



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

John 4:24

On Worship

with Pastor Steve

Worshiping the Father

John writes in his gospel, *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father. . . .* What does it mean to worship the Father? How do we make the Father the object our worship? Let me suggest a couple of ways: 1. The Father must have our affection. 2. The Father must have our attention.

In Luke 7:36-50 is a story of a woman who unashamedly displayed her affection toward Jesus. Jesus was having dinner with Simon, a Pharisee, at Simon's home. While they were eating a woman in the city, whom the Pharisees called a sinner, came in with an alabaster flask of fragrant oil. As Jesus reclined at the table the woman stood at his feet behind him weeping and began to wash his feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair. She also kissed his feet and anointed them with oil.

It was obvious to the Pharisees that this lady was a prostitute. They either knew her by reputation or the fact that she let her hair down. It was a custom in those days for women to wear their hair up with their head covered. The only time a woman was seen with her hair down was in the privacy of her bedroom with her husband or in the case of a prostitute when she was conducting business.

This woman lavished her love upon Jesus, not in response to a command but from a heart that was overflowing with gratitude. She was responding to the love of a God who had forgiven her of much. She wasn't concerned what those sitting at the table thought of her. True worshipers are not ashamed to show their affection to the Father regardless of who is watching. They are so overwhelmed with his love for them that fear of looking foolish is no deterrent.

Like the Pharisees dining with Simon, Christians can easily fall into the trap of worshiping traditions, ritual or institutions. Their affections are misplaced and the preservation of tradition becomes their passion. When the preservation of religious traditions causes a congregation to become inflexible to the word and leading of God, traditions take the place of God. When the love of such traditions becomes the affection of the worshiper the result is idolatry.

Upon the final entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the Pharisees (the church leaders of that day), rebuked Jesus because his disciples were worshiping him. The Pharisees spent many hours in the temple studying God's word to know when the Messiah would come. They spent time in fasting and prayer for God to send the Messiah. Yet, when the Messiah came they missed the very thing they searched for, because they loved their tradition and their position more than they loved God.

There are many things in the world that war for our affections. Being the father of five children it is my desire to constantly show my family how much I love them and give them the affection they need. Christians must, however, be careful not to let even family members become their first love. Jesus said, *He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.* Jesus is to be our first love. All other loves should pail in comparison to our love for him. Mark 12:30 reads, *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . .*

God is looking for men and women who want him more than they want his gifts. Men and women who like the woman sinner are not afraid to break their alabaster boxes and anoint him with fragrant worship regardless of what those around them may think. The Father is looking for those people who will unashamedly let their hair down and show publicly how much they love and adore him. To truly worship the Father he must be at the top of our affections list.

Let me take you back a few years to the time when Moses and the children of Israel were building the tabernacle. God had given Moses specific instructions on the construction of the tabernacle, and God's spirit empowered the people to build it.

The most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle was the ark of the covenant. The ark was placed inside the Holy of Holies where only the priests could enter, one time a year, to make atonement for the sins of the people. On top of the ark were two angel like beings called cherubim; one on each end, and their wings covered the top of the ark. Between the wings of the cherubim was the mercy seat. It was on the mercy seat that the visible presence of God dwelt.

To the Israelites the ark of the covenant represented God's presence among them. The Israelites carried the ark with them into battle, and it preceded the Israelites into the Jordan River as they entered the promised land. In 1 Samuel we read of an instance when the children of Israel presumed on God when they brought the ark into battle. They felt sure that with the ark present victory was imminent. Yet, because of the wickedness of the sons of the high priest Israel lost the battle, and the ark was captured by the Philistines.

The Philistines took the ark and placed it in the temple beside their god Dagan. When they came to the temple early the next morning they found Dagan lying on its face before the ark of God. So they took it and set it up again. The next morning they arrived at the temple only to find Dagan lying on its face again before the ark of God. This time, however, the head of Dagan and the palms of its hands were broken off at the threshold of the temple; only the torso was left intact.

The Philistines had taken the God of the universe and attempted to add him to the worship of their idol Dagan, but it didn't work. The children of Israel made a similar mistake. They had not repented of their wickedness, but thought God would rescue them from the Philistines just because the ark was present. Their worship was directed toward the ark of God instead of toward the God of the ark. The ark had become an idol to Israel.

So many Christians today have turned their attention toward careers, sports, television and hobbies. Worship, prayer, and bible study. Christian service has fallen to the bottom of the priority list. Like Dagan, whose head and hands were broken before God, their minds are filled with earthly things and their hands are busy doing for self. Some Christians have even allowed their traditional worship, prayer and bible study to take the place of an intimate relationship with the Father.

God commanded Israel to have no other gods before him. He said, *You shall serve the Lord your God and him only shall you worship.* The same is true today for those who are called by his name. God is not something we add to our life, he is our life. All other objects of worship must bow to him. He will have all of our worship or none of our worship.

The Father desires unbroken fellowship and an intimate relationship with his children. To be a true worshiper one must have an undivided heart, giving his undivided attention and affection to the Father. Whatever has your affection will also get your attention. Matthew 6:21 says, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Where is your treasure? What has your heart?