

What is True Worship?

By Steven Shepard

“Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying ‘Where is He who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him’” (Matt. 2:1-2)

Guided by the star, wise men came to worship the baby Jesus. Matthew 2:11 says that "when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother and fell down and worshiped Him." The Greek word "worship" means to prostrate oneself. But biblical worship implies more than the bowing down of our body. It is the surrendering of our entire being to Jesus as Lord and Master (Rom 12:1). Jesus is God. He created us, died for us, and loves us with an unchangeable love. To know Him is to worship Him. But what is true worship like? The following points are offered to clarify what worship is and what it is not:

1. Worship is not limited to special times or places. Worship is not just singing songs. It also involves the obedience of our whole life, all the time, and in every place. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. (John 4:21b, 23a)"

2. Worship is in both spirit and truth. Worship is *in spirit* when it comes *from the heart* flowing out of communion with God and in dependence upon the Spirit. Worship is in *truth* when it involves a *genuine* response to a personal knowledge of truth. It is not "vain repetition".

3. Worship is properly expressed through our whole being including mind, will, and emotions. Worship does not by-pass the mind or understanding. It is only when we are convinced of the truth about who God is and what He has done that we will worship Him. Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matt 22:37)."

4. Worship is not a method to enter into the presence of God. As Christians, we are *always* in the presence of God through faith in Jesus. We may experience His presence as we worship Him; but it is not for this reason that we worship. (Heb 10:19; Eph 2:13)

5. True worship is God centered, not man centered. Worship is not for our own fulfillment, enjoyment, entertainment, or experience, but for God's pleasure. In public worship every song should have lyrics that are biblical and God centered. The focus of people's attention should not be upon the music, the rhythm, or the group who is leading, but upon God. Losing oneself in music or rhythm does not encourage the work of the Spirit, but rather can lead to a false carnal experience.

6. In public worship what matters is not the outward form or style, but the inward attitudes of the heart. These attitudes should include the fear of God, humility, repentance, thanksgiving, love, and complete submission to Him.

7. In the congregation there are a variety of biblical ways to express our worship: singing, reading Scriptures, kneeling, raising hands, clapping, being quiet, shouting in a loud voice, giving testimonies, and dancing for joy. Services may be structured or spontaneous, express a quiet reflection or a joyful celebration.