

## Components of True Worship

When we look at the topic of this article I am sure we all think, “What is there about worship that I don’t already know? Why not discuss something different or more important?” Well, as there is nothing more important than true worship I think it is a topic worth considering. After all, just listen to the answer Jesus gave when asked what the greatest commandment was that has been given to us.

Mark 12:30 ... *“you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”*

And that, in a nutshell, is a simple definition of “worship.”

Recently I read “The Grand Weaver” by Ravi Zacharias. In the book there is a chapter entitled “Your worship matters”, in which Ravi sets out some important thoughts concerning true worship. This really spoke to me, and as worship of God is so important I would like to share some of these truths and the thoughts they stirred up within me with you for your consideration.

God is not just a resource centre from whom we can get all the things we need, no matter how pure our motives. He is primarily a living being, our Father, who seeks and desires our fellowship.

John 4:23-24 ... *“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Life’s essential purpose is to worship God in spirit and in truth. In God’s order all other purposes are meant to be secondary. If anything else becomes primary, it will ultimately destroy you. Worship is exclusionary – you cannot compromise on worship. You cannot serve two masters.

Satan will do all he can to distract you from the worship of God. Right from the beginning Satan has subtly used the “lust of the flesh”, “the lust of the eyes”, and “the boastful pride of life” to sway mankind away from the worship of God, and in doing so to transfer worship to himself.

1 John 2:15-17 ... *“Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup> For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. <sup>17</sup> The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.”*

Satan even tried out his ploys with Jesus while tempting Him in the wilderness. We read of this in Matt 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-14. In His dialogue with Satan Jesus replied with a very clear answer:

Matt 4:8-10 ... *Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; <sup>9</sup> and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him **only**.”*

When Jesus said, “Him **only**” that’s exactly what He meant. Satan is subtle and will even try to get you to reserve just a **tiny, little** part to belong to someone or something other than God. In doing so, you

will be compromising on true worship. That's all Stan wants, a little compromise to nullify your worship of God. To destroy you.

So remember, worship is exclusionary – you cannot compromise on worship. You cannot serve two masters.

### **Worship's Definition:**

So what is *worship*? Quite simply, as Jesus told us, it is ... *"loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."* Which, by implication, is something we are to do "all the time".

But let me add, the word "worship" comes from an old English term no longer used, namely, **"worthship."** It really relates to how much **worth** you attribute to someone or something.

Worship shows God how much "worth" or "value" we place in Him.

In the Hebrew two words are used for "worship" – Shachah (שָׁחָה) which means *"to bow down"*; and, avad (עָבַד) which means *"to work subject to another's will"* (it is the same root word from which the word "slave" – eved – is derived). So these words in relation to worship are quite simply mean *"to bow down"* and *"to serve"*. And if we put them together they simply mean *"reverence in serving."*

So worship is an act of submission to God's rule in our lives, in response to which He enters with His loving blessing and liberating power. By a lifestyle of honouring and obeying God's word in our words and actions, by exalting His Son with our lips in our daily conversation and by giving the Holy Spirit a place to work in our lives by our love and actions towards God and others, when we stand before God and worship in song, we are saying by the backing of our lifestyle of worship that we truly place great "worthship" in Him. The result of worship in spirit and in truth will be that His blessings and glory presence will become the portion of those who pursue a pathway of humility before His throne.

So we see that true worship involves in every aspect of our lives. It is seeing and living life God's way. It is ... *"loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."*

### **Worship's Components:**

In the book of Acts we find the **main components of worship**. These include: Teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, prayer, praise (including thanksgiving), and giving.

Acts 2:42-47 ... *"They were **continually** devoting themselves to the apostles' **teaching** and to **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and to **prayer**.<sup>43</sup> Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup>And all those who had believed were **together** and had all things in common;<sup>45</sup> and they began selling their property and possessions and were **sharing** them with all, as anyone might have need.<sup>46</sup> Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and **breaking bread** from house to house, they were taking their meals **together** with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup>**praising God** and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."*

Note the words, “continually”, “day by day”, and “from house to house” – these speak of all day everyday events, because worship is not just something reserved for Sundays!

So let us consider these main elements of worship.

### **1. Teaching:**

With the shift from Old Testament to New Testament times, particularly with the Diaspora, there was a major change in the manner and means of worship. There was no more temple and priests for their gatherings and rituals, and there were new gentile converts with no background knowledge of God’s ways. So what took place was mainly a shift in focus from ceremony to teaching.

In the early church, teaching very quickly became the backbone of the entire worship liturgy. Without the Apostles teaching, the rest of the components of worship would become prone to heretical expressions. So we see Holy Spirit directed teaching guides and guards the integrity of worship. Teaching gives direction and understanding of how to be a worshipping community. Teaching prepares the children of the community to understand their faith in God and to pass it on to the next generation. Teaching explains the lifestyle of a true worshiper.

Somewhere, somehow, many have come to be of the opinion that music is the centrepiece of worship. It isn’t. It has its place and is included in “Praise and thanksgiving”, which is *one of several* components or expressions of worship. None of the various individual components of worship are exclusive, they are mutually dependant. The sum of all of them comprises worship in spirit and in truth.

In many gatherings of believers the focus is on the “music programme”, which in many instances rather sadly attempts to copy the ways of the world in attempts to attract the world, taking up the majority of the duration of the service, and the ministry of the Word, teaching in particular, has taken a back seat or has almost vanished. Is it possible that for us to be so swept up in this manner that we lose the message and guidelines to true worship in its fullest meaning? Teaching must become an integral and central part of worship again so that our lives and ultimately our worship expressions are biblically induced and shaped. Misplaced, diminished or an absence of good teaching will most certainly eventually lead to a heretical church.

To make a point of this, just look for a few young Christian folks and ask them two questions: 1. How many choruses or hymns can you sing, knowing all the words and tunes, 2. How many scriptures can you quote, and can you show from the Scriptures the path to salvation? By their answers you will soon see where the emphasis lies in their churches and lives. They love the boppy songs and lively music, but do they study and obey God’s word? The components of true worship are not mutually exclusive. The sum of all of them comprises worship in spirit and in truth. Sound teaching is an integral part of true worship.

### **2. Prayer:**

Prayer is not a monologue. It is a dialogue between you and God. It’s a conversation between the two of you, through which God shapes and directs your heart and brings His will and plans for you into reality. Primarily, prayer enables you to see your own heart and brings you into alignment with God’s heart and purposes. If we engage in prayer, communing with God, we are drawn into a deeper love

for God for who He is, not for what we can get from Him. In drawing closer to Him we deepen our worship for and of Him. So prayer and our getting to know God is an integral part of our worship.

### **3. Praise and Thanksgiving:**

Throughout the Scriptures we see the importance of praise and thanksgiving to God. He instituted the various festivals and special occasions in order that the numerous facets of His truth could be emphasised through song and music, to His glory. Times of celebrating and giving thanks for our salvation, praising Him for the people and circumstances He used to bring us to salvation. Praising and thanking Him for the resurrection and ascension of our Lord so that we could be brought to new life and filled with the Holy Spirit. Most importantly, praising and worshipping Him for who He is; for His amazing nature and attributes. Praise fills us with God's wonder. Thanksgiving expresses our appreciation for who He is as well as for what He has done.

Any diminishing or loss of worshipful praise and thanksgiving results in the defacing of life's essential purpose, which, in response to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Heb 13:15-16 ... *"Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased".*

1 Thess 5:18 ... *"in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus".*

It's also good to remember that seeds of discouragement cannot gain root in a heart of gratitude.

### **4. Giving:**

According to Malachi 1:7-14, after diminishing and eventual cessation of their praise and worship of God, the Israelites lost their generous heart of giving. In place of giving their best they brought the lame, blind and sick animals to be offered on the altar to God. They presented their leftovers and damaged and unwanted possessions to God.

To keep the best for yourself and present the crumbs to God is not worship it's blasphemy. True worshippers are those whose give of their best to God. The best of their time, energies and substance. What blesses God is a generous person – especially those who give of their time, energies and substance to help the hurting and deprived folks of the world. As James states:

Jas 1:27 ... *"Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world."*

Generosity is an integral part of our worship.

### **5. The Fellowship of the Lord's Supper:**

Fellowship and the Lord's Supper are considered under one heading quite simply because they are not mutually exclusive, as we will see. You cannot have one without the other.

When Jesus answered the question as to what was the greatest commandment and said, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"* He immediately added *"The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

This highlights the importance of fellowship (loving your neighbour). In Acts 2:42-47 we read how they were daily breaking bread together, going from house to house, and eating meals together. Togetherness – or fellowship was the believers' daily practice. There is so much in the Word about "encouraging one another", "building up one another", and loving, acceptance and forgiveness. These are all aspects of fellowship which are an integral part of our daily "worthship" of God.

From the moment Adam and Eve submitted to the lie of the devil instead of believing and obeying God's word, the communion of man with God was broken. So to this day **brokenness** describes the human condition.

Romans 5:18-19 ... *"So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. <sup>19</sup> For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."*

Romans 3:23-24 ... *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."*

Mankind is broken and every kind of struggle we face will only be mended when we understand the symbol of Jesus' breaking of the bread and pouring of the wine.

Look at the struggles that take place in our broken world – gender issues, racial issues, political battles, personal struggles, national feuds, religious and doctrinal wars, and so on. Even believers against other believers over petty issues. The break in communion with God caused our break with one another, and we will only find unity and enjoy true fellowship when we fully understand the reason for the brokenness and when we understand the following expressions of Jesus' broken body and shed blood:

... *"This is my body given for you" ... "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"* (Lu 22:19-20)

Jesus was broken so that we might be mended. *"Eat the bread, drink from the cup"* is an expression of renewed fellowship with God from which we begin renewed fellowship with our fellow human beings. Partaking in the Lord's Supper is a communal thing that expresses within a community the fellowship to which we are called. We the church are called to be a community of healing. The church will never culminate worship until the Communion cup has been drunk to the last dregs (And this does not mean the physical drinking every scrap of wine in the chalice, rather it means we have come to fully understand and are aligned with what the elements of Communion represent).

1 Cor 11:27-29 ... *"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the*

*cup.<sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly."*

Paul explains to us that a person brings upon himself or herself harsh judgement by taking part in Communion without first discerning the essence of and implications of the expression, "eat the bread, drink from the cup". When Jesus said, "do this in remembrance of Me", He was basically saying, "I have given my body and blood to forgive you and to restore you into right relationship with the triune God and with your fellow man. Your restoration has been bought with a price, My life, and now I live in you and want to extend my grace and mercy through you to all those around you – I am here to bring wholeness in every area and relationship of your life. That is what you must remember." What begins between God and me within me as an individual must continue within me as a part of a community. You have received forgiveness and wholeness from God in order to extend forgiveness and wholeness to others. The forgiven must become the forgivers. This is the meaning of "rightly judging the body". Even as the cross has vertical and horizontal components, so communion is both vertical and horizontal. There was no condition to our forgiveness, Jesus freely died in our place, paid the price for our sin and forgave us and restored us to fellowship with Him, and so there should be no condition to our forgiveness for others and restoration of fellowship with them. Freely you have received, freely give. If the forgiven are not in turn forgivers, they cannot be true worshippers and thereby they bring condemnation upon themselves.

Mark 12:30-31 ... *"you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" ... "You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these."*

Immediately before His crucifixion Jesus prayer a very specific prayer, that we may be one with Him and one with one another:

John 17:20-23 ... *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; <sup>21</sup>that they may all be **one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, **that they also may be in Us**, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be **one**, just as We are **one**; <sup>23</sup>I in them and You in Me, **that they may be perfected in unity**, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."*

So each time we partake of the bread and wine we are to remember that "comm-union" and "comm-unity" speak of our oneness with Christ and with each other.

Matt 26:29 ... *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

Finally the day will come when we drink from that cup together in heaven. The oneness of the Trinity and the oneness of our communion with the triune God give us the only hope that our fractured lives and fractured societies and races may one day come together.

I would like to share a quotation from "The Grand Weaver" made by Thomas Merton (an American Trappist monk) after he had participated in his first communion:

"I left the altar rail and went back to the pew ... and I hid my face in my hands. In the temple of God that I had just become, the once eternal and pure sacrifice was offered up to the God dwelling in me. The sacrifice of God to God. Now, Christ born in me, a new Bethlehem, and sacrificed in me his new Calvary, and risen in me: offering me to the Father, in Himself, asking the Father, my Father and His, to receive me into His infinite and special love – not the love He has for all things that exist, for mere existence is a token of God's love, but the love of those creatures who are drawn to Him in and with the power of His own love for Himself."

Zacharias continues, and I quote:

"After Merton observes how everything within him converged – Bethlehem, Calvary, and the empty tomb, now all within him; God offering Himself to God within the mortal frame of this kneeling man – he ends with the key words "the love of those creatures who are drawn to Him in and with the power of His own love for Himself." The love with which God Himself is bound, now binding us to Himself. This is the mystery, the majesty, and the grandeur of Holy Communion – God's love shed in our hearts to keep us from fragmentation and dissolution."

"In creating Eve for Adam, God intended an exclusive and sacred fellowship. In creating different races, God intended a sacred respect and fellowship. When we eat the bread and drink from the cup with a fellow human being, everything that divides us is overcome by the love that God has within Himself. A man who dishonours his wife has broken fellowship with God. A man who dishonours or refuses to forgive his neighbour has broken fellowship with God. Communion is both vertical and horizontal."

Worship is consummated in the broken body and shed blood. If we are to be worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth this understanding cannot be adulterated.

### **Conclusion:**

Our entire life, the life of a true worshipper, is an altar before God. All that our "altar" consists of is part of what constitutes our worship – or the "worth" we place in God. The altar of a true worshipper is one which treasures and displays:

- A desire for good biblical teaching, which points us to a deeper and more intimate knowledge of God and His ways, and
- A prayer life that leads to the formation of a pure heart that is aligned with the will and purposes of God, and
- A heart filled with praise and thanksgiving towards God; our loving heavenly Father, our Savior the Son, and our Helper the Holy Spirit. Praise and thanksgiving primarily for who He is – an awesome God, and
- A generous heart. One which gives of its best in time, energy and substance to God and the work and extension of His kingdom, and finally
- A true understanding of the meaning of union and communion with God, and which extends to union and communion with our neighbour.

These are the **main components** which **together** constitute true worship. So let us be worshippers in spirit and in truth, whose entire daily lives show how much we honour, value and show worth to God.



### Communion Addendum:

Consider the following if you are to partake in Holy Communion.

Jesus said, *“Do this in remembrance of Me.”*

Look at Jesus on the cross and remember that it was as His **body was being broken** and His **blood being shed** that he cried out, “Father **forgive** them, for they do not know what they are doing”. His broken body and shed blood are integrally tied to forgiveness. We are to remember forgiveness is both vertical and horizontal – as God has forgiven us, we are to extend forgiveness to others.

So before partaking in the bread and cup take a moment to see if there is any unforgiveness and brokenness of relationships with others with whom you are involved (“examine yourself”, “judge the body rightly” apply here), and if there is an outstanding problem then commit before God to forgiving them unconditionally and restoring those broken relationships and do so at the earliest opportunity, so that you do not bring condemnation upon yourself by partaking in communion unworthily.

1 Cor 13:4-8 ... *“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”*

We are to remember to, *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” ... and ... “love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.*