

Msg #154 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*

"True Worship Is In Three Parts"

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to talk about worship. We all worship in one form or another, but when we come before God to worship him, it is necessary that we worship in a manner, a form, that will be pleasing to God. No, I'm not talking about whether you worship with organ music or guitars and drums, or whether you sing hymns or modern music. I'm talking about the actual worship to God that comes from you, that comes from your heart.

Now, I know that we're not in the Old Testament, and we're not under the Old Covenant of Law, but it is helpful to understand some of the principles of the Old Testament Worship in order to understand what God likes and what he doesn't like. After all, if God doesn't appreciate your worship, then you're just singing to yourself. Now, if that's all that's taking place, then I hope you're really enjoying it because that's all you're going to get out of it.

However, if you're really intent on worshipping God, then take a look at the form of worship in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament we can see that God instructed the Children of Israel in their method of worship, and one of the most important points of instruction was that the worship of God was only to take place in the place where God himself set his name. For the Children of Israel, this meant where the temple was. God's presence was in the Most Holy Place in which was placed the Ark of the Covenant. On this Ark of the Covenant was a lid, which was called the Mercy Seat. God dwelled above this Mercy Seat. When the Children of Israel worshiped God, they were required to go to the temple and worship God there.

Let me read Deuteronomy 12, starting in verse 10. It says, “But when you go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you dwell in safety; 11 Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; there shall you bring all that I command you; your burned offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which you vow unto the LORD.” Then, in verse 13 it says, “Take heed to yourself that you offer not your burned offerings in every place that you see: 14 But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burned offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.” And then we read in verse 17, “You may not eat within your gates the tithe of your grain, or of your wine, or of your oil, or the firstborn of your herds or of your flock, nor any of your vows which you vow, nor your freewill offerings, or heave offering of your hand: 18 But you must eat them before the LORD your God in the place which the LORD your God shall choose.”

You see, God instructed the Children of Israel that it was only in his presence that you could worship him. Now, of course that makes sense. What else would God want? He wouldn't want his children to worship him without himself being there. That would be silly. But then, God wasn't being picky, and he surely wasn't being silly. He knew that if the Children of Israel were to worship anywhere else, that they might very well go through the ritual of worship without being conscious of God's actual presence. If this happened, they might seem to be worshipping God, but they really wouldn't be. Now, God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. However, God's people must focus their attention on God and not just go through the motions. By requiring the Children of Israel to worship in Jerusalem, they were certain to be aware of his presence. It would be especially evident.

Now, this is an important concept for Christians. Sometimes the worship which takes place in this current day is a worship which takes place without God really being present. Sometimes people get involved in the form of worship and don't really have a personal awareness of God himself. Sometimes Christians get emotionally involved with the music without being fervently involved in the words of the song.

Each song has words. Without words the music is useless. Unless the song describes a certain message, then there is no worship of God. God cannot be truly worshiped without expressing something, and nothing can be expressed without words. Now, there is one exception to this, and that is when a person is communicating to God in spirit. However, this too has a message that passes from the worshiper to God. It may not be expressed in actual human words, but it is certainly descriptive. But no matter whether you worship in descriptive word or worship in descriptive emotion, you must still be focused directly on God. If you sing, dance, raise your hands, shout, bow before the Lord, or kneel, still, you must be focused on God in order for true worship to take place. The temple at Jerusalem ensured this concept. It made the Children of Israel very much aware that they had come to the place of God. Therefore, when they worshiped, it was almost a certainty that they would be focused on God.

Let me share something with you that might help you to see the concept of focusing on the Lord during worship. Several years ago I attended a worship seminar. Several people from my church attended, and there were many others from area churches that attended. On the final night of the seminar we were packed into a church that held 5,000 people, and as far as I could see, every seat had been taken. It was a very big event. We sang some worship choruses for about 20 minutes, and then the program stopped in order for the worship leader to introduce the musicians. He gave each musician an extensive introduction, praising each one of them for their many accomplishments in the field of music and for their great talent. At the end of each introduction, the musician would then demonstrate his or her great talent. They would play their respective instrument for about 30 seconds with a lot of showmanship. The drummer went wild on the drums, and it sounded like a wild man banging on the heads and cymbals. When it was the guitar player's turn, he played up and down the neck of the guitar and made it squeal like crazy, and in addition he squatted way down and shook his head back and forth. When it was time for the piano player to show his stuff he performed up and down the whole 88 key keyboard, demonstrating his fantastic talent and then stood up and played more still, also contorting his body along with the music to the extent possible while still maintaining his balance.

While this was going on the audience was going wild. They clapped their hands and shouted and whooped at the showmanship taking place. Well, after a few minutes the flashy introductions were over. Then the worship band started playing a worship chorus and the worship leader stepped up to the center of stage again, and began to tell the audience to stand to their feet because the King was coming into the house. Essentially, the worship leader was telling the people that Jesus Christ was just then, right at that moment, entering the auditorium. He continued to urge the audience to stand to their feet, telling them that they must stand in order to give honor to the King as he entered into the house. The musicians continued to play their instruments loudly, and the people started rising from the seats. However, at this very time the Lord spoke to me in my inner self and said, "Randy, don't stand up." Of course, I immediately wondered what was going on, but the Lord further said, "don't get caught up in the hypocrisy." Well, to tell you the truth, I wanted to stand up in the worst kind of way. The worship leader was continuing to urge everyone to stand up. In fact, he wouldn't let it alone. He kept urging every single person to stand, saying that he didn't want anyone at all to remain seated because the Lord was entering the house, and everyone should stand to welcome him in. All the people were rising to their feet, and I was becoming uncomfortable by remaining seated. I looked around at everyone standing and asked the Lord if I could just stand up so that people wouldn't get the wrong impression and think that I didn't care about giving honor to Jesus. But the Lord spoke very clearly once again and said, "No, don't stand up. They are not honoring me. They are just using me for their own purposes. I am not entering into the house. I have been here all along. I was here when the musicians were showing off in order to receive glory from the people, and none of them even thought about me standing right here in their midst. I was here all the time, and they didn't even know it." Well, for sure, I was amazed. The voice within me was so clear. It was almost as if it was audible. So I just sat there. People would look at me with a questioning look, and the man behind me laid his hands on me and started praying. I believe that

except for one person I saw in a wheelchair, I was the only one in the whole auditorium that remained seated.

The call to stand had continued for what seemed like at least five minutes. But you know, the Lord was right. The worship team was being hypocritical. God doesn't wait around outside the sanctuary until someone signals for him to come in. God is omnipresent. He dwells among his people everywhere. The Lord was already in the sanctuary when the musicians first entered themselves. They didn't even give a thought about Jesus Christ when they were showing off, and on top of everything, they thought they could tell him when to come in.

But God isn't in the business of performing on cue, and he's not going to take a backstage position while the musicians show off their talents. If we're going to worship God, then we're going to have to do it on his terms.

A little while ago, in the not to distant past, God put a thought into my mind about worship, and gave me an understanding of how true worship consisted of three parts. The first part was sacrifice, and the second part was the praise and singing, and the third part was allowing God to work in us in order to change us. In fact, I believe God spoke to me and told me that there is a great danger when a church has a very accomplished worship team. He said that if the musicians are really talented, and the worship leader is very skilled in manipulating the audience, then there is a great chance that the people will become enthralled with worship itself instead of focusing their singing and praise on God. It's not that people can't sing and praise the Lord along with a talented worship team, but that when the musicians and worship leader are very skilled, it is very easy for the people to begin to enjoy the music and to get emotionally involved with the singing and worship motions. In addition, the ecstasy which results from this might very well not be a true worship of God because the attention is not focused on God, but on the emotion of worship. It doesn't matter if it's in a church with stained glass windows or a modern structure with lots of chrome. If the worship team is really talented, it's very easy for many people to be lulled into a false sense of worship where they lose their focus on God and just enjoy the music instead of speaking to God with their heart.

Now, in the Old Testament, the Bible tells us that when the Children of Israel came before God to worship him that they were not to appear before him empty handed. Let me read one example of this in Deuteronomy 16:16. It says, "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty:"

Christians sometimes make the same mistake of appearing before God empty handed. Now, I'm not necessarily talking about money. In the Old Testament, tithes and offerings were given, but one of the most important parts of worshiping God was the sacrifice. When we worship God, he also wants a sacrifice from us. However, the sacrifice he wants from us is not an animal sacrifice. What God wants is us. He wants us to be a living sacrifice unto God. Romans 12:1

tells us that we are to be a living sacrifice, and also that this is not an unreasonable requirement from God. Giving ourselves to God is the normal thing to do. When we come before God to worship him, we must not appear before him empty handed. We must present ourselves as a living sacrifice. This is also the reason that we give tithes and offerings of such things that we have. Without giving to God of the things in which he has blessed us, we do not have the right to even come into his presence. When a king sits on the throne, people who come to him honor him by bringing him presents. This ensures that the king will be favorable to them. It's no different with God. And, the most important part of giving to him is to give yourself. If you think you are entering into the worship of God and you really aren't presenting yourself wholly and completely to him, then he really isn't your Lord and Master because you have withheld yourself from him. In order to truly worship God you must raise him up to the level he deserves, and you must do this by lowering yourself down. If you cannot humble yourself in worship, then you aren't really worshipping.

Now, there's a third part of the worship process that must also be accomplished, and that is allowing God to do a work in us in order to change us. When we appear before God to worship him, we must also allow him to change us, to change our hearts and make us into what he wants us to be. No person can truly worship God unless they are also giving God the opportunity to do a work in their heart. God's Holy Spirit is the conduit by which God works in his body. We are the body of God, because we are the body of Christ. However, we cannot be moved by God's Holy Spirit to do his will if we resist him. God will not force us to worship him, and he will also not force us to do his will. We surely will be held liable if we resist his will, but in order to change us and make us more like Christ, we must open up ourselves to him and allow him to do the work. If you come before God to worship him, and even if you appear with an offering, the offering and the praise is not acceptable to God unless you also are willing for him to do his work in you. A man who is not willing to be changed is not an acceptable sacrifice. In the Old Testament, any sacrifice on the altar was always consumed by the fire of God. When we allow God to do his work in us, he purifies us with fire in order to purge us from the impurities of this life. True worship must begin with sacrifice, but it must also end with the sacrifice being purified with fire. Unless God is allowed to purify us, we really haven't offered ourselves in sacrifice.

Ezekiel 3:31 says, "And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee *as* my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, *but* their heart goes after their covetousness."

This is what happens in many church circles. The people come like all Christians come to church, and they sit there before God and they worship and then listen to the sermon, but even though they display a lot of love with their mouths, they don't really let the word of God penetrate them. They are still consumed, but not with the fire of God. They are consumed with the covetousness which is directed toward the delicacies of this earth. They're just going through the motions of worship but not really worshipping God from the heart.

You know, there's a lot of hype these days about the style of worship. There are some who insist on singing the old hymns in church, and there are some who insist that unless the song is currently on the best seller charts then it isn't worth singing. But personally, I don't much care if the songs are current or old fashioned, I like either kind as long as the music doesn't prohibit me from worshipping God. You see, I love music, and I certainly can be moved by it, but what I really love best are songs where I can best express my love for God. If a song expresses what I really feel about Jesus, then that's the song I like best. I think it's nice to have musical talent. I don't have much of it myself, and I certainly can't claim to have good rhythm, but what I do understand pretty well is the words of the songs. I like words. I like to express myself with words. I like to express my feelings to God with words. Sure, sometimes I just express my feelings to God by my emotions, and I let my heart commune with God in spirit, but most times I like to express myself with words that reflect how I really feel about him.

I love God. I love his son, Jesus Christ. When I worship in a church setting, I can worship with the organ playing and I can worship with guitars and drums. However, what I can't do very well is worship when the musicians and singers are just showing off their talent. That kind of music gets in my way. I would rather have no music at all than to have musicians standing up on stage without a clue as to what they're really supposed to be doing. Besides, how can a worship team lead the people to a place that they haven't gone themselves?

I think a worship team is supposed to add to the worship, not take away from it. I think that when God is worshiped, it's supposed to be like shining a spotlight on him so as to give him as much glory as possible. In fact, when we are trying to glorify the Lord, that's what glorifying is all about. To glorify someone is to make that person the center of attention. That's why a spotlight on the stage is used, to make a person stand out from the rest. Can you imagine Jesus Christ taking a back row position on the stage? I can't. I think worship leaders and musicians who concentrate more on showing off their talent than in making Jesus Christ the center of attention should go back and start over again and find out what it really means to glorify God. In fact, I think maybe we all need to go back and start over again. I think it's time that God begins to get the glory he deserves instead of his people just singing and dancing because it feels good.