

## **TRUE WORSHIP**

by

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### **What is “Worship” ?**

We all know what prayer is. But, what is worship?

A Christian may say, *“Oh, everybody knows what worship is. It’s what you do when you go to church.”*

I’m not asking what worship means, to a particular person, today. We all may have different practices of worship. What I’m asking is what did the word mean originally, as recorded in the Bible? What is God’s definition of worship? How does God want us to worship?

The first thing to do is look at the word in the Greek New Testament. We go back to the original Greek, because that’s as close as we can easily get to the original writers of the New Testament, before it was translated into English. Greek was, in Jesus’ time, and perhaps remains today, the richest high-resolution language for the recording of ideas. I think that’s why God chose it for the preservation of the ideas of the early Christian Church.

In the New Testament, the word that is translated, *“worship,”* is *“proskuneo.”* This is a compound word, made up of the preposition, *“pros,”* and a form of the noun, *“kuon.”* The preposition means *“forward,”* and the noun is *“dog,”* as in *“hound.”* The picture that comes from this compound is that of a faithful hound, leaning forward, as to kiss his master’s hand in adoration.

*“And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.” [1 Cor. 14:25]*

This verse from Corinthians reinforces the picture of being literally in a low position, worshipping upwards.

This is a simple picture. From the linguistics of the Bible, worship is not something complicated.

### **How Does the Bible Characterize Worship?**

Beyond the singular linguistics of the word, how is *“worship”* used in the Bible? The key New Testament scripture that will help us characterize worship is the following:

*“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. [24] God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” [John 4:23-24].*

This verse out of John doesn’t define what worship is, but it adds two characterizing factors. It says that God is looking for those who will worship him in spirit and truth. What does this mean?

Our spirit is the most fundamental part of our three-part being. We are spirit, soul, and body (flesh). The body is the part that eats. The soul is the analytical part that thinks rationally. The spirit is our basic identity. It is capable of perception and of receiving witness. It reacts and may be activated. It can sigh, groan, be troubled, feel compulsion, and become emotionally hot. The spirit can purpose and speak. It can affect the will and enliven the flesh. The spirit worships, prays, sings, blesses, rests, is refreshed, and rejoices. (18 scriptural references). Looking at this list, it seems clear that the spirit is the seat of man's emotions, purpose, and drive.

If we worship in spirit, then we are worshipping with our spiritual capabilities. That may include perception, receiving witness, reaction, activation, purposing, speaking (in the spirit), affecting of the will, enlivening of the flesh, praying (in the spirit), singing, blessing, resting, refreshing, and rejoicing.

If we worship in truth, then we are worshipping in light of what the truth is. But, there is something beyond that.

*"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* [John 14:6]

*"... And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."* [1 John 5:6]

These two verses show that Jesus is the truth, ... literally. And, so is the Holy Spirit. That is, truth is something tangible. It is absolute. It is not an abstract idea, open for debate. It has form and substance. So, if we worship in truth, we worship in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. That is, we are *"in Christ"* as we worship and we are also *"in the Spirit."* From [Rom. 8:9], that means that we are not *"in the flesh"* as we worship. A result is that when our individual spirits receive witness in worship, it is from the Holy Spirit.

Going back to [John 4:23], we see that this kind of worship characterizes *"true worshippers."*

### **False Worship.**

As there is true worship, so also is there false worship. Worship that is not in the truth runs the gamut from trying to worship God, but doing it in ignorance [John 4:22], [Acts 17:23], to outright devil worship [Rev. 9:20]. In between are vain worship (due to poor teaching) [Mark 7:7], worship of a lie (something created) [Rom. 1:25], and idol worship [Acts 7:42]. Then, there are also those who give an outward appearance of worship [Col. 2:23], after the commandments and doctrines of men.

So, there is true worship and false worship, and we need to be able to recognize the difference. That is, we need to be able to judge between them (*diakrino*). This kind of judging is what prophets do, in judging prophecies [1 Cor. 14:29]. The Bible calls us to judge within the Church, according to four different Greek forms for the word, *"judge."* The only thing we are not to judge is a person's salvation. That is up to the Judge.

### **Defining True Worship.**

What the Bible says leads me to write the following definition of true worship:

True worship is of God, personally, and not of things. It is an act of adoration, as of a faithful hound, licking the hand of his master. It is conducted in the worshipper's spirit

and in the Holy Spirit. It is not a fleshly activity. That is, it doesn't require physical activity. Neither is it an analytical activity, other than recognizing its simplicity. And, it is certainly not something that is done for appearances' sake. It is done for God's sake and for the sake of the worshipper. And, its spiritual rewards are immediately felt.

### **So, Why Have I Written This?**

In Jesus' Church, there are certain fundamentals. The fundamentals are simple. Worship is one of them. It is man's fallen nature to complicate religious things, and to make idols of them. Worship is also one of these. One sees that happen when a system of churches becomes institutionalized. In a sense, it is possible to worship the process of worship, itself, on an individual basis. This is one of the lesser evils meant by worshipping the creature, more than the Creator [Rom. 1:25].

It is religious leaders who build institutions. Those who are inclined to sustain the rituals, procedures, and structures of those institutions tend to gravitate into positions of leadership. That is, old leaders tend to select new leaders of the same inclinations. In that way, the institutions are preserved.

The Bible shows that when the Church is institutionalized, it generally follows a single mistake by leadership, violating some clear Biblical principle. Following that mistake, the institution goes downhill, like a line of falling dominoes, toward a condition scripturally labeled apostasy. In the end, God steps in and judges the institution, and destroys it. That is one clear message of the Old Testament.

True worship is simple. And, it is an individual thing. When incorporated into a churchly institution, it may easily be complicated and corrupted. Christians need to be alert, on the lookout for such things. And, when discerned, such corruption of this most fundamental of Christian activities needs to be judged within the Church. It is as Paul said in the corporate context of the Church. If we should judge (*diakrino*) within the Church, we should not be individually judged (*krino*), here on Earth [1 Cor. 11:31]. For, as Peter said, God's judgment (*krino*) begins at the Church [1 Peter 4:17].