

## ***Article of the Month***

September, 2018

### ***Worship***

Sometimes a simple little word like worship can be used by us for decades, and then suddenly we ask ourselves, What does it mean?

Usually, as students of the Bible, we can answer questions like this with a quick look at a concordance or lexicon. But every once in a while we must carefully not only consider the texts which are used, but what ideas are behind those texts. This is the case with “worship.” We will end up expanding our appreciation about this vital topic once we have examined the Hebrew and Greek words and have looked over texts which use the word. We will find that “worship” is not a ceremony; it is a life-style. There are acts of worship, but they are more of a symbolic nature; real worship is perpetual and within us.

While a few exceptions exist, nearly every Old Testament text about worship is from the Hebrew “*shachah*” (Strong’s # 7812) or, in the New Testament, from the Greek “*proskuneo*” (Strong’s # 4352). Thus we don’t have a lot of words to sort through. Unfortunately, the word meanings themselves do not give us the in-depth understanding we crave. After all, if we want to worship God from the bottom of our hearts, we need more than word meanings!

The Hebrew word for worship means “to bow down.” That seems simple enough. But WHY do we bow down? And what does “bow down” mean? We can bow down to earthly princes as well as to God. Some may do so because it is expected practice or protocol. Some may do it because they’ve been told that it’s required or that it is part of ones religious heritage. Some may do it in fear that they will be punished or even die if they don’t! The true worshipper does so because he is so overcome with awe, respect, reverence, and a desire to manifest a desire to serve. The true worshipper realizes that there is a literal bowing down, but that literal bowing is merely a symbol for a much greater “giving in” out of phenomenal respect — virtually a consecration of all of his life’s powers.

The Greek word for worship means “to throw a kiss toward.” That clearly gives a different implication from the Hebrew! It is, however, usually used in the New Testament with the thought of “do reverence to.” Indeed, it is the word that Jesus and the Apostles choose when they translate from the Old Testament into the Greek language. It is frequently translated “to bow down to.” So, as far as translators are concerned, the Hebrew and Greek are not too different. However, there is something very appealing about “throw a kiss to.” This simple gesture has now come to mean a sign of affection. But it has an intimacy about it — a display of “I’m always with you, even when I won’t see you.” Perhaps we want to retain that intimacy even when we fall

to our knees with an awesome respect that is everything BUT intimacy. The fact is, we must LOVE the one we truly worship.

We will try to see the implications behind the words. But first we will profit from reading at least a few texts in which “worship” is used. If we take the time to read ALL of the texts on the subject, we will not necessarily find ourselves with a better understanding. These texts are usually about the formal, open, symbolic act of worship rather than about defining what worship is. THAT we must do for ourselves.

## A FEW USES OF WORSHIP IN SCRIPTURE

### ***In the Old Testament:***

Exodus 3:12: This text is about God’s telling Moses that after Moses delivers the people from Egypt, he will “worship God at this mountain.”

This contains two thoughts for our consideration. (1) We often associate a place with worship because the place reminds us of something significant that happened there. That is not necessarily an improper thing — although it is not vital to worship. Worship is, in part, a thankfulness. In this case, the mountain is where Moses was to get the ten commandments — something that makes the place most memorable. It WOULD, indeed, be a place associated with, and, therefore, stimulating of awe and thanksgiving. (2) But more importantly, God seems to be telling Moses that what Moses would do at that mountain WOULD, in itself, BE an act of worship. Moses was to SERVE God and the people of God (Israel) by being mediator of the Law Covenant. Many Scriptures seem to EQUATE service with worship.

Exodus 23:24: In this text, Israel is instructed not to “worship their (other people’s) gods, nor serve them.”

This gives us a little extra information. While worship clearly involves service, it also shows that worship is EXCLUSIVE. We cannot have awe and respect for the true God if we have awe or respect for OTHER contradictory gods. God calls Himself a “jealous God” because He knows that any compromise with other authorities will be harmful for us. Worship, therefore, is SINGULAR. It cannot be extended to more than one authority. And we cannot “serve” the interests of other gods.

Psalms 29:1, 2: Here we are counseled to “Ascribe to the Lord...glory and strength...the glory of His name. Worship the Lord in the majesty of holiness.”

The Psalmist first lets us know that we must “ascribe” or attribute to God what He really is. (Compare Hebrews 11:6.) There is no way that proper worship can occur if we don’t have that fullest of appreciations of the character we worship. David lists “glory” — that supreme aura of perfection which only God has. We cannot worship a flawed or

imperfect god. Then he lists “strength” — ALL strength. God is ALMIGHTY. This is important; we must have full confidence in the saving power of the one we worship. Then David uses the words, “His name.” This is shorthand for all of the character traits possessed by God. David thus starts out by saying that worship cannot begin or succeed without UNDERSTANDING of the one to whom we wish to give worship. True worship is not ignorant doting.

We must remember that the Hebrew means “to bow down.” The act of bowing down IN MIND and HEART, as opposed to with the knees only, shows that we think enough of the object of our worship TO GIVE IN to everything He has to say or request. THAT is what “bow down” means. The literal bowing down is only a symbol of that complete obeisance which says, “Whatever you wish, THAT is my command as well as my desire and delight.” This is what David means by “worship...in the majesty of holiness.” Our holy (or sanctified) devotion is mandatory.

There are any number of other applicable texts in the Old Testament. But the above three capture the essence of the topic.

### ***In the New Testament:***

The New Testament usages will not differ nor add much to the Old Testament concepts. But looking at a few of them will help us be convinced of the consistency of interpretation between the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures.

Matthew 4:10: In the wilderness, Satan offers Jesus certain advantages — but only with the stipulation that Jesus offer worship to Satan. Jesus says, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.”

These words reflect what we have seen. God is a “jealous God,” knowing that ANY compromise of full devotion will be harmful. Worship is EXCLUSIVE. Jesus also includes the word “serve.” We have seen that worship (the ATTITUDE, not the SYMBOLIC bowing) includes and involves service to the one we worship.

John 4:21-24: This is a fascinating text. Jesus points out that PLACE does not really constitute a basis for true worship (verse 21). He points out that KNOWING what we worship is not sufficient for true worship (verse 22). And then he emphasizes TWO words necessary for the actual (not the ceremonial) act of worship. Jesus says (verse 23) that true worshippers in the new Christian Age will “worship the Father in SPIRIT and in TRUTH.”

When Jesus gets to verse 24, he tries to help us understand what he means by “in spirit.” How do we worship “in spirit?” He points out that God IS A SPIRIT being. He does not think like men think. In this Gospel or Christian Age, true worship of Him will be possible ONLY by those who have SPIRITUAL MINDS — minds that can comprehend and appreciate Him. (See I Corinthians 2:10-16.) This is

very limiting. It is telling us that VERY FEW among the human race will at present be able to worship God in the fullest sense. Only the “spirit begotten” sons of God (those with “spiritual minds”) will be able to carry this out because only they will have full access to the information as well as have the complete desire to do so. Ultimately, all of humanity (when God “pours out His spirit upon all flesh”) will be able to join in the true worship. But currently, there are limits. Jesus is telling us that “truth” is imperative for worship, but, at this time, “the mind of the spirit” is also a requirement.

Hebrews 1:6: This text admonishes that angels are to worship Jesus.

We earlier saw that worship of more than one authority is prohibited. But the worship of Jesus AS WELL AS OF GOD is not prohibited because they are ONE AUTHORITY. As Jesus pointed out in John 17, he and his Father are ONE — one in intent, in purpose, and in authority. Hence the Father points out that whoever honors the Son also honors the Father.

Revelation 22:8, 9: The angel (or messenger) here speaking makes an additional point so that the Hebrews text (above) might not be misunderstood. It is PROPER to HONOR any servant of God. We SIT AT THE FEET of teachers sent by God. But we do not FALL AT THE FEET of (worship) them. God and Jesus (to whom God gave “all authority in heaven and in earth”) constitute the AUTHORITY of the universe. Worship of them is proper. All others, no matter how much in conformity they are to the Father and Son are not to be objects of worship. As this angel states it, “Worship God.”

## THE CONCLUSIONS

Looking at these few texts and analyzing them has given us lessons about what constitutes actual worship — not ceremonial worship. If we meditate on what we have found, and if we augment it with a few other texts, we will come to realize whether or not we are trying to be true worshippers. If we are true worshippers:

- (1) We will have a supreme love for the one we worship. It is “supreme” in the sense that this love is ABOVE all other loves. It is an uncompromising love that knows and acknowledges that nothing or no one can come between us and the object of our worship. This is worship.
- (2) If we supremely love and respect the one we worship, we will STUDY Him — we will do all in our power not only to search His words for personal meaning, but to reject all things we have been told about Him that are not in conformity to His Scripturally-revealed character. This is worship.
- (3) If we love Him and study Him, we will next, as an objective of our worship, give all diligence to CONFORMING ourselves to His character traits. As Paul shows us in Romans 12:2, we will actively be having our minds, our ways of thinking, being

Return to Article of the Month Index

TRANSFORMED into a likeness of His way off thinking — spiritual thinking, not fleshly thinking. This is worship.

(4) If we truly find Him worthy of worship, we will SERVE Him in thought, word, and action. We will serve His purposes; we will serve His people; we will serve His standards. This is worship.

(5) If we worship, not in ceremony, but in truth, we will find it terribly distasteful to have or use fleshly thinking — human reasoning — on any topic. We will feel the need in our minds to separate ourselves from “the people of the land” — human objectives, standards, and entertainments. We cannot separate ourselves from the physical company of people. That would be a bad witness and would give us the inability to function in this world. But our thinking must be on a distinctly higher plane than that of all around us. This is worship.

(6) We will begin to realize that every event of fellowship and congregating with other saints is an act of worship because these events will be building us and others up in His likeness. Worship becomes co-working with others of like precious faith. This is worship.

-----

In summary: When we worship “in spirit and in truth,” we will LOVE God over all else; we will STUDY Him; we will CHANGE THINKING patterns; we will SERVE His purposes and His people; we will abhor and try to ELIMINATE human thinking within ourselves; we will ASSEMBLE with the saints at every available opportunity. This all is worship.