

Worshipping in Spirit and Truth

By Jim Sayles

When we use the word, “worship,” almost all modern believers think in terms of the worship service, singing songs of praise, preaching the word, and celebratory fellowshiping in His name.

But an examination of John 4:23,24 reveals the possibility that what the Father considers to be true worship is much, much more than that.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23, 24 ESV

All three key words in this passage, “worship,” “spirit,” and “truth,” have become religious words that we frequently process without being impacted by the revelatory meaning in context.

As I meditated on this passage, what jumped out at me is the command, “...MUST worship in spirit and truth,” which instantly alerts me to the possibility that what we have commonly defined as “worship” in the modern western church is only partially in view here.

In this circumstance Jesus was conversing with a Samaritan woman at the well, and when she recognized that he was a “prophet” (a man with spiritual authority and insight) she began querying him about the difference between how the Samaritans and the Jews worshipped God.

Her concern was with the place and form of worship, whether on the mountain or in the temple in Jerusalem. But Jesus revealed that the place and form (and date and time) have little to do with true worship.

“Worship” (Strong’s #G4352) means “reverent obedience,” and our reverent obedience while singing worship songs and responding to the preaching of the word is only a small fraction of the Father’s expectation for His adopted covenant sons and daughters in Christ.

True worship is also related to the “fear of the Lord,” or the reverent awe and respect we have for who He is and what He has done for us, because it is our reverent awe for who He is and what He has done for us that motivates our reverent obedience to His revelatory truth, promises, and commands.

Likewise, the “truth” Jesus is referring to in this passage is not merely the truth of the gospel message or the truth that God is real. It is the absolute, immutable, revelatory, *rhema* truth, promises, and commands of the Lord as spoken into our individual and corporate spirits by the Spirit of Truth in ALL things.

But when He, the Spirit of Truth (the Truth-giving Spirit) comes, He will guide you into all the Truth (the whole, full Truth). For He will not speak His own message [on His own authority]; but He will tell whatever He hears [from the Father; He will give the message that has been given to Him], and He will announce and declare to you the things that are to come [that will happen in the future].

He will honor and glorify Me, because He will take of (receive, draw upon) what is Mine and will reveal (declare, disclose, transmit) it to you.
John 16:13,14 Amplified (emphasis is the author’s)

John 16:13,14 is not a message that applied only to His original disciples. It has applied to every regenerated believer in Jesus Christ from the first Pentecost until now. Nor does it apply only to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers appointed to the body of Christ for the purpose of equipping the saints for works of faith in service to the Lord.

At best those who have been appointed by the Lord to the fivefold ministry are mere facilitators given to the body of Christ to accelerate the process, and any individual believer who grants authority for the absolute, immutable, revelatory truth of God to another man, a denomination, or to his own intellectual prowess is literally engaged in IDOLATRY, which is the exact opposite of worshipping God in spirit and truth.

The Roman Catholic Church, claiming that the Pope, as the “cleric of Christ,” is the sole repository for the absolute, immutable, revelatory truth of God is, perhaps, the most outrageous and condemning form of this idolatry, but we have ALL been engaged in this same idolatry to one degree or another.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. Matthew 23:8-10 ESV

In this instance, the command to call no man your “father” on earth, is not a reference to our familial “fathers,” but a reference to the granting of authority to another man as the source for the absolute, immutable, revelatory truth of God.

Likewise, the process of “proof texting,” even as I am doing in this article, may or may not be appropriate, and it may or may not “prove” what we claim that it proves. But the most divisive, faith-killing, idolatrous practice of all, apart from the reliance and trust we place in our own inadequate intellects, is to grant authority for what we believe to another man, to a sect, a denomination, or to a particular school of theological interpretation and tradition.

In this we are engaged in the IDOLATROUS worship of our own intellects and in the worshipful obedience to our chosen “authorities,” other than the Spirit of Truth speaking as the voice of the Lord, which we are specifically commanded NOT to do by the Lord (Matthew 23:8-10).

This trust in “other” authorities, including our own arrogant intellectual opinions, then becomes a stronghold assaulted against the absolute, immutable, revelatory **TRUTH** of God.

Seen from the Father’s perspective we will either “hear” with spiritual ears and “see” with the eyes of our hearts the absolute, immutable truth, promises, and commands of the Lord and make reverent, obedient faith responses to what we have seen and heard, which is TRUE WORSHIP in the spirit, or we will reject the revelation of His will in favor of our “other gods” as we trust our own intellects, the authority of men, their institutions, and their various schools of theological interpretation, which is IDOLOTRY.

That’s it. PERIOD. And no amount of emotional singing of praises or liturgical recitations of praise will be accepted by the Father as “worship” if we are not “hearing” His truth, promises, and commands in our spirits and reverently obeying what we have heard.

This choice is so important that Paul identified the process of choosing whom or what we will believe as “WARFARE,” the literal battleground wherein the outcome is either worshipping Him in spirit and in truth, which is faith, or worshipping “another god,” including our own intellects, which is idolatry.

For though we walk (live) in the flesh, we are not carrying on our warfare according to the flesh and using mere human weapons.

For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God... (through genuine faith responses to the absolute, immutable, revelatory truth of God)... for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds,... (defined as)...

[Inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge

of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One)...2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Amplified (inserts and emphasis are the author's)

As we examine this passage the first thing we notice is that the true worship of God in spirit and truth involves “warfare” against every form of deception and error that inhibits our reception and obedience to the revelatory truth, promises, and commands of the Lord.

And this “warfare” is defined as actively opposing the various sources of false doctrine and all human error in general, and deliberately and alertly taking captive any thought that opposes the revelatory truth of God as we have it, which includes areas of personal sin opposed to the righteous nature and person of Jesus Christ who has been seeded into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ's] one body you were also called [to live]. And be thankful (appreciative), [giving praise to God always]. Colossians 3:15 Amplified (emphasis is the author's)

Peace, or soul harmony with the indwelling Holy Spirit resident in our spirits, is the result of true worship. And those who are in this state of being are in a state of constant praise whether or not that praise is given forth in song, word or deed.

This is the “lifesong” He has implanted in each of us at the moment of regeneration, which is also His song manifesting in us and flowing out through us by grace through faith as we make appropriate responses the supernatural revelation of His truth, promises, and commands.

A few years back, in a dream from the Lord, I was standing on a platform with a lot of other men and women looking out over a crowd that stretched to the horizon in every direction. As a light shone on one man he stood up and began to sing his lifesong.

It was not given to me to discern his words, but the song was so exquisitely beautiful that I had tears of joy in my eyes. Then I had a sudden, shocking awareness that the light would next shine on me, and I realized with intense shame and anxiety that I had forgotten the words of my lifesong.

As I awakened one minute before my alarm was set to go off I immediately went into prayer, becoming deeply and intensely repentant as the Spirit revealed the root causes of my failure.

What He showed me was that my emotional songs of praise and words of praise offered up to the Father, whether in celebratory fellowship with other believers or at home alone, was NOT true “worship” as long as I was in knowing disobedience to the revelation of His will in ANY area of my life.

And it was this awareness that caused me to understand why our corporate “worship” services, though sometimes intensely emotional, seldom manifest the fullness and glory of the presence of the Lord in the way that we continually hope that they will.

Truth, then, is received through our spirits (“heart” or “inner man”), and our genuine worship of the Father and the Son, our Lord, is meant to be a continuum of “hearing” and “seeing” the revelatory truth, promises, and commands of the Lord by various means and then making reverent, obedient faith responses, whether in repentance or in the outflow of ministry. And, in either case, He will fill us with the joyous soul harmony of His presence so that our “lifesong,” our living testimony of praise and worship, glorifies Him and manifests His will not only in us, but in the world.

Then...and only then...will our songs of praise become a celebratory expression of our true worship of Him in spirit and truth.