

# TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

*by Ralph Mahoney*

**Do you want to be powerful in your attack on Satan? Powerful in your witness for Christ? Successful in building a growing church?**

**The principles shared in this article put at your disposal the powerful truths that can transform your life.**

## TO KNOW HIM...IS TO PRAISE HIM

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland to give drink to my people, my chosen. This people have I formed for myself...they shall proclaim my praise.” (Isaiah 43:18-21)

“...This people have I formed for MYSELF! ...”

Why has the Lord called you? Did He call you for the ministry? Has He called you to be a missionary in a far-off country? Perhaps you believe He called you to be a good husband and father...or just to be a good Christian or church leader!

Consider what the following verse says: “God has **called you into fellowship with** his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). Also, consider the purpose expressed in another verse: “This people have I formed for myself” (Isa. 43:21)

The primary reason God has called us is for fellowship with Himself, not for what we can do for Him. When God first created Adam, there were no lost heathen to save, no churches to staff, no gospel to preach, nor was there any kind of church ministry. God made Adam to enjoy sweet communion with him. God’s first concern is still the same: our fellowship with Him and with Jesus, His Son. That is the essence of why we are called.

We are not saying that God’s calling doesn’t involve service: God called Paul, for example, to be an apostle, to preach the gospel, and to stand before kings and governors for His name’s sake. But we must be careful to put first things

first. God intends that our service to the body of Christ and to the lost proceed out of a relationship with Himself. God wants us to make our relationship with Him our first priority.

## **BUSYNESS DISTRACTS US FROM FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD**

Luke 10 records Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha which serves well to illustrate this principle: "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.** She came to him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'

"Martha, Martha' the Lord answered, '**you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.** Mary has chosen **what is better**, and it will not be taken away from her'" (Luke 10:38-41).

A Mary and Martha dwells in each one of us. As our Christian life progresses, one or the other will take preeminence in our experience as a result of our particular point of view, the influence of our culture, or the influence of our religious heritage. Unfortunately, Martha is usually the one who prevails. How easy it is for those in Christian service to gradually, almost imperceptibly, let their work crowd their relationship with the Lord out of their experience.

Now, some may be glad to hear this for the wrong reason: They like the idea that God wants us to "sit at His feet" and not to work. But Jesus wasn't disclaiming work at all. Work is an important part of God's will for every believer. He rebuked Martha, not because she was working, but because she had been distracted by her work. Distracted means drawn away or diverted from one's primary goal.

In Jesus' parable of the sower (Matt.13:3-8), we are told this about the seed that fell among the thorns: "Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants ... What was sown among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful." Distracted by worldly concerns, the believer fails to see God's word (or purpose) come to fruit in his life.

Paul warns us as soldiers of Christ Jesus that we should not allow ourselves to be caught up and distracted by “civilian” (worldly) affairs (2 Tim 2:4). Subtly, it is good things which most often distract us. “Doing the work of the Lord” consistently displaces the Christian leader’s persona I prayer relationship with Jesus. What could have been a more worthy desire on Martha’s part than to make sure her house looked nice and that a nice meal was made ready for Jesus? You and I want to do the same thing, wouldn’t we?

Jesus, however, pointed out that no matter how seemingly worth y one’s objectives, or how holy one’s office nothing is important enough to take preeminence over our relationship with Him. God values our fellowship with Him more than anything we can or will ever do for Him. And it is as we can enter true spiritual worship that relationship begins to take shape.

## **GOD SEEKS WORSHIPERS**

Jesus told the Samaritan woman God was seeking men and women who would worship Him. God first seeks worshipers, then workers. But didn’t Jesus tell us to pray for God to send workers into His harvest? Yes, but those workers must be worshipers first! I’m convinced whatever God does to advance His purpose on the earth is born out of a worshiping people.

Because the church has reversed this formula for so long, much of its history has been barren – a spiritual wasteland.

## **NO WORSHIP . . . NO RAIN!**

Job 36:27 and 28 illustrates where rains of blessing come from. ” He [God] draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind.” Zechariah 14:16 and 17 explains how this natural phenomenon pictures a corresponding spiritual reality: “If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain.”

No worship ... no rain! The worship of God’s people ascends to God as vapors from the earth. These vapors arrive in His presence and then distill into a rain of blessing, glory and renewal that falls upon those who worship. As God’s people worship, it provides God with the “raw material” He then uses to

release power and blessing among them and upon the lands in which they dwell. If they don't worship, they won't get rain.

The Scriptures often refer to a nation, or a people who are spiritually inert as a "barren wasteland," a place that is dry like a desert. The lesson is simple enough: If you want the outpouring of God's blessings in your church and your community, worship the King- no worship ... no rain!

## THE INGREDIENTS OF TRUE, SPIRITUAL WORSHIP

Another Biblical picture of a similar idea is found in Revelation 8:3,4: "Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, **with the prayers of all the saints**, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, **together with the prayers of the saints**, went up before God from the angel's hand." The Old Testament type that illustrates true spiritual worship is the altar of incense and the elements burnt on it. In Exodus 30:34-38, God commanded Moses, "Take fragrant spices-gum resin (stacte), onycha and galbanum – and frankincense, all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. **Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the Lord.**"

God tells us what acceptable worship consists of. The four ingredients that made up the holy incense illustrate the worship God seeks.

One half of the incense speaks of our contribution to worship, the other half speaks of God's part. The first half was made up one-third of gum resin (stacte), one-third of onycha, and one third of galbanum. Frankincense made up the other half of the formula.

## TRUE WORSHIP IS SPONTANEOUS

Stacte was a gum-resin that oozed spontaneously from the bark of the storax and opobalsurnum trees of the Palestinian region. This speaks of the spontaneity of worship. As we spend time with the Lord in prayer and in His word every day, we will see more and more just how great and worthy He really is. Our hearts will "ooze spontaneously" with gratitude and worship.

## **WORSHIP COMES FROM OUR HEARTS**

Onycha is a substance which is obtained from the 'closing flaps' of certain deep-sea mollusk.

This speaks of two things: First it tells us that just as they had to go to the depths of the sea to get this sea creature, so God wants worship to come from deep within our innermost being. It was for lack of depth in Israel's worship that God said to Isaiah, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." (Isa. 28:18). God wants our worship to come from deep within our hearts:

## **WORSHIP IS OPEN**

Secondly, onycha tells us that God wants our worship to come from open hearts. Paul speaks of this when he says, "but we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed 'into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit'" (2 Cor. 3:18).

"Unveiled face" speaks of a whole-hearted, unhidden, honest communion with the heavenly Father. Our worship should invite Him to examine us, cleanse us, and transform us into the image of Jesus, His Son. We must put to death our human tendency to withhold ourselves from the Lord (we must lay aside our 'closing flaps') as we enter true spiritual worship. True worship involves our opening totally before Him.

## **WORSHIP PROCEEDS FROM A BROKENNESS**

Galbanum was an amber-colored substance gathered by breaking the stem of a certain local plant and collecting the milky substance that oozed from the break. Fig trees, milkweed, and dandelions all produce a milk like this. This speaks of the brokenness God desires in our worship.

The Psalmist declared "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Ps. 34:18; 51:17). God asks that you and I bring an open-hearted spontaneity which comes from

deep within a broken and contrite heart. That is our part in true spiritual worship.

## **JESUS WORSHIPS IN OUR WORSHIP**

Frankincense is pure white, and obtained the same way as galbanum. This says two things: Purity and brokenness. Only Jesus Christ can be described in these terms. He was the perfect, spotless Lamb of God whose body was broken to take away the sins of the world: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Hebrews 2:12 quotes Jesus as saying, “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.” Jesus “joins in” every time His people assemble and worship the Father because He dwells in every believer by His Spirit which each of us has received from God.

## **A WORSHIP OF RULES TAUGHT BY MEN**

Isaiah 29:13 tells us that God disclaimed Israel’s worship because “their worship of me is made up of rules taught by men.” Exodus 30:9 warns “do not offer on this altar any other incense.”

Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s sons, offered unauthorized incense on the holy altar before the Lord and He struck them dead with fire that came out from His presence. Worship that is taught by the rules of men is unauthorized incense and God regards it as such.

There are two ways we can worship: God’s way, or man’s sinful way-the way God wants to be worshiped, or according to the rules taught by men. God only accepts the worship He has specified in His word. Wrong worship may be sincere, but sincerity has never been the criterion for truth. You can be sincerely wrong. Many are! Nadab and Abihu were sincere when they offered strange fire but God smote them dead just the same! (Lev. 10)

## **WHAT HAPPENED TO TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP?**

The Early Church was characterized by a joyous flow of true spiritual worship. But men, unfamiliar with this true worship, came into leadership in the church

and they introduced rituals and liturgies they had contrived out of their fleshly minds. As the church entered the “Dark Ages” it lost most it ever knew about worship “in spirit and in truth.” The flow of the Spirit had been displaced by systems of worship learned by rote and taught by men. Lip service replaced heart service. That which had once been full of God’s glory had become barren and lifeless. “The glory had departed.”

Although we are in the midst of great renewal in the church, still much present day worship has been inherited as lifeless traditions. Thus, today’s forms of worship are often death-dealing, having resulted from hundreds of years of forms of godliness that deny God’s power. (2 Tim 3:5)

Many who worship this way are deeply sincere in what they are doing. They love God, but just as Israel had to repent when the Law was rediscovered in Josiah’s day, many of us must lay aside things we’ve ignorantly adopted. God now, by his Spirit, is again revealing His Eternal Will concerning worship.

## **THE RETURN OF GOD’S GLORY**

A beautiful story from David’s life pictures this: Israel had backslidden for years. The Book of Judges concludes with an apt description of the moral decline of those days: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” The negligent, corrupt high priesthood of Eli was typical.

Because of this, God allowed the Ark of His Presence to be captured by the Philistines, Israel’s enemies. In the battle in which the Ark was captured, Eli’s delinquent sons were both killed. When Eli heard of this, he died of a broken neck, as he fell backward at the news, “The Ark is captured.”

When his daughter-in-law heard of all these things, she went into premature labor, and died in childbirth. Before she expired, she named her son Ichabod, for she said, “the glory has departed.”

Some years later, David the king heard the Philistines had returned the Ark after they captured it. He went to Obed-Edom’s house with priests to carry the Ark back to Jerusalem. He was filled with joy, and offered sacrifices every six paces of the journey. The whole journey was full of high praise and worship.

Having arrived in Jerusalem, he laid aside his kingly robes and danced with joyful abandon before the Lord in nothing but a linen ephod. As he did so,

Michal, his wife, saw him from her window and the Bible says, “She despised him in her heart.” David finally brought the Ark to rest in a tent which he had prepared for it, amidst great praise and joyous worship.

When David returned home, Michal mocked his joyful worship which she inwardly despised. “And Michal, the daughter of Saul,” the story concludes, “had no children to the day of her death.”

## **BUSINESS AS USUAL-BUT NO GLORY!**

This episode has much to teach about what is happening in the present spiritual renewal of God’s people. Although God’s glory had departed due to Israel’s corruption, lukewarmness, and continual backsliding, the priesthood and religious system continued to function as it always had. It was business as usual.

Similarly, the church has often moved gradually into periods when all its ritual and ministry proceeded out of carnality, and God’s glory was no longer present. No one seemed to notice it was gone, either. Many segments of the church are still like that today. It is business as usual services are conducted, ministers ordained, prayers prayed, sermons preached and all without a trace of the glory of God. But it is into the midst of this that God brings renewal.

It was no coincidence that King David, a man addicted to the worship of God, was the one responsible for seeing that the Ark of God’s presence was returned to its rightful place. When God brings revival and renewal to His people, He does so through men and women who are worshipers. Only people who worship and praise the Lord consistently can ever expect God to move gloriously in their midst.

## **THE MICHALS AMONG US**

Finally, how telling was Michal’s negative response to David’s abandon to worship and praise: When God brings renewal to His people, the very first evidence will be an increased freedom and frequency of worship. This always meets with hostility from a number of people. These are the Michals among us.

It is also significant that Michal was David’s wife. It is often God’s people who are closest to the renewal, but are untouched by it, that become most hostile

to it. Those who have experienced renewal early in their lives, or are second generation heirs of revival, most often oppose God's present day stirrings.

The result with them is the same as it was with Michal they become barren. The harder they fight and the more stridently they oppose renewal, the more barren and fruitless they become.

Israel is the most impressive example. Their ultimate rejection of Jesus, the Messiah, resulted in their destruction and final dispersion among the nations. They became and largely have remained a spiritual wasteland.

## **THE RESULTS OF TRUE SPIRITUAL WORSHIP**

Once the Ark was returned to Jerusalem, David's reign, followed by that of his son, Solomon, brought Israel to its greatest time of glory. This pictures the important place worship plays in bringing about God's purpose. Once worship has been established, it will continue to result in ever greater victory for the people of God. That is because worship gives God a place to dwell in, gives us an environment to be transformed in, and provides a weapon to bring certain defeat to the enemy of our souls.

## **GOD INHABITS PRAISE**

Psalm 22:3 says, "Thou are holy, O thou who dwells (lives) in the praises of Israel." A more literal rendering of the original Hebrew would read, "O thou who inhabits the praises of Israel." Most biblical revelations of God picture Him seated on a throne, either surrounded by a praising multitude (as in Revelation) or lifted high by the cherubim, angelic creatures who do nothing but recite the high praises of God (as in Daniel and Ezekiel.)

Wherever His people gather and worship Him, God promises He will make His presence known in their midst. On the other hand, where God's people consistently neglect true spiritual worship, His manifest presence is rarely experienced.

## **TRANSFORMED THROUGH WORSHIP**

Worship prepares us for the working of God in our lives like nothing else can. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "but we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a

mirror the glory of the Lord , are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, just as from the Lord the Spirit.” As we worship the Lord, His Spirit conforms us to the image of Jesus Christ.

This transformation does not only take place as we worship. The Holy Spirit continually works in the lives of believers whose hearts are open before Him. But it is in the lives of those believers who have a consistent worship experience that the Holy Spirit finds most ready access for His transforming work. The Bible says, “Don’t grieve the Holy Spirit,” and warns us not to “quench the Spirit.” Nothing will “grieve” or “quench” the Holy Spirit faster than a lack of worship in a believer’s life. Our hearts will become hard like ground where there is no rain if the “rains” distilled from our worship and praise don’t often come upon them to soften them.

## **WORSHIP-A MIGHTY SPIRITUAL WEAPON**

Finally, worship is a most powerful weapon. Threatened by a massive, devastating invasion by the sons of Ammon and Moab, King Jehoshaphat of Judah sought the Lord for deliverance from his plight. The Lord promised him certain victory and told him that all he’d have to do was stand and watch Him fight for him. By the wisdom of God imparted, King Jehoshaphat decided to send a choir out in front of the army. “When they began singing and praising, the Lord set ambushes against Judah; so they were routed.” (2 Chron. 20:21-22)

2 Corinthians 10:4 says, “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” Our warfare isn’t against “flesh and blood” (i.e. in the natural realm) “but against the spiritual] rulers, against the (spiritual) powers, against the (spiritual) world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual force s of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Natural weapons are valueless against a spiritual adversary. To defeat a spiritual foe, we must rely on spiritual weapons, and spiritual worship is such a weapon.

One facet of its effectiveness is the great “pain” it causes the enemy. Satan and his demons had once been part of the worshiping angelic hosts. But they rebelled against God and were cast out of their previous estate. Therefore, Satan and his hordes now react to worship much as someone would react to being thrust out into bright sunlight after having spent years in the darkness of

a deep cave. Just as extremely loud noise causes us physical pain, so the sound of true spiritual worship causes the demonic realm great pain and confusion and drives them away.

You can know all about worship, why it's important, how God wants you to worship, and what happens when you do worship, but unless you begin doing it yourself, it will have no value. Here are some guidelines that will help you enter into true spiritual worship:

### 1. *Remember that you worship God because He is worthy.*

God is the Creator of everything. He always was and always will be. Everything we possess, He has given us and He will still give us more than we can imagine, now and in eternity. He is greater than anything we consider great, wiser than anyone we consider wise, better than anything we consider good. He is far more perfect than the most perfect thing we can imagine. And yet He suffered and died so you and I, wretched though we were, could live. The only possible response from a grateful heart is, "Thou art worthy, O Lord!"

### 2. *Worship God because He commands it!*

Worship isn't optional. God commands worship and our obedience to His will must include a regular pattern of whole-hearted worship.

David said, "I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth." Be like David and worship at all times.

### 3. *Worship God as He wants to be worshiped!*

There is more instruction in the Bible about how God wants us to worship Him than on any subject. The Great Commandment capsulizes this teaching: "Hear, O Israel The Lord is our God the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord' your God **with all your heart** and **with all your soul** and **with all your might**" (Deut. 6:5) True spiritual worship involves these three major areas of your being:

Worship involves the heart. The heart is the emotional part of our being. True spiritual worship is not emotionalism, but it is emotional.

Worship involves the soul. The soul is the seat of our intellect and will. With our souls we choose to worship because we have come to know it is the right thing to do. We know Who we worship, why we worship, what happens when we worship, and that we must worship. True spiritual worship doesn't correspond in any way with the mindless vacuity and passivity of heathen spiritualistic trances or their so-called meditation worship.

Finally, worship involves might. Worship is physical, and involves singing, dancing, leaping, shouting, clapping, lifting up hands, etc. After reading and studying the Bible, no honest person can conclude that the silent, motionless worship so many Christians experience is what God desires from His people.

#### **4. *Worship God in the Spirit!***

Jesus said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, 24).

True worship is in the spirit. 1 Corinthians 14:14-19 defines the term, in the spirit: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?"

For you are giving thanks well enough but the other man is not edified. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue."

In or with the spirit and in a tongue are used interchangeably in this passage and the context sets them over against with the mind (or with the understanding in other translations). In the spirit means using the language the Spirit of God gives you and only your spirit understands, your mind not being able to understand it. Praying, singing, speaking, and worshiping in a tongue gives you a way to express yourself to God that isn't limited by your natural understanding. Thus freed, you can participate in true heavenly worship, not possible otherwise. Worship in the spirit also employs using the melody the Holy Spirit gives, as well as the words.

## 5) *Worship daily!*

There is a difference between a true worshiper and one who only worships on occasion. The true worshiper has a characteristically joyful attitude because he “dwells” in God’s presence. He continually has a song on his lips and rarely complains or murmurs. Difficulties and afflictions which arise, though grievous, have little effect because the true worshiper is so aware of the goodness and power of God in the midst of trouble.

However, one who worships only on occasion is easily discouraged by his circumstances. Worship is something he does rather than something that is a part of him. One who worships occasionally does so only when he feels like it, but it isn’t a regular “habit” with him. His worship isn’t spontaneous; it isn’t free. When difficulties and afflictions arise, they easily blow him away.

Make it a holy habit to arise and worship the first thing every morning. Establish worship as a continual flow throughout the whole day. Worship when you feel like it, and when you don’t feel like it. Worship when it is convenient, and when it isn’t convenient. Be a true spiritual worshiper all the time!

## 6) *Worship right now!*

Having read this article, you can begin to flow in true spiritual worship right now! Lift up your hands and worship the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might! Pray this prayer right now!

“Lord Jesus, I thank you that you’ve called me to worship you because you are worthy of all praise and worship. Thank you for cleansing me from my sin, and preparing me to enter your presence to praise your name. Help me to worship you every day. I believe your Spirit will help me become one of those worshipers who surround your throne.

I want to join that multitude that sings your high praises. I will, by the work of the Spirit, Amen!”