

Worship God!

by Staff

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," January 2000

The car is packed, the kids are in the back seat, and all are ready to leave for church services. Just before you climb into the driver's seat, your next-door neighbor saunters over and with a quizzical expression asks, "Where are you going?" What would we say? Most members of the greater church of God would probably say, "To church." Some, wishing to avoid talking about religion, might mention having a "meeting" to attend or name the town where services will take place. A few wisecracks might joke, "I'm going crazy," or "Away from here."

If we were asked the same question just before leaving for the Feast of Tabernacles, would we say we are going "to the Feast"? Maybe a better question would be, "*Why* do we go to church services or to the Feast?" What are the main reasons we go to where God has placed His name? Certainly, a couple of our goals would be to learn to fear Him more and to rejoice, but what does the Bible say is a primary reason we go?

Several Bible passages say people came to Jerusalem at Feast time "to worship." Even Greek converts came to worship (John 12:20). The Ethiopian eunuch "had come to Jerusalem to worship" (Acts 8:27). The apostle Paul claims he "went up to Jerusalem to worship" when he was arrested (Acts 24:11). Even the prophecy of the Millennial era says the remnants of the nations "shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

Perhaps many of us are slow to claim "worship" as a reason for what we do and where we go because it sounds so Protestant. But worshiping on the Sabbath, at the Feast and at many other times in our lives is a very biblical concept! As in all doctrines, there is a true and a false way to worship—but worship we must!

It is likewise true that many who claim to worship God are worshipping Him "in vain . . . teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). Jesus also teaches that

the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:23-24)

God is seeking true worshipers! Several times in the Bible, God's children are called "worshippers." When was the last time we consciously worshiped? Do we ever think in terms of *being* a worshiper? Would we call ourselves that? Do we even understand what it means to worship?

What Is Worship?

Except within the context of a passage, the Bible never clearly defines worship, yet understanding what it is is critical. God is even now measuring His Temple and its altar to see who worships there in truth (Revelation 11:1-2). **We** are the temple of God, so we are being measured to see if we are truly worshipping God or not.

The thesaurus gives these synonyms for *worship*: adulate, honor, glorify, edify, deify. The Greek word most often translated "worship" is *proskuneo*, meaning "to kiss, make obeisance, reverence." Strong's defines it as "to fawn or crouch to, i.e. (literally or figuratively) prostrate oneself in homage (do reverence to, adore)." The picture of being prostrate or bowed down is often associated with worship.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "worship" is *shachah*, defined as "to depress, i.e. prostrate (especially reflexive, in homage to royalty or God)." This word is also translated in the Authorized Version as "bow down, crouch, fall down, humbly beseech, do obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship."

Worship, then, is reverencing God, adoring, honoring and bowing down before Him. But a deeper study of worship shows that it is more a thing of the heart and mind than a physical action or position. Jesus says worshippers worship Him in vain when "their *heart* is far from Me" (Matthew 15: 8).

Perhaps we can say worship means having a bowed-down head and heart as we adore and revere our Maker! It is an attitude of totally and unconditionally surrendering to the One we call our Master, our Lord, our God. Mere words are not enough! Many *call* Jesus "Lord, Lord," yet He will claim not to know them, for their actions are not those of one who really knows Him (Matthew 7:21-23) or has totally submitted to God and His way. This is why Paul testifies before Felix, the procurator of Palestine, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers. . ." (Acts 24:14).

Worshipping thus becomes a *relationship* with our holy God, characterized by a bowed-down heart in total surrender. It reflects one poor in spirit and one who mourns as he recognizes his abject spiritual bankruptcy. As we bow our hearts and heads to God in worship, crying out for mercy and to be filled with God's attitudes, we are comforted and filled.

Bowing and worshipping go hand in hand in many verses in the Bible. Satan tries to get our Savior to "fall down and worship" him, but Jesus angrily replies, "Away with you, Satan! . . . 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him *only* you shall serve'" (Matthew 4:9-10). David urges us to "worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD our Maker" (Psalm 95:6). When Abraham's servant sees how well God has blessed his quest to find a wife for Isaac, "he worship[s] the LORD, bowing himself to the earth" (Genesis 24:52).

When Job hears the horrific news of the total loss of everything he once enjoyed, including all his children, he does what many would consider an unusual thing: "Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped" (Job 1:20). What an example of faith!

After Solomon dedicates the new Temple to God in prayer, the people worship: "When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD" (II Chronicles 7:3). The same acts of worship are repeated in King Hezekiah's day, as "all who were present with him bowed and worshiped" (II Chronicles 29:29).

Acts of worship like this often occur in heaven itself: "And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, 'Amen! Alleluia!'" (Revelation 19:4).

Perhaps this partly explains why worship is not deeply imbedded in our thinking. People in our independent, me-first, Western society dare not be caught on their knees in public—anywhere, anytime! Other cultures literally bow the head in deference to an older or titled person. We seldom see that here. Muslims the world over will spontaneously prostrate themselves—with foreheads on the ground—five times a day when they are called to prayer. In the Western world such demonstrations of worship are rare.

What would we think of a worship service where every person present bowed down so low that their faces touched the ground? Would this feel right? Would we be comfortable doing it? Would we believe this to be "overboard"? Yet that is often how our forefathers in Israel worshiped God.

When done properly, if we truly understand worship, this attitude of a bowed-down heart and head permeates everything we do. We seek to do God's will. We ask, "What would Jesus do?" in every situation. We do all for the glory of God, and in this sense, *everything* we do becomes either an act of worship—or of desecration.

The Bible also teaches there are specific times when God's people should worship. For example, Abraham tells his servants as he traveled the last few miles before sacrificing Isaac: "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5). In one sense we could say Abraham had been worshiping all along the way to Moriah, yet he states he was going to a specific point, at a specific time and place to worship. Similarly, after traveling many miles for many weeks, the magi tell King Herod they had come to worship the Child born to be King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2).

Worship, then, is a constant attitude of yieldedness and humility before God, but there are certain times and occasions when we worship pointedly and in earnest.

Beginning to Worship

True worship of God happens when people become aware they are in God's awesome presence. People begin to understand true worship after an "awakening" that enlightens them to the fact that Someone very awesome is with them. When we recognize God as Supreme Commander of our life, our worship reveals itself in complete and total humility and surrender to Him.

Have we met God closely enough to truly bow our hearts? Have we come to know God intimately enough to take off our shoes as a servant, bow our heads to the ground, surrender our hearts and lives and truly worship Him? If we are not yet completely aware of God's awesome presence, we could be guilty of ritualistically bowing our heads without worshipping from the heart! We could be the very ones Jesus describes as worshipping with our lips, but in vain. We could merely be going through the motions!

Notice these examples:

- » When Moses realizes the One in the burning bush is God, he not only takes off his shoes, but even hides his face, afraid to look upon God (Exodus 3:4-6).
- » Joshua has an intimate encounter just before the battle of Jericho, when God appears as the Supreme Commander of the Lord's armies. "And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, 'What does my Lord say to His servant?'" (Joshua 5:13-14).

- » After Jesus saves Peter from certain drowning after his attempt to walk on water, the other disciples understand they are in the presence of God, and they worship Him (Matthew 14:31-33).
- » A man born blind from birth has no trouble worshipping Jesus once He reveals to him that He is the Son of God. This is his moment of awakening and meeting God (John 9:37-38).
- » Our Savior has to urge Thomas to thrust his fingers into His side before that moment happens for him. In that instant he recognizes who Jesus is, proclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:24-28).

It is doubtful we will ever worship "in spirit and in truth" unless we come to see God, know God, recognize Him and completely surrender to Him. If that has not occurred yet to us, we can always ask God to reveal Himself to us and give us the eyes to see Him. Jesus commands us to ask, seek and knock, and He will respond (Matthew 7:7-11). Once He does, we can then bow our heads and our hearts to the ground in worship!

Remember Job's experience? He knew all *about* God, but only after meeting God in the whirlwind did he come to know Him. God begins Job's awakening by basically telling him, "Dumb, dumb, dumb!"—a loose paraphrase of "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). He then mocks the man, commanding him to gird up his loins like a man. With a tornado blowing around him, Job's garments were likely all over the place! After four chapters of God revealing Himself, Job worshipfully answers, "Now my eye sees You" (Job 42:5).

A time is coming when the whole world will know the Eternal, and all the world will come to worship the King. The people of the world will have had their personal encounter with Him, and they will have come to see and know Him. The result: They will worship. Paul writes, "At the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow" (Philippians 2:10).

Have we really met God yet? We should and sooner is better than later!

Practical Matters

So what should we do? Our every act should be a worshipful adoration of our great God. We can pray that everything we do will bring glory and honor to His name and purpose (I Corinthians 10:31). When we pray, we should practice bowing not just our heads but also our hearts! When we sing praises to Him, we can sing with gusto, adoringly, reverently, exalting and worshipping the Most High God. Too often our thoughts are a thousand miles away as we mouth the words to the hymns.

Next time we go to church on the Sabbath or to the Feast, we should go to worship. It will add a deeper dimension to the services, helping us listen as if God Himself is speaking—and He is, but through His ministers. This attitude will make us realize we are singing praises to a Being who is listening. Our conduct during services will exhibit greater reverence and awe as we become more aware of His holy presence in our midst.

How would we sing if we could see God in front of us? How would we dress? How would we sit? Would we ever dream of arriving late—or even at the last minute—if God were going to be visible at services? How carefully would we hang on every word and take notes? How would we act? How carefully would we have prepared ourselves and our children to be in the right frame of mind?

Whether we visibly see God or not, He *is* at His worship services. If we "see" God in Sabbath services, we will do all the above in a worshipful manner. If we do not, we will take them carelessly, disrespectfully and earn the wrath of God on ourselves. It makes no difference whether we are in a formal hall or meeting with God alone or with a few others in our homes—the same respect and honor needs to be there. Even when services are held in our homes, it is a *formal* worship service, a sacred and solemn assembly!

We should be ready to begin services, quietly and respectfully at our seats, as the songleader opens the service. When he begins speaking, worship services have begun, and we should no longer be talking to anyone else. The King is present, and we need to honor His presence. It is not just the songleader up there, but someone initiating the formal worship of the great God at His direction.

If we really adore our Father and soon-coming Savior, King and Elder Brother, we would never dream of doing anything that would upset, anger or sadden Them. That is how and why, when we really understand the concept of constantly worshiping our God, everything we do becomes an act of worship, of adoration, of reverence, of exalting the Almighty.

Let us do as David teaches, "Oh come, and let us *worship* Him."