

Total Worship

What comes to mind when someone mentions worship? Do you think of an assembly of the saints? Do you think of praying and singing? Or is the mind drawn back to a sermon or series of lessons on the various portions of worship? Is worship just thinking about God on specific, scheduled occasions? Does it occur while surrounded by God's creation in nature? Can we choose how and when to worship? Does God actually care what we do as long as we believe in Him? At various times and in different parts of the world, these questions are asked. Sometimes they are worded differently and, at times, without a desire to know the answer. They are, however, questions that the Christian should be able to answer.

We have a song with the words, "What ever you do, in word or deed, do all in the Name of The Lord." These words summarize the duty of each person concerning God and His Son. From the beginning, God demands obedience to what He says. Adam and Eve suffered for disobeying the command to not eat from the tree in the middle of the garden (Genesis 3). Discarding God's word, given in the Bible, carries a severe penalty or eternal death (Hebrews 2:2-4). We have a responsibility to hear and read His word, then understand and do what He wants us to do. Turning to scripture, we find that there are commands and examples to follow. Some things are done in a specific way at a particular time. Other things spring from the heart continuously.

As soon as people were added to the church, we read of them engaged in worship activities. In our desire to worship as first-century Christians did, our worship services are designed to honor God and edify each other as taught in the New Testament. We read that *"They were **continually devoting** themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer"* (Acts 2:42)

The two words **continually devoting**, is translated from the Greek, "προσκαρτερουντες" a verb describing steadfast, devoted, and courageous actions. The sentence describes their dedicated assembly to receive instruction in the gospel, fellowship in the Lord's Supper, and unified prayer. It points to the example set by these Christians as they left Jerusalem after Stephen's death (Acts 8:4). These worship activities are the basis of the assembly of saints from that first Lord's Day until today's First Day of the Week worship assembly.

To the follower of Christ, striving to be like the servant Jesus (Matthew 23:11-12), the daily activities combine devotion to Christ and the brethren. Luke describes their activities this way. *"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people"* (Acts 2:46-47). Notice the mention of two locations. The Temple was a common meeting place with its various covered and uncovered areas. But they also met house-to-house. The apostles taught in the Temple (Acts 3-5), but the new converts enjoyed each other's hospitality in their homes daily. Those in Jerusalem who had the ability provided shelter, food, and anything a brother or sister needed. *"And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common"* (Acts 2:44).

On any day of the week, our assemblies of two or more brethren include singing, praying, Bible reading, and teaching. We do one or more of the first three while we are alone or with others. It becomes natural to combine our voices and thoughts while we assemble together as the early church did in the first century. Bible reading leads to teaching, to the one reading, and then to the ones listening. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, reminding them of the importance of these

items in worship. He indicates that they must continually be *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Ephesians 5:19-20 NKJV). We must sing and pray alone or assembled with others, always giving praise and honor to God and Christ.

On Sundays, however, we also observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and give to the church's work as God has prospered us (1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Throughout the week, we look for ways to serve each other with our time and possessions. We sing in the assembly and also when alone or visiting. We pray in the assembly but also alone and as we share other's burdens. We communicate with and comfort the brethren as we wait for our Lord's return. Jesus told the woman at Jacob's well that a day would come when people would not be tied to a building or physical place to worship. *"An hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father ... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:21-24). Do we worship God as He demands, adding nothing against His desires?