

AN ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP.

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The term "Worship" is often used in a loose fashion, being applied to a variety of conditions and carrying several connotations. Perhaps worship has been inadvertently defined by the classical usage of the word and by certain ritualistic forms of religious activities. Individuals need to be aware of the Biblical concept of worship, of its freedoms and of its possible forms of expression.

Historically speaking men have been known to trust the stars, to pay homage to imaginary heavenly figures, to give gifts to the sun and to recognize certain powerful elements of nature. The Jews have their Jehovah, the Christians their Christ, the Buddhists their Buddha, and the Moslems their Allah. In all cases, the behavior of the people is partially explained in terms of homage, respect, honor, servitude, and submission.

Several scriptures will be considered to determine how God has revealed himself with respect to acceptable worship. An Old Testament review will be conducted first, followed by the Heart of Man, and finally a review of New Testament references. This study will be concluded by summarizing, to the best of our ability, the meaning of worship as recognized by God.

Old Testament Review

Insight into the elements of worship with respect to the Old Testament will be obtained through a study of several prominent characters. The personalities that will be considered in detail below include Cain and Abel, Noah, Abram, Moses and Aaron, David, Hezekiah and Hannah.

The unique offerings of Cain and Abel strongly suggest acts of worship, even though Cain learned that his gift was not held in regard by the Lord. Abel's offering was accepted. Cain's offering was rejected. From the Genesis account, the reader is left to ponder whether the constituents were unauthorized or whether something else, such as Cain's attitude or personal character prevented his gift from being accepted (Genesis 4 verses 3 through 7). The Apostle Paul commented on this event in Hebrews 11 where he stated that **because of faith Abel's sacrifice was better than Cain's.**

Concerning Noah, Genesis 6 verse 10 states that he found favor in the eyes of the Lord and that he was obedient to all that the Lord commanded. Upon leaving the ark Noah built an altar to God and presented to Him burnt offerings on the altar. The author of Genesis says that the Lord sensed these offerings in a favorable manner and as a result, He established the covenant of the rainbow.

Abram also offered burnt offerings to the Lord. The offering of his son Isaac in Genesis 22 was something special. Abram received specific instructions and he obeyed them. Of significance to us, however, is that Abram defined his actions to Isaac as worship.

Before going further note that in the examples cited above, **worship contained the elements of obedience, presentation of offerings, special acts of homage, and faith.**

A history of the Jewish people and their great exodus from the land of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron is found in the book of Exodus. The reader is introduced to the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover event. Moses taught the people: "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever." In the years thereafter the Passover rite was to be explained as a "Passover sacrifice" to the Lord; an offering referencing the original Passover sacrifice. Scripture says: "And the people bowed low and worshipped".

Moses received from the Lord an array of commandments which were to serve as a basis for the Jewish civil and religious law. Included in the renowned Ten Commandments was the following one: "Ye shall not worship other Gods". This commandment reflected the Lord's intense jealousy of attention, servitude, and homage given to gods and idols of any likeness. The conclusion here is that **the Lord equated servitude and devotion with worship.** This conclusion is further reinforced in the events of Exodus 32 verse 8 where in the words of the Lord: "They have made for themselves a molten calf and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and declared, this is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt."

In Exodus 34 Moses is found communing with the Lord and "bowing low toward the earth in worship." In this instance, **worship included a prayerful petition** to the Lord on behalf of the Israelite nation coupled **with a sense of humility.** Exodus 34 also contains the Law of the covenant-observance which involved worship.

Other aspects of worship are given in Exodus 35 verse 21. The people were commanded to contribute gifts and laborers for the building of a sanctuary. "And everyone whose heart stirred him and everyone whose spirit moved him came and brought the Lord's contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments." **The emphasis here is on spiritual involvement and a receptive heart.**

Throughout the career of Moses, he exhorted his people to obey the laws, statutes, commandments and ordinances from the Lord. Obedience, along with prayer, service, devotion, demonstrated submission, offerings, ritualistic activities and stirred hearts and spirits can be identified within the realm of worship. The above references furthermore illustrate these elements of worship in both a formal and an informal manner. In his summary recorded in Deuteronomy 30 Moses presents a very pertinent contrast to worship; life with blessings or death with curses. In other words, **worship was depicted as being continuous and focusing on a way of life.**

Other examples of worship are in abundance in the Old Testament. One needs only to consider the words of David, Solomon, Daniel and a host of others to see this fact. Only a few more Old Testament scriptures will be cited in our attempt to obtain insight to the history surrounding Old Testament worship.

In Psalm 2 verse 11 David instructed the people to **worship with reverence**, to rejoice with trembling. In a prayer recorded in Psalm 86, David says **to glorify God's name** is to worship. David exhorted the people to praise the Lord in Psalm 95: "O come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. Come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

Many of the kings of Israel after David and Solomon did not do right in the sight of the Lord. They ignored the book of the law of the Lord given by Moses. There were, however, two kings who attempted to restore the ways of the Lord. They tore down the idols which were on the high places and taught the people to consecrate themselves before the Lord. King Hezekiah and King Josiah stand out in their dedication to God and in renewing proper worship, specifically in reference to Passover worship. Second Chronicles 29 describes King Hezekiah's activities with respect to restoring the Passover ordinance. On this occasion, Passover worship included: burnt offerings, songs accompanied by trumpets (that is with the instruments of David), the songs of a chorus while the assembly worshiped, demonstrations of humility — bowing down, and songs of praises and joy. The experiences of King Josiah are found in Second Chronicles 34 and 35. Verse 31 of chapter 34 records the covenant King Josiah made with the Lord: **"To keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul."**

Chapter 1 of First Samuel describes a touching story about Hannah. Her womb had been closed, and she petitioned the Lord to look on her affliction and remember her. **The worship of Hannah consisted of sacrifice, intense prayer, and a vow.** She said, "I have poured out my soul to the Lord" (First Samuel 1 verse 15). The Bible says that the Lord remembered her and she remembered her vow to give the Samuel to the Lord.

Now in all of the above examples, certain characteristics are revealed and constitute a framework of worship to the Lord within the boundaries of the Old Testament.

Summarizing, the following elements are observable:

- Obedience to specific as well as generic commands.
- Presentation of offerings.
- Special acts of homage.
- Communication directly and through prayer.
- Ritual specific example cited was the Passover memorial.
- Servitude and devotion.
- Contributions gifts of labor.
- Spiritual involvement.
- Reverence.
- Glory of God's name.
- Songs accompanied by trumpets.
- Songs of chorus, songs of praises and joy.
- Humility.
- Vows.

These elements were molded into both formal and informal aspects and were identified as worship. The formal portions were found in ritualistic activities commanded by the Lord; such as the offering of burnt offerings on altars and the observance of regulations surrounding the first covenant. Paul comments in Hebrews 9 verse 1 on the formalities of the first covenant: "the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary" and in verse 9 "**according to which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience.**" The informal part was reflected in the involvement of the heart in conducting a life pleasing to the Lord. Moses gave the proper attitude of mind: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him". To worship is to live; otherwise it is to die.

The Heart of Man.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over all the earth, So God created man in his own image created him. The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being with an eternal soul.

So, God's creation called man became a living being, a creation having emotions, desires, feelings, a mind, and a soul and with the ability to rule, have dominion, and make decisions.

When questioned by the Pharisees about the greatest commandment Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind, strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments".

Paul when referring to preaching stated "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, *who has believed our report?*' So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: '*Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world*'"

In one sense hearing could include reading, in that information is passed from the writer to the reader, the same as if spoken. Therefore, hearing includes the receiving of information whether audibly or visually. But faith involves more than the hearing or reading as evident above. Therefore, believing faith, and hearing, requires more than acquiring knowledge and understanding. In fact, **to generate a believing faith something must occur in one's heart** (not the physical blood pump) **that causes some type of action.** "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, perhaps justice, mercy, humility and faithfulness, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them".

So, what is man's heart? Is it his mind, intellect, thought process, the seat of emotion, inner self, conscience, soul, the human brain, man's central processor with its large internal storage possibly similar to a computer)?

From the New Bible Dictionary, one will find the following description and definition of “heart.”

- a. Physical or figurative 29 times.
- b. Personality, inner life, or character in general 257 times.
- c. Emotional states of consciousness, 166 times, intoxication, joy, sorrow, anxiety, courage, fear, and love .
- d. Intellectual activities 204 times, attention, reflection, memory, understanding, technical skill.
- e. Volition or purpose 195 times, this being one of the most characteristic usages of the term.
Adapted from H. Wheeler Robinson.

In the New Testament, the heart does not altogether lose its physical reference, for it is made of ‘flesh’, but it is the seat of the will, of the intellect, and of feeling. This means that heart comes the nearest of the New Testament term to mean the total the whole man.

“The Hebrews thought in terms of subjective experience rather than objective, scientific observation, and thereby avoided the modern error of over-departmentalization. It was essentially the whole man, with all his attributes, physical, intellectual and psychological of which the Hebrew thought and spoke, and the heart was conceived of as the governing centre for all of these. It is the heart which makes a man, or a beast, what he is, and governs all his actions. Character, personality, will and mind are modern terms which all reflect something of the meaning of 'heart' in its biblical usage.

“Yahweh knows the heart of each one and is not deceived by outward appearance, but a worthy prayer is, nevertheless, that he should search and know the heart, and make it clean. A 'new heart' must be the aim of the wicked, and that will mean that God's law has to become no longer merely external but 'written on the heart' and make it clean.

“Thus, it is that the heart, the spring of all desires, must be guarded, and the teacher aims to win his pupil’s heart to the right way.

“It is the pure in heart who shall see God and it is through Christ’s dwelling in the heart by faith that the saints can comprehend the love of God.

The human brain is the control center for all human activity. All its functions when taken together make up the whole man, the person,

- a. The physical section that processes all data and information relating to vital bodily functioning.
- b. The mental part appears to be that part of the brain that receives facts and other external information for processing, analyzing, sorting, comparing, storing, and retrieving required for decision making and could be referred to as the intellectual section.
- c. The emotional and spiritual section is often referred to as the heart, the inner man, or seat of emotion. It is here where one finds love, hate, fear, courage, trust, integrity, conscience, character and feelings. It should be noted that one’s conscience can be

trained to accept various ethical standards, one's character can become either good or evil and one's feelings can be based upon opinion or belief rather than knowledge and facts.

Conclusion.

The heart is that part of man created in the likeness of God and may not necessarily be all physical. Man can train his heart for good or for evil. It is in one's heart that man is to worship.

The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

Man's worship must be genuine and real; in spirit and in truth and with feelings and emotion. Any activity that is done just "to obey" a command or to "fulfill" some perceived requirement or out of a sense of duty appears to be a ritualistic practice in an attempt to earn one's salvation.

New Testament Review.

There are many New Testament passages which directly reference some aspect of worship. These will be considered initially for the purpose of identifying elements or characteristics which necessarily define worship. Most of these characteristics will be of a positive nature, but some will be derived from negative criticism of various scenarios.

Elements of New Testament Worship.

As an example, we found that service to something or to a personality constituted worship from an Old Testament point of view, whether to idols or to the Lord. This trait is also carried over in New Testament teachings. Christ placed a strong emphasis on properly directed service as in rebuking Satan, Christ quoted Deuteronomy 6 verse 13 "You shall **worship** the Lord your God and **serve Him only.**" Paul states do not lag behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. Service constitutes worship but not exclusively. Furthermore, our service can be misdirected and, as such, not be favorable to the Lord.

If service is to be properly directed, then obedience to specific and generic commands must be very basic to worship. Christ experienced the following: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered". In Colossians 1 verse 10 Paul speaks of the need "to please Him in all respects." Demonstrated humility is shown by a new believer who has been convicted and who senses the need for reverence and awe.

However, Christ did introduce a new emphasis to worship in his discourse to the Samaritan woman. He challenged tradition by declaring that neither Mount Gerizim claimed by the Samaritans nor Jerusalem where the Jews gathered is the preferred place of worship. Instead the time "now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth; for such people, the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth." We must understand what is meant here in order to have effective worship. Without a doubt, the emphasis is on the spiritual rather than physical at the place of worship. True worship is genuine, faithful, with sincerity conforming to that which is desired or

pleasing. Spiritual worship involves the heart and soul, that inner part of man made in the image of God. This concept represents a major shift in policy; Paul taught the Colossian Church that Christ nailed the Old Law to the Cross thereby fulfilling it.

Another reference along this line is Philippians 3 verse 3. Paul says that Christians worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus without placing confidence in human traditions.

Now Christians are able to measure whether they are being led by the Spirit of the Lord by comparing their behavior with desirable traits identified by Scripture. Paul lists a whole array of Spiritual attributes in his letters to the churches at Rome, Galatia, Ephesus, and Colossae. These passages go further in that they present a contrast between the characteristics of the lower nature of man with those of the spiritual man. The former are derived from the lust of man; the latter are derived from the desire to walk with God. The allegory introduced by Paul in the Galatian letter depicts the inner conflict within man. Paul himself experienced this inner conflict.

Christian character is described by love, joy, peace, patience, steadfastness, endurance, perseverance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All of these allow one to worship in the Spirit because they honor our Lord. Christians are to imitate God, to be of a forgiving nature, tender-hearted, speaking words of edification, and to have self-discipline. Romans 12 verse 1 details the ultimate: "present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

Paul was speaking of spiritual behavior, the spirit of worship, as opposed to a worldly behavior. That is, the majority of the people presented a norm which was unfavorable in the eyes of the Lord. Christians are to have a different norm. **They are to be set apart in a spirit of worship to the Lord which is continuous and which encompasses attributes of honor, servitude, obedience, respect, reverence, humility,** etc. They are to be filled with the spirit, to conduct their lives on a high plane, communicating by "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

The following two key passages amplify this theme;

- a. "So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God".
- b. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father".

The main point here is that we are to have God enthroned in our hearts; we are to cultivate desirable personality traits as illustrated by scripture. Under these conditions, an environment of

worship exists. Honor, reverence, obedience and love will be acknowledged both implicitly and explicitly.

Other Worship.

An attempt was made to correctly identify aspects of worship which focuses attention on our Lord. This worship has been referred to as true and genuine, encompassing the desirable elements included in Holy writ. However, scripture speaks of vain, ignorant, devil and idol oriented, people oriented, angel and esthetic, or nature, worship. Their formats are considered by scripture to have characteristics of worship. These events of worship are generally spoken of in negative terms and are in opposition to true worship. The following examples are given for consideration.

Ignorant worship.

Christ's discourse with the Samaritan woman not only defined the spiritual aspect of true worship but also the issue of ignorant worship. In John 4 verse 27 Jesus stated to the woman that the Samaritan nation worshiped in ignorance. Salvation was from the Jews, yet the two nations avoided national intercourse partly because of ethnic overtones.

The void worship of the Samaritans as identified by "So while these Samaritans feared the Lord, they also served their idols (placed in the houses of the mountains); their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did [tradition], so do this day." Paradoxically, they feared the Lord yet they worshiped their idols. At least two lessons are involved here. First, we should examine for truth the traditions handed down by each generation. In the above case, ignorant and false worship was fostered for generations and generations. Secondly, the Samaritans, as an ethnic group of people, were unacceptable to the Jews. This environment of racial tension and barriers perhaps hindered the Samaritans from having acceptable, worship. We need to be on guard from the pride of race, heritage, social status, and tradition.

In speaking to the men of Athens Paul recognized their religious culture. But he also acknowledged their ignorant worship to an unknown God." Paul differentiates between their format of worship that is, incorporating idols, temples, images, art, silver, stone, etc., and true worship. He supports the words of Moses, David, Solomon, and others "that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist." Their worship was ignorant because of the manner in which they tried to communicate and to reach the Lord. Yet they did have a form of worship because their actions involved service, gifts, and reorganization. Worship could be a continuous relationship with God.

People worship quite possibly existed in the Church at Corinth. In First Corinthians 1 verse 12 Paul discusses the divisions of the congregation along the lines of personalities; "each one of you is saying, 'I am of Paul' and 'I of Apollos' and 'I of Cephas' and 'I of Christ'". These divisions may have been a result of a congregation made up of ethnic groups. Paul's ministry was primarily to the Gentiles, Apollos perhaps to the Greeks, and Peter to the Jews. The danger here was that attention and honor was being focused mainly on the individual teachers and not exclusively on Christ. This polarization prevented the existence of an environment conducive to true worship.

The lesson for us is simply this: our faith should be based on Christ and not upon a, dominant Christian personality.

Angel Worship

Paul mentions angel worship in Colossians 2 Verse 8 also suggests worship conditions governed by nature, by traditions, by philosophies of men, etc. Remember that Colossae was exposed to the influence of the Jews, Greeks, and other intellectuals.

Vain Worship.

Christ rebuked the Pharisees and Scribes who invalidated the word of God for the sake of tradition. His response was: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men." Christ classified these people as hypocrites. Vain worship can occur by engaging in traditional rites without being cognizant of one's motive; it can occur under the circumstances of going through certain motions without the involvement of a righteous heart.

Vain worship is also evident in Paul's letter to the Galatian church (chapter 3). These Christians received the spirit via hearing with faith, yet they reverted to the Law and attempted to be justified by the works of the Law. This vain worship was a result of insufficient faith; they failed to continue to grow in Christ.

Devil and Idol Worship is mentioned by John in Revelation 9 verse 20. "But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk.