



God is spirit, and those who
worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

On Worship
with Pastor Steve

Worship: A Way of Life

In England during the 1500s, especially during the reign of Queen Mary, the Christian church came under terrible persecution. Many Christians including clergy were excommunicated and/or executed for refusing to denounce their beliefs and adhere to the teachings of the state church.

One of those who suffered for his faith was Thomas Hawkes. Hawkes was born in Essex, England and later entered into the service of the Lord of Oxford. Upon the death of Edward VI, rather than change his religious beliefs to that of Queen Mary, Hawkes left his service and returned home. After returning home Hawkes' wife gave birth to a son. Hawkes refused to have the boy baptized according to the Catholic tradition and was reported to the Earl of Oxford. He was sent by the earl to Bishop Bonner of London where he answered to the charge of contempt of the sacraments.

Hawkes and Bonner argued over several practices of the Catholic Church. Other church officials were brought in to persuade Hawkes to change his beliefs, but Hawkes stood firm and would not recant. On February 9, 1555 he was condemned as a heretic and stayed in prison until June 10.

Days before Hawkes was to be burned at the stake he agreed with his friends that he would lift his hands over his head if the pain was tolerable and his mind was at peace. When he was engulfed in flames and most people thought he was dead, Hawkes suddenly raised his burning hands above his head and clapped three times. Those who understood the gesture broke into shouts of praise and applause as Thomas Hawkes sank into the fire and died. (Taken from *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World*).

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* (Romans 12:1)

The Greek word used for service in this passage compares to our English word liturgy. According to Webster's dictionary, liturgy is a system of public worship in the Christian church. Many theologians, smarter than I, have interpreted this passage as saying, *which is your reasonable worship*. The Amplified Bible says, *service and spiritual worship*. The Roman Christians had certainly heard of sacrifices, but they were familiar with dead ones, not living ones. The Old Testament sacrifices had been killed at the will of their masters. They had no will of their own but submitted to the will of their masters. When it came time for the fire to consume them they didn't object.

The same applies to a true worshiper; however, this sacrifice is alive. A true worshiper offers himself to the Master as a holy sacrifice. He is dead to his own will but alive to the will of his master. When it is time for the fire to consume him he doesn't object. This was the life of Thomas Hawkes. When it was time for him to face the fire he gladly embraced the flames.

Notice Paul says that to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice is our reasonable service. It is as if it is taken for granted; it is rational and logical. In the preceding versus to chapter 12 of Romans, he explains that God has turned Israel over to disobedience so that he can have mercy on all. *Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out. . . .* (Romans 11:33) Who would not give themselves to worship him? It only makes sense.

Jesus tapped into this idea when he said, *Does he (the master) thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things*

which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do. (Luke 17:9-10)

The ultimate expression of love is the giving of one's life for another. Jesus said, *Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.* (John 15:13) Laying down of one's life for another is the relinquishing of the right to have one's needs met in order to meet the needs of another. Though this doesn't necessarily mean physical death, physical death is certainly included. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.* (Ephesians 5:2)

A true worshiper has no life of his own. He has been bought with a price. He has died to the right to have his needs met in order to meet the needs of his Creator; to do the will of the Creator. The true worshiper does not exist for himself. He exists for his Maker.

In 1 Samuel 15, God gave King Saul a command through the prophet Samuel, to destroy all the people of Amalek. He was to destroy their sheep, camels and donkeys as well. However, when Samuel arrived after the battle, Saul had spared the best of the flock and Agag the King of the Amalekites. Saul's excuse for sparing the animals was so that he and the people could sacrifice. Samuel responded to Saul by saying, *Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed as the fat of rams.* (v22) God didn't receive Saul's sacrifice of worship because Saul had disobeyed God's will and worshiped his own way. He satisfied his own ego. Saul wanted to look good in the eyes of the people, but apart from obedience his worship was meaningless.

Without Jesus' death on the cross all mankind would be lost forever. However, without Jesus' submission to the Father's will, there would not have been a sacrifice for sin. According to the book of Matthew, after Jesus and the disciples finished the Passover meal they retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and asked them to pray with him. Going a little further he prayed three times, *O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will, but as you will.* (Matthew 26:30-44) Though Jesus knew the cup he was to drink was that of suffering and death, he submitted to the will of the Father. His obedience to the Father and his love for what the Father loved were the factors that made his sacrifice acceptable.

It is obedience to the Father that makes our worship acceptable. Jesus said, *If you love me, keep my commandments.* (John 14:15) True love is the gas that fuels our worship. Obedience is the gauge of true love. Without obedience there is no true love. Without true love there is no worship.

Each of us is at a different level in our journey to becoming true worshipers, and God would have us know that where we are is okay, as long as we don't stay there. He wants us to move from our comfort zones and rise to the next level. He calls us to authenticate our worship by laying down our lives in obedience, even unto death.