANS 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in (possibly means in speaking to one another; use the words of) psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart (the seat of worship) to the Lord;

EPHESIANS 5:20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ

It is by a life of righteousness as well as by the words of our mouths that we are to praise God. And we can praise and worship

God in both public and private arenas. Praise and worship can be expressed in the form of direct address - such as adoration or thanksgiving. But worship can also be a response of the heart without any verbal or physical expression. As we have learned, praise is usually seen and heard, but worship is more intimate and may not always be evident to the onlooker.

TITHING SHOULD BE AN ACT OF WORSHIP

Background Reading: Deuteronomy 12:5-12

Tithing should be an expression of thankfulness to God Who has redeemed us at such a great cost and Whom we acknowledge as our eternal Provider. The giving of tithes and offerings also carries with it the idea of commitment and dedication, and should be an expression of our devotion to, our faith in, and our love for our Creator. As we know, tithing is actually an act of worship, a means by which we can glorify God. As such it assumes much greater importance than the mere throwing of \$10 onto the offering plate in a casual way on Sundays.

Let's turn to Proverbs 3:9:

***PROVERBS 3:9 Honour the Lord with your substance,
and with the firstfruits of all your increase:***

***PROVERBS 3:10 So shall your barns be filled with
plenty, and your presses shall burst out with new wine
(you will not lack).***

“honour the Lord with your substance”

The word “*honour*” in this context means “to glorify” or “to worship.” So this scripture establishes the fact that tithing is an act of worship.

Therefore, as we give to the Lord from the substance that He has already given us, and we give in an attitude of wanting to please Him, our giving, as we have said, becomes an act of worship.

Scripture shows that the two elements of worship and gratitude were an integral part of the way the children of Israel were to give their gifts to the Lord.

***“...Tithing is actually an act of worship,
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importance than the mere throwing of
\$10 onto the offering plate. . .”***

Note: As we have said, only after Calvary did the grace become available for man to worship God “*in spirit and in truth.*” Before Calvary, man could not worship God with his spirit energized by the Holy Spirit because man’s spirit was darkened and unregenerated. Nevertheless, the Old Testament Saints were commanded to worship God and did so according to the Mosaic Law. Grace was given to them to worship God in a limited way. This worship was acceptable to God because it was all that could be offered at the time. God could not truly fellowship with fallen man, which included Israel. The blood of bulls and goats did cover their sin in a legal sense, as a precursor of Calvary, and allowed the people to worship God in an acceptable way according to the Law of the Old Covenant. This connected them to Calvary and the Blood which would later flow backwards to cleanse their sin properly and completely.

In Genesis 28:18-22 Jacob took a stone, anointed it with oil and set it up as an altar to the Lord. Then Jacob worshipped the Lord and vowed that he would give Him a tenth of all that the Lord would give him.

Deuteronomy 12:5-7 and 11-12 speak about the time when the people of Israel were instructed to come together to present their tithes and offerings etc., to the Lord. These verses tell us that this was to be a joyous occasion and a time of celebration. Also, the principle we learned in Deuteronomy 26:4 was that the priest brought the firstfruits of the people’s produce and set it down before the Lord. The people were then to worship the Lord and rejoice because of every good thing which the Lord had given them.

DEUTERONOMY 26:10 And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which You, O Lord, have given me. And you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God

DEUTERONOMY 26:11 And you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given unto you, and unto your house, you, and the Levite, and the stranger who is among you.

We can clearly see that the correct giving of tithes and offerings is an important part of worshipping our God, both then and now, and we should rejoice that we can do so. We should consider it a privilege to give to God and to worship Him in this way, but again, as we have seen, only through the grace of the Divine Nature can this take place in the truest sense.

Not to tithe:

1. Is to disobey God's commands, i.e. to “*bring all the tithes into the storehouse*” (Malachi 3:10). This was commanded under the Law of Moses, but the Law simply served, in this case, to give form and procedure to that which was already being practised. Tithing, as we know, originated well before the Law. Abraham tithed 400 years before Moses was given the Law, as did Jacob.

2. Constitutes a lack of worship: Take for example the Christian who sings God's praises in order to worship Him, yet does not tithe. This Christian's so-called worship is empty and so goes downward and never upward to be received by heaven. Because his worship is shallow and lacks both faith and commitment, he will never walk closely with God but will be merely a Christian spectator, walking alone in this life in these areas of unbelief.

“...This Christian's so-called worship is empty and so goes downward and never upward to be received by heaven. . .”

Not to tithe actually constitutes incomplete worship - which means the Christian's so-called “worship” is not as it should be. To give tithes and offerings is designed by the Lord to be an integral part of our worship. In other words, it is vital and therefore essential to the completeness of our worship. Without this integral

component, our so-called worship will not rise to heaven but will fall to the ground because it lacks substance. Unfortunately the absence of tithing shows a lack of commitment to God and His Word, and our praise, as a result, will be empty.

Note: On the other hand, a Christian who willingly gives his tithes to God but never grows in the graces of God's love and truth will also offer up worship which is empty. This is because even though he has a positional relationship, he is not walking in it in an experiential sense!

The Christian is a priest unto God, and everything we do should demonstrate this - but only through God's graces can we function truly in this role. Tithing should be an act of worship, but only in and through Christ is this possible. We must therefore give as the Holy Spirit directs. We must tithe God's way - where we are being spiritually fed, from a heart of faith and love:

MALACHI 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me. But you say, "Wherein have we robbed You?" (And the answer comes back) In tithes and offerings.

MALACHI 3:9 (Because of this) You are cursed with a curse: for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation.

Now from Malachi 3:8, 9 we see God saying to His people, both then and now, that those who do not tithe are actually stealing from Him. Then He goes on to say clearly that those who do not tithe are cursed. What does this mean?

It means that he who does not tithe will frustrate God's grace (Galatians 2:21) and so block God's help from being received in many areas of his life. Certainly the Christian's relationship with the Lord will be affected. People who do not tithe will not be trusting God to provide for them on a natural level. Mistrust will then lead to unbelief in this area, and this will spread to many other areas of people's lives.

If tithing is meant to be one of the ways in which Christians worship God, and you do not tithe, then simply put, you cannot be worshipping as you should, certainly not *"in spirit and in truth"*

(John 4:23-24). As we have said, without tithing and truth, or truth and tithing, we cannot enter into the proper worship that the Father desires from us.

“ . . . If tithing is meant to be one of the ways in which Christians worship God, and you do not tithe, then simply put, you cannot be worshipping as you should. . . ”

The hour has come in this New Testament age to walk with God and to be true worshippers - not just those who are glad to have escaped from their dark prison, and from their gladness to thank God. No, God is looking for Christians to go beyond escapism and to enter into experiential relationship. Let us therefore seek to worship God not just out of gladness but rather real, daily relationship that would also cause us to walk with Him, our Lord and Saviour, in His power and might. Without seeking truth you will not do it, and without tithing you will not do it.

We as God's kids must find Him so as to walk with Him experientially, day by day. Yes we have found His Son Jesus, for without the Lord in our lives we would not be saved. But now the Holy Spirit is calling us into truth, power and love. To be led in this way must begin with our hand in Jesus' hand, then the reading, studying and hearing of His Word. For faith to be developed in us we must hear His Word, for this is how faith comes (Romans 10:17). Only by His truth can we grow into a person of faith and love, so essential if we are to worship our God in spirit and in truth:

JOHN 4:23 But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

For true worship to take place, man must allow the Holy Spirit to empower and move his very being, his inner man. Scripture shows us that this is the only type of worship that God will accept, and therefore receive, as true worship. In this is experiential relationship and the true giving of oneself to the Lord at the deepest level. This is

love, expressed in worship, for the Giver of all that is good, even life itself.

Only as we allow Jesus to be Lord in our lives can God accept anything from us, even our worship. So let us give our tithes and offerings to our High Priest, Jesus Christ, so that we may please the Father and Giver of life through our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL FELLOWSHIP

Background Reading: 1 John 1:1-7

When we come together to worship God on a corporate level, our vertical fellowship with Him needs to be ongoing and vital. The development of our vertical fellowship is best served through us coming before Him in our quiet-times on a daily basis to pray, to praise and worship Him, to confess our sins and to hear His voice. However if we are to effectively enter into corporate praise and worship, then our horizontal relationships with our fellow Believers also need to be right. We should have an attitude of wanting to break down barriers for the purpose of embracing our horizontal relationships and fellowship with fellow Believers. As we work on breaking down any barriers which may exist between us and other Christians, through forgiveness and seeking God's grace to handle difficult situations, our ability to worship will be enhanced and vice versa.

Once these two aspects of vertical and horizontal fellowship are in order, we can join together with fellow Believers as one in love and truth in the power of God. **This is called the unity of the Spirit.** When we enter into corporate worship from this position, we will be able, potentially, to enter into a different level of worship than is generally possible on an individual basis. This of course is achieved through the corporate Anointing of God - for where brethren dwell together in unity, the Lord commands a blessing (Psalm 133:1-3), that being His Anointing, His corporate presence.

Know that it is difficult for Christians to enter into worship on a corporate basis if a particular service is not anointed by God. The Anointing of God gives the proper spiritual atmosphere for worship to take place.

It is the Anointing which actually draws worship from us through the Divine Nature working within us. We could also say that in

worship, we are allowing God to work through us so that we are able to draw close to Him on an intimate level. Only when we yield to the Holy Spirit, focusing on the truths He has taught us and His love for us, is He able to energize our human nature by the graces of His Divine Nature so that we can truly enter into worship.

“ . . . It is the Anointing which actually draws worship from us through the Divine Nature working within us. . . ”

Thus, as we have said, it is only with God's help that we are able to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

ROMANS 6:3 Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ (the baptism spoken of is into Christ and not water (Galatians. 3:27; Ephesians. 4:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13) were baptized into His death?

ROMANS 6:4 Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father (we died with Him, we were buried with Him and we were raised with Him), even so we also should walk in newness of life (the empowerment of the Divine Nature).

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO PRAISE

Though the New Testament does not give any detailed information concerning praise and worship, this aspect of the Believer's life is demonstrated clearly throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms. We find that David was a skilled musician who was able, through the Lord's Anointing, to minister to Saul in music (1 Samuel 16:23). Towards the end of his own rule, David established the music ministry as an official part of the Levites' service to God (1 Chronicles 23:5), commanding that 4,000 out of the 38,000 Levites were to be commissioned solely as singers and musicians. These people were to praise the Lord with instruments and song. Some 288 of these were talented singers (1 Chronicles

25:7 Amp.) and these were divided into groups of 24. For this reason it is believed that there was a 24 hour roster, and that singers and musicians were involved in a continual service of praise in the house of the Lord (1 Chronicles 15:16-29; Psalm 134).

Indeed the ministry of musicians and singers was given particular distinction in David's time, which probably represents the peak period for worship in Israel's history.

The account of Jehoshaphat's enemies being defeated as the people sang praises to God also gives an interesting insight into the importance placed upon the praise and worship of God in the Old Testament (2 Chronicles 20:18-23).

In the New Testament we are exhorted to lift one another up in the faith through psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and to maintain an attitude of praise in our daily lives.

EPHESIANS 5:19 *Speak out to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, offering praise with voices [and instruments], and making melody with all your heart to the Lord, (Amp.)*

COLOSSIANS 3:16 *Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (our songs of worship must proclaim the Word of God, thereby teaching us: E.S.B.), singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (This presents the real purpose of Spirit-Anointed Music, which tells how important music and singing are as it refers to worship: E.S.B.)*

The lifting up of one's hands is a physical expression of praise, when accompanied by a willing and obedient heart of faith and love. It can also be the physical indication of a surrendered spirit. When we raise our hands in praise to God, we are humbling ourselves and we are exalting God and all that He stands for. In doing this, we can become more open to God as we give ourselves to Him in this way. Whether this is done on an individual basis in one's own quiet-time or when Christians gather together on a corporate level, it represents an interaction between the worshipper and God. And there is great blessing to be obtained through true worship - it can even help

people hear God's voice when they have been previously unable to do so.

“...When we raise our hands in praise to God, we are humbling ourselves and we are exalting God and all that He stands for...”

Some may even dance or clap before the Lord - reverence, however, may be the key to remember here. Let all that we do be in accordance with 1 Corinthians 14:40: *“Let all things be done decently and in order (of the service).”*

MUSIC

Background Reading: Psalm 150

Music can play a significant role in preparing people to come to a position where they can praise and worship God. Indeed God is the Author of music, and it could be said that music was created to help people worship God. Our Maker wants to touch us, spirit, soul and body, and music is the ideal way to begin to do this. Music can touch us deep in our emotions, and it will inspire, facilitate and enrich worship.

The singing of Christian songs promotes God's principles of truth, thereby exhorting people to faith. This is one of the reasons churches use hymns, choruses or songs at the commencement of and throughout their services. Choruses and songs give people the opportunity to focus their faith on positive statements, to remember the greatness of God and to come to a position of spiritual openness from which they are able to worship.

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Music can thus perform the function of helping Christians open themselves spiritually so they can both worship God and receive into their hearts the Word of God when it is preached. We should, however, prepare ourselves (mentally and spiritually) before we arrive at church so we can enter into fellowship with the Lord on a corporate level as soon as the service begins. There are then many opportunities during a service to give of ourselves to God and to receive blessings from Him. Unfortunately, many Christians spend more time before going to church and teaching meetings decorating the outer man than preparing their hearts to worship God. However we should always prepare our hearts before we come together so we can praise and worship God in spirit and in truth and be fully involved in every aspect of the service.

ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE SERVICE

The purpose of music during the service is to focus people's attention on God and to draw them into worship.

It is important to realize that music which is harsh, overpowering or very “worldly” will interfere with this process for it will focus people's attention on things other than God, even if it is only the music itself or the musicians.

Certain music will only gratify the flesh and will consequently never be anointed (Galatians 5:17). Certain types of music and also the way the music is presented can also produce “hype” which can create a false emotional (“fleshly”) high rather than a true response of the heart. It must also be remembered that, in order to enter into true worship, the fundamental ingredient of reverence must always be present. Without reverence, one can only give God verbal praise - one cannot enter into the intimacy of worship.

What shows as to whether a particular style of music is of God, quite often, is the long-term fruit which is revealed in the lives of its

advocates. Is it associated with those who desire total surrender to Christ on His terms not theirs? Or is it supported by those with a twisted interpretation of scripture, brought about, at times, by their own bias? The trouble with both the young and the old in the churches is that they all want to be, so-called, “sold out to Jesus” - but on their own terms and according to their own philosophy. These people are deluding themselves because they are living in a false world. Christians, yes, but Believers who do not take up the cross of self-denial and therefore disqualify themselves from the power of the Cross that would liberate them from themselves!

We all need to be seeking God’s will in our lives, and allowing Him to convict us of sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). As we have this resolve, and focus on the Cross, He will, by His very nature in us, energize our human nature so we can praise and worship Him in spirit and truth. But if the music is beyond the scope of decency, how can we expect the Lord to extend His grace to us to do this? Indeed He will not. To be energized means that the Lord’s Nature has been enmeshed with our nature. In this we can truly become one with Christ and so have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5), even in worship.

We believe that praise and worship in song and music will disseminate throughout the Church worldwide in many and varied styles according to culture and even according to age. Indeed there are so many ways in which praise and worship can be expressed. We must therefore allow the Spirit to direct the Saints around the world in accordance with what is acceptable for Him to anoint.

“ . . . What shows as to whether a particular style of music is of God, quite often, is the long-term fruit which is revealed in the lives of its advocates. . . ”

Because of the cultural differences in music and song, what may operate effectively in China may not do so, for instance, in America. There is nothing wrong with this, for the world functions in this way. Cultural differences are not evil or bad, but something which exists and which we must accept in the Body of Christ. Such

differences exist between different Western countries, and even, to some extent, within one's own nation. For example, Believers in churches in the larger cities tend to have different musical tastes to those within small towns. The Church must also tolerate the different musical preferences of the old and the young, provided the expression of these preferences can be anointed by the Spirit of Grace.

In some Christian circles, there is such an overemphasis on music and song that, in some cases, this becomes the main focal point of the service. However music should always be a means to an end, that of drawing people to God and facilitating worship, never an end in itself.

Remember the goal is always to allow the Spirit to anoint the music. This helps the Christian have a heart focus (on truth) and an emotional focus (love for God). The Holy Spirit then empowers us, through the Divine Nature, to worship the Lord in spirit and truth. The Anointing turns that which is natural, i.e. the music, into something which is spiritual and holy. Some styles of music simply will not allow this to take place, for the Spirit will not anoint music which has been corrupted by the world, the flesh and the devil.

“ . . . The Lord can also be grieved by anything which does not differentiate between the world and the Church (e.g. worldly music, a lack of reverence), so that the culture of the world is brought into the place of worship. . . ”

Anyone truly in tune with the Spirit of God, living for God and truly in love with God will, by the Spirit's teaching and leading, discern correctly that which is or is not holy and acceptable to God.

God's acceptance, not human acceptance, must be the measuring stick applied to everything that takes place in the church -

and this includes the music we play in worship to Him. We cannot worship Him with music that is an affront to His holiness.

MISCONCEPTIONS CONCERNING PRAISE

The emphasis on praise and worship in the Christian Church today has also brought with it some misconceptions. These relate mainly to what constitutes true worship and what importance can be properly attached to praise.

JOHN 4:23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship Him.

JOHN 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

It must be emphasized that true worship emanates only from a heart of faith motivated by love through the Believer yielding to the Holy Spirit and becoming one with the energies of the Divine Nature that we are now partakers of in Christ (2 Peter 1:4). It comes from within and is then expressed outwardly. Water baptism is a physical action which, when accompanied by faith in what it represents, will bring deliverance and freedom to those who participate according to the Word. If the action of being water-baptized is not accompanied by heart-belief, however, there will be no physical or spiritual gain. Similarly, in worship, when gestures are made without a sincere, focused and committed heart, there will be no spiritual gain or even meaning.

All worship is based on us standing on Calvary's truths, and being immersed in Calvary's graces. Again, the Cross and its message must be the central core. Our focus must be on the Cross, us in Christ and He in us. Only from this firm footing can our worship be true and acceptable to the Lord.

“ . . . All worship is based on us standing on Calvary's truths, and being immersed in Calvary's graces. . . ”

In some Christian circles, there is an exaggerated approach to praise, springing from an underlying belief that in itself, praise is the answer to every problem. Consequently, since the latter part of the 20th century, many Pentecostal churches have had an overemphasis on praise and worship to the neglect of the teaching of God's Word. Inclined in this way, many try to use praise to "manipulate" God into healing them or setting them free without having the word of faith in their hearts (Hebrews 11:6). Others try to use praise to break the power of demonic bondages over situations or cities, etc. However, the Word of God teaches us that it is only through activating our faith in the truth that God's power will be released to heal us and set us free. And faith only comes through hearing the Word of God - faith does not come from praise (Romans 10:17). Also, it is only after the word of faith is deposited into our hearts that true praise can come forth. Then from this position, praise may help unlock some doors to problems in people's lives as they open themselves to God. However as we can see, praise is only the end result of what is already in our hearts, just as, for example, effective prayer is really only the confession of the faith that is already in our hearts, the faith of "*a righteous man*" (James 5:16b).

When accompanied by faith, worship can then become very powerful, but this is the only time there is "power in praise."

Note: We can begin to praise God in the flesh, and when this stirs up the faith within our hearts, we can then start to praise Him in the spirit. Thus what begins simply in the natural can progress to become a holy spiritual interaction between God and the worshipper.

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In Christ, we possess the ability and the gift, through inheritance, to praise and worship God. Therefore we are stewards of this ability. We need to seek the Lord in order to learn how to use and develop this ability so as to bring Him pleasure. We need to find

out how His grace can flow through us to bring the sweet melody of praise and worship to His throne. Even in this, we cannot outgive God. Indeed our character is developed to be more Christ-like as we yield to the gentle persuasion of the Spirit and take up daily, by His grace, the cross of self-denial. This must be done in order to please Him, to do His will and not ours. This is not a chore but a privilege, as we rejoice in our Lord with thankful hearts for all He has done for us (Psalm 103:2; Corinthians 5:15).

HINDRANCES TO PRAISE

Praise will enhance the Christian walk and allow God to work more effectively in a person's life. Because of this, in fact, praise becomes essential. This is one reason the Bible exhorts us to lift our hands and give praise to God liberally. However some Christians have a problem in doing so. Some cannot openly praise God in the presence of other Believers. This is usually an indication that they are experiencing problems of some kind in their lives, e.g. embarrassment, nervousness or other types of fear, etc. In the company of fellow Believers and on our own we should feel quite free to praise and worship God in an uninhibited way. If this is a problem, begin by lifting your hands just a little, and allow the Spirit of God to help you overcome your fear. We who have no problem in this area should not be insensitive but rather patient. We should encourage others, even praying in the middle of the service for God's Anointing and grace to release them from their fear.

To suppress visible and vocal praise is to withhold from God that which is rightfully His due, and the person who does so will be limited in what they can receive from God. This is because the person who cannot praise will find it difficult to be really open to the Spirit of God in the way in which they should. In many ways it is like having a relationship with someone, and never having a two-way conversation with them.

It should also be noted that we can only praise according to the level of our knowledge of God's Word. For example, a person who has only been saved a short time may only know that they have been rescued from an eternity in hell. They may not know much else about their inheritance in Christ. This person can praise God for their

salvation and for the fact that they have been rescued from the Kingdom of Darkness - and this would be very acceptable to God if it was done from a sincere heart. However as we learn more of what the Lord has done for us and made available to us, we can appreciate Him more fully and our love for Him will grow. In this way, a stronger foundation for praise will be established, and we will be able to enter into a broader and deeper level of praise. Indeed there are varying levels of praise and worship that we can enter into, depending on our growth in the Lord, our love for Him and our commitment to Him.

“ . . . To suppress visible and vocal praise is to withhold from God that which is rightfully His due, and the person who does so will be limited in what they can receive from God. . . ”

The main element to praise is **thankfulness** - being appreciative. Anyone would be thankful for being delivered from death's grip, but in order for this thankfulness to progress to true worship, such gratitude needs to be accompanied by a heart of **humility** and **reverence**. This reverence is “*the fear of the Lord*,” also called “*the beginning of wisdom*” (Proverbs 9:10). Unfortunately, these elements of humility and reverence are missing in many people's lives. There are not many who will truly serve God, laying down their lives and their own desires (in the power of the Divine Nature) in order to do so.

It has been said that true worship involves opening ourselves to the Lord and inviting the cleansing presence of the Holy Spirit to convict us unto repentance, if needed, of areas of wrong. David came to God in this way when he said:

PSALM 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:

PSALM 139:24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Unconfessed sin will always block us from worshipping God effectively, and we need to be constant in recognizing any sin which may be in our life, repenting of it and allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse us and empower us to live righteously. In this way, we can enter into the Father's presence unhindered, and enjoy the intimacy He desires to have with us.

“ . . . The main element to praise is thankfulness . . . but in order for this thankfulness to progress to true worship, such gratitude needs to be accompanied by a heart of humility and reverence. . . ”

God seeks people who will praise and worship Him in spirit and in truth, people who love Him and are prepared to serve Him with a sincere heart and a full commitment to His will. Such Christians are trusting that in Christ at the Resurrection, they were also raised up into “newness of life,” so being enabled to live for God in the way they are meant to. The one who truly loves God, commits himself to serve the Master and help meet his fellow man's needs. This love is expressed in the Believer through their human nature becoming energized by the Divine Nature, which empowers them to love as God loves. Jesus spoke of this true love in Matthew 22:37-39:

MATTHEW 22:37 Jesus said unto him, “You shall love (and therefore serve) the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.

MATTHEW 22:38 This is the first and great commandment.

MATTHEW 22:39 And the second is like unto it, You shall love (with the love of God) your neighbour as yourself.”

LIVING IN THE PROMISES

A person may praise and worship God in the first year of salvation in regard to escaping the fires of hell. If 20 years later, however, this is all they know and appreciate about God and His Word, then God would no longer accept their so-called “praise and worship” as true praise and worship. The reason for this is that the relationship between a Believer and their Lord is meant to be progressive, being based on a progressive revelation of truth (Isaiah 28:10-11). If this doesn’t happen, the situation can be likened to the manna the Israelites were given in the desert. If they collected it and stored it up for 20 years, it would no longer be of any use. The same can be said in regard to our praise and worship. If our praise and worship is not fresh in the knowledge of the fresh manna the Lord gives to us (as we seek it), then it may become “stale worship.” Progressing in the truths of God’s Word must be a daily priority so that our worship will be alive and progressive, not stagnant and stale through our own slackness.

It must be said that without the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Believer can only go so far in praise and worship, because until then, the Saint has only partially yielded their life. They haven’t developed their relationship in the way the Father intended. After the Spirit Baptism takes place, the Holy Spirit has greater latitude to work in the heart and life of the yielded Saint, and greater grace is made available for the Saint to truly worship God.

Following the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, praise can become more of a spontaneous response than having to be limited to a scripted worship service. Liberty then is experienced in praise, and is obvious in the services where the worshippers have received the Spirit Baptism and are yielded to the Spirit of God. Other services are stilted in comparison, lacking spontaneity, freedom and Holy Spirit empowered worship. Let us point out, however, that being baptized in the Holy Spirit does not guarantee automatic and acceptable worship. The Spirit Baptism is a gateway through which one can progress in the Lord’s grace to a deeper level of worship if one sincerely desires to do so and is fully yielded to the Holy Spirit.

“...Following the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, praise can become more of a spontaneous response than having to be limited to a scripted worship service. . .”

Also, we need to praise and worship God not from a positional level but from a conditional one. This is, for instance, to praise and worship God for His grace last week that empowered us to live the saved life. It is to thank Him that we are able to be imitators of Christ by His empowerment - by us being, in Christ, partakers of the Divine Nature. This is to worship God in spirit and in truth. Many praise God year after year for their salvation (escape from death), yet never progress in any great way to acknowledge and so praise Him for the fact that He gives us all the graces we need to live for Him and serve Him.

The eyes of the Lord are moving throughout the earth to strengthen and bless those whose hearts are dedicated and fully committed to Him. This takes place as we yield to the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, and submit to His conviction power.

In order to come to this position, we need to spend time on a daily basis, fellowshiping with our wonderful God and studying His Word. We also need to fellowship regularly with Christians who are committed and who operate in faith. Then as we respond to the Lord's direction, we can live in the promises of these scriptures.

“...Progressing in the truths of God's Word must be a daily priority so that our worship will be alive and progressive, not stagnant and stale through our own slackness. . .”

Unfortunately, many Christians study God's Word but do not receive the full benefits of doing so. A major reason for this is that they are not open to respond to that which God may be revealing.

In order to receive the full benefit of studying, we need to make a quality decision that we will act on whatever is revealed by applying it to our lives. The key is to approach God and His Word with an open heart, declaring that what He says you will do, regardless of what you think or feel, or whether your “comfort zone” is threatened by such action. Trust and believe that whatever it is, He is more than enough. In other words, His grace is sufficient to give you the desire and power to do His will at all times and in every situation.

Sometimes we may need to write down such a confession and read it before studying, until, with His help, it becomes part of our lifestyle. The reason for this is that Christianity is a daily walk, as Luke 9:23 states, and we need to reaffirm to ourselves and to God that we are going to be faithful and true to our commitment to Him. This then becomes the start of a proper focus for the day ahead, so that even throughout the day, we can worship Him and give Him praise for every good thing with which He has blessed us (Psalm 103).

We may need to search our hearts on a regular basis to see whether we are doing all that God requires of us at any particular time. We may need to adjust our thinking and time schedule to accommodate the work of the Spirit needed in us to bring our condition to our position. Then we will be able to live in the benefits of doing so, knowing that the Lord is watching over us to develop our character and to bless what we do in Him. We will then also be able to praise our Lord from a position of confidence, and our praise will be much more than mere lip service. Our praise will be a sweet smelling savour, and an acceptable sacrifice unto our Lord. Amen.

HEBREWS 13:15 By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name.

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

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