

## ON WORSHIP

Man's religions have always been accompanied by worship of God, or, the god(s) of their religions and beliefs. In the OT, Yahweh gave Israel a complete system of worship through Moses, then later, with David, we see added methods and forms - together with singing and instruments - in the tent that he erected to house the ark of the covenant. But in the Psalms we see worship via poetry and singing that seems to forecast a future day, of which Jesus spoke in John 4:20-24, culminating where the psalmist said, "Let everything that has breath praise Yahweh" (Ps. 150:6). This would seem to indicate that all animate beings are to praise the Lord. In fact, in Ps 148 we see that this includes not only animals, but even all of creation.

So how do animals and fire and snow and stormy winds and mountains and hills and fruitful trees and cedars praise the Lord? I think that vs. 8 of Ps 148 gives us the key: "Fire and hail; snow and vapors; stormy wind fulfilling His word." I suggest that it is the last three words that tell us how creation worships and praises God: by "fulfilling His word." In the LXX, "word" is Logos (thought; idea; word; message), and the verb is "habitually doing" or "continuously performing."

Now since Ps. 148 includes people in its injunction to "praise," I suggest that we ascribe praise to God the same way that creation does - by doing His Word. Jesus, I submit, referred to worship (showing the value and "worth" of someone) by use of the word "love." In John 14:15&23 He said, "If you are habitually loving Me (or, as a sub.: should continue loving Me), you WILL [other MSS the subj.: can; should; other MSS: the imperative] observe (note and keep watch over; guard and preserve; keep in view; hold in custody) My commands (directives; orders; precepts; commandments).... If anyone continues (or: may be habitually) loving Me, he will watch over so as to observe, guard, preserve and keep My word (My thought, idea and message)..." Is this not an echo of the thought in Ps. 148:8?

So what did Jesus teach us about worshiping God? We can see all through the OT how it was done, and even in the days of Jesus'

ministry we can see how folks worshipped someone: often by prostrating themselves before the one they were worshipping, or by other religious acts which were the cultural norm of the times. We see folks "worshipping" (or: doing obeisance to) Jesus when they came to Him with their requests. This was how you honored someone, and showed that you revered the person. But what was the teaching of Jesus on the matter of worship?

Actually, He didn't speak much of it. In His wilderness temptation, when the devil/satan wanted His worship, He quoted Deut., "You shall worship Yahweh your God - and Him only will you SERVE!"

Note my emphasis: service is parallel to worship. Jesus used this word (proskuneo) only in this situation (Matt. 4 & Lu. 4), which was prior to the beginning of His ministry - with one exception, in John 4, when speaking with the Samaritan woman (and she had brought up the subject). And then what did He say?

20. "Our fathers worshiped (or: worship) within this mountain, and you folks continually say that the place where it continues necessary (is constantly binding) to be habitually worshipping is within Jerusalem."

21. Jesus then says to her, "Be constantly trusting in Me (or: Continue believing Me), O woman (= dear lady), because an hour is progressively coming when you folks will give worship to the Father neither within this mountain nor within Jerusalem.

22. "You folks are habitually worshipping what you have not seen and thus do not know. We are continuously worshipping what we have seen and thus know, because the deliverance (the being restored to the original state; the health and wholeness; the salvation) continues being (habitually is; constantly exists being) from out of the midst of the Jews.

23. "Nevertheless an hour is progressively coming - and now exists (is; or, is being) - when the true (real; genuine) worshipers will worship (or: will give worship to) the Father within spirit and Truth (or: in breath and reality; within the midst of [the] Spirit and a Fact), for the Father is also constantly seeking after such ones (habitually searching out such ones as this; continuously looking for and trying to find lost ones to be this kind) - ones continuously worshipping Him!"

This is the teaching of Jesus re: worship. It is in breath and reality; in spirit and within Truth. Does this echo Ps. 148? Does it speak of our

life, in union with Him who is the Truth, the Life, and the Way (to live)? Does our breath/spirit speak of something internal and our very life? Does Truth/Reality speak of Christ? Then I suggest that our true worship is not in form or ceremony or religious activity, but in our life in Christ - and it is "doing," "performing" His will and His word.

Furthermore, the doing and the performing of His will can only be done by the Christ within us, Who by His Spirit enables and empowers us both to will and to do His good pleasure!

So where do the various "forms" of "worship" come from which we see in Christianity today? In many places it is right out of the OT (contrary to the words of Jesus in John 4). We are like Israel who built a golden calf - something that could be seen - in reality, it also becomes an idol: we must have our music, our songs, our incense, our structured service, our litanies, our candles, our times of kneeling -- or our "lying before the Lord" or raising our hands or marching around the room or waving flags and banners or laughing or speaking in tongues or "dancing before the Lord." Did I cover the gamut? But did Jesus teach us to do these things, as worship?

Now I'm not saying that any of these activities are wrong - but I am questioning that they are true worship, as Jesus defined it. They are old covenant worship, at best, and some - because of how we hold them in our hearts - are idolatry. We look more to the activity than to Spirit and Truth. We come home from a meeting feeling satisfied if our particular "form" of spiritual activity touched our emotions.

So is there a problem with the spiritual activities, which Christianity calls worship? I think the answer is, "Yes." What is the problem, you say? Simply this: with the old covenant, there was separation between the worshiper and God. Jesus prayed for our unity with Him; Paul said that he that is joined to the Lord is "one spirit."

Kenneth Leong has said, "The problem with an attitude of worship is that it tends to take the two souls apart rather than put them together." Religious worship keeps separation alive.

We are Christ's body. Now that is unity! Christ loves us as a husband loves a wife. Now I love union with my wife - it is joy and life to me - but I don't worship her, nor she me. The concept of worship that was presented to us under the Law was the concept that all

religions of that time had. In Christ that old has passed away, and see! - all has become new! We see this in the picture given to us by Paul: we are seated together with Christ in the heavenlies! What God has joined together, let not man's worship divide asunder.

Now you say, "Wait a minute, Jonathan, what about all the worship going on in the book of Revelation?" Good question. To illustrate how that book is a book of symbols and figures, can I just ask you, "When John saw a Lamb, was it a four-footed wooly creature, or was it a figure of Christ as our Passover, our Atonement?" The living beings continuously saying "Holy, holy, holy," and the twenty-four elders on their thrones who fall down in worship, casting their crowns, saying "You are worthy, O Lord..." - are also figures: figures (using an earthly metaphor of "thrones and crowns and living creatures") of the body of Christ. The words and the actions speak of the wholeness of our lives involved in continuously living and doing His words, and of recognition of Who Christ is and what (the Creation, the plan of the ages, the salvation of humanity) He has done. We will always exalt Christ in our lives and our thoughts and our actions - but that's just it: it is in our being and existing that we do this, not in religious activities. We do it in spirit and truth (in the flow of His Breath-effect, and the new Reality). The heavens are a figure of the realm of this spirit-life. The throne of Rev. 4 is the same throne that Paul says we are presently seated in.

Far too often, in groups that enjoy exuberant or demonstrative "worship" (e.g., charismatic assemblies), the "worship" leader promotes the idea that if those present will do something (e.g.: stand, praise aloud, come to the altar, speak in tongues, or, just be more earnest in "entering in" to the spirit of what the body is presently doing) then God will respond with a special manifestation of what is commonly called His "manifest presence." The desire is for signs and miracles to happen, or, "for His glory to appear."

Now who doesn't want to see God in action? Yet, though I'm certain that the hearts of folks who "worship" in this manner are sincerely set on God, do we find injunctions from the NT (via the teachings of the "apostles") for this behavior? And more so, does this not fly in the face of our declared position in the body of Christ? We are a part of Him. This is the good news. Yet we tend to act like this has not

happened, and we are back under the old covenant. We are His home: He lives in us - and yet we act like He is somewhere else and we need to do something so that He will drop on by and do something. Is this not a contradiction? By our attitudes, we in fact relegate His Spirit to being powerless, for His Spirit continuously abides in us.

Now I know that I am confronting a whole culture - and industry - of "worship" with these objections. But I think we have missed it, folks. Like many of you, I enjoy songs of praise where the poet or the performer puts into words feelings of love for God that match my own strong feelings - and I often weep as I try to sing along. And I am not denying the experiences that we have as we do this. But I suggest that we should do this simply in an attitude of love, as we might for our spouse - for that is what He is - and not in an old covenant attitude. We must have renewed minds - not minds attuned to the former creation, with its rituals and forms. Christ has come, we are joined to Him, all has changed!!!! We should be living in this realization, and our corporate activities should reflect this new Reality and Truth.

I hope you have heard my heart in this,  
Jonathan