

# WORSHIP IN FELLOWSHIP

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The worship of man-made ideas is a farce!

(I didn't make that up; Jesus said it. Matthew and Mark both recorded it. I'll read Mark's account of the situation, then conclude with Matthew's report of Jesus' response.)

*Mark 7:1 One day some Pharisees and teachers of religious law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. <sup>2</sup> They noticed that some of his disciples failed to follow the Jewish ritual of hand washing before eating. <sup>3</sup> (The Jews, especially the Pharisees, do not eat until they have poured water over their cupped hands, as required by their ancient traditions. <sup>4</sup> Similarly, they don't eat anything from the market until they immerse their hands in water. This is but one of many traditions they have clung to—such as their ceremonial washing of cups, pitchers, and kettles.) <sup>5</sup> So the Pharisees and teachers of religious law asked him, “Why don't your disciples follow our age-old tradition? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony.”*

*Matthew 15:3 Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? <sup>4</sup> For instance, God says, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and ‘Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.’ <sup>5</sup> But you say it is all right for people to say to their parents, ‘Sorry, I can't help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.’ <sup>6</sup> In this way, you say they don't need to honor their parents. And so you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, <sup>8</sup> ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. <sup>9</sup> Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’”*

Any act of worship becomes a farce when it looks and sounds like worship but lacks the heart of extravagant love and esteem.

Any act of worship becomes a farce when it substitutes man-made ideas for the truth of God's Word, As Apostle Paul described to the church in Rome:

*Romans 1:18 God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. <sup>19</sup> They know the truth about God because He has made it obvious to them. <sup>20</sup> For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.*

<sup>21</sup> Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him as God or even give Him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. <sup>23</sup> And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped (hand-made) idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles.

However, if “their worship” is a farce, there must be an alternative. If there is a counterfeit, there must also be an authentic. What about “our worship”? How is our worship different than *theirs*?

I know there are some people today who believe ALL worship is a farce; that it is the behavior of fools. But Jesus disagreed. Most of those who believe worship is foolish, still recognize Jesus of Nazareth as a wise and good man, and a great teacher, yet He disagreed with their denial of worship. Jesus thought that worship of God was appropriate and dynamic, the practice of wise men.

## **Worship Is Appropriate**

In fact, His own birth was greeted by wise men from eastern lands, who traveled for weeks to His birthplace, Bethlehem, to worship Him and present Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

True worship is the highest act—the act of greatest value, the act of greatest meaning—of any human being. As the psalmist wrote:

*Psalm 95:1 Come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. <sup>2</sup> Let us come to him with thanksgiving. Let us sing psalms of praise to him.*

*<sup>3</sup> For the Lord is a great God, a great King above all gods.*

*<sup>4</sup> He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains. <sup>5</sup> The sea belongs to him, for he made it. His hands formed the dry land, too.*

*<sup>6</sup> Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker, <sup>7</sup> for he is our God. We are the people he watches over, the flock under his care.*

We worship God because of who He is. He is great. He is King. He is our Creator. He is our Sustainer. He is our Guardian. He is our Provider. He is the Lover of our souls.

He is ever worthy to be worshipped!

Jesus addressed this subject with a woman of Samaria. Samaritans were a mixed breed—half Jewish, half Gentile. Many of them considered their Jewish heritage significant, and worshiped the God of the Jews, Jehovah.

However, the Jews imagined that a pure Jewish blood line was their ticket into the presence and favor of Jehovah, so they despised the Samaritans as undeserving trespassers and banished them from their rituals. So, the Samaritans adopted their own alternate rituals in an effort to continue to honor Jehovah.

As Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, He revealed His awareness of secrets from her broken past. She was stunned. She was moved to faith.

*John 4:19 "Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. <sup>20</sup> So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"*

*<sup>21</sup> Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. <sup>22</sup> You Samaritans know very little about the One you worship, while we Jews know all about Him, for salvation comes through the Jews. <sup>23</sup> But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship Him that way. <sup>24</sup> For God is Spirit, so those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth."*

According to Jesus, worship is not about "here or there," but about "how"—in spirit and in truth.

Why is that so? Because worship is not about you (or me), therefore it is not dictated by our preferences.

Worship is about God; therefore, He dictates its manner and expression.

*"The Father is looking for those who will worship Him THAT way."*

We cannot worship God any way we please (or prefer). We must worship Him (for He is worthy) in a way that HE prefers, a way that He prompts. That's what makes it worship.

The first recorded expression of humans in worship occurs in Genesis 4:

*Genesis 4:26 When Seth grew up, he had a son and named him Enosh. At that time people first began to worship the Lord by name.*

It was the Hebrew word, *qara*, which means to call upon, to summon, or to encounter. "People first began to call upon the Lord." "People first began to encounter the Lord."

Worship is not an action or an activity; it is not a ritual or a ceremony—though it may involve and include those things. Before anything else, worship is a relationship. It is fellowship with God, the Father and the Son.

## Worship is Fellowship

Listen to the words of Apostle John, as he expressed his enthusiasm for the Savior of us all, and invited us to share the wonder with him:

*1 John 1:1 We proclaim to you the One who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw Him with our own eyes and touched Him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. <sup>2</sup> This One who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen Him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that He is the One who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then He was revealed to us. <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.*

“Relationship” and “fellowship” involve a personal awareness and connection—a conscious encounter.

We can and should expect that each time we begin to worship God, for He longs to “*hear your voice*” (Song of Solomon 2:14) and He “*bends down to listen*” (Psalm 116:2) when we call out to Him. It need not be an ecstatic experience, but it should be a conscious one.

It should involve fellowship with God, and with one another. True worship is communion; and true communion is worship.

Communion recognizes the presence and the worthiness of God. We consider God the Father, who so loved us that He gave His one and only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. And we consider God the Son, who loved us and gave Himself for us on the cross.

And communion also recognizes the presence and value of the other members of the body of Christ, your fellow believers, the followers of Jesus. For Jesus did not love you alone; He loved *the church*, which is His body and the fullness of Him who fills everything. He puts the solitary into families, as we are today in this local congregation. You are not alone. You weren’t designed to do this alone. It is not good for people to be alone. You can’t make it on your own. We’re supposed to do life together.

Apostle Paul heard that the church in Corinth was ignoring this practice, and had turned their love feasts and the Lord’s Supper into something less than holy, something self-serving. This was a dangerous practice, about which he warned them sternly:

*1 Corinthians 11:20 When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord’s Supper. <sup>21</sup> For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. <sup>22</sup> What? Don’t you have your own homes for eating and drinking?*

*Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!*

*<sup>23</sup> For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread <sup>24</sup> and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it." <sup>26</sup> For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.*

*<sup>27</sup> So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. <sup>29</sup> For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.*

*<sup>31</sup> But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. <sup>32</sup> Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*

*<sup>33</sup> So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other.*

Think about the words he used: "sharing," "honoring," "waiting." These are expressions of fellowship. These are expressions of respect. These are expressions of love.

This is why we pause to give God thanks before we eat—out of respect—for God is more important than food. God is more important than food.

And this is why we share our food together—out of love—for people are more important than food. People are more important than food.

How can we magnify the *love* in our love feasts?

How can we be careful to *share* with each other in times of communion?

How can we show more *honor* to one another in our gatherings?

How can we demonstrate the grace of *waiting* for each other, instead of rushing ahead? (Perhaps patience really is a virtue!)

Think about these things. And then practice them.

As we do, our worship will become appropriate. Our worship will become fellowship. And our fellowship will become worship.

