

Praise and Worship in Spirit and Truth

By Ginny Larsen

“Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens! Praise Him for His mighty deeds; praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with trumpet sound; praise Him with lute and harp! Praise Him with tambourine and dance; praise Him with strings and pipe! Praise Him with sounding cymbals; praise Him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!”

(Psalm 150:1-6 ESV)

We do have a God of unspeakable Glory – so much so that even a small glimpse of that manifested to us here in this life causes our hearts to swell in praise to Him – praise that cannot be held back. His glory is our delight. It causes our hearts to rise up in praises to Him. We want to use all that we have available to us to express that praise. When our eyes are turned to Him, we receive the truth about ourselves, being humbled before Him, and seeing the truth about Him, true praise comes forth from our spirit and we worship Him in spirit and in truth.

PRAISE, v.t. [L. *tollo*, *extollo*; *pretium*.] (Webster's 1828 dictionary)

1. To commend; to applaud; to express approbation of personal worth or actions.
2. To extol in words or song; to magnify; to glorify on account of perfections or excellent works.
3. To express gratitude for personal favors. Psa 138.
4. To do honor to; to display the excellence of.

Why would this God command worship and praise? Some think He must have such a big “ego” to have to continually have beings that praise Him. That would be true if He were merely a man with flaws and selfishness. But Who He truly is with all the true and very real glory that goes with that—His attributes, His majesty, His flawless perfection in every way, His love and goodness toward mankind - this in itself is what commands His praise, because He is truly worthy of it, and one cannot help but praise Him when these attributes are seen and manifested in some way. As we worship Him, we receive of that glory into our own souls and partake of His divine life. The hymns many have written attempt to explain His attributes and His glory. When we sing these hymns it reminds us of His goodness. When reminded of His glory our hearts are lifted up to Him. We receive life as we see the truth, and our hearts are set free in His presence. Men will praise themselves and each other, though deceptive, self-centered, and undeserving of such praise, but they will not praise the God Who created all things and Who is the only One that is truly worthy of such praise. After all, to do so would admit submission to such a God and then they couldn't be their own god, which is what our sin nature desires.

I remember a time when I was in a Christian meeting, and it was time for “worship.” I had just had a very bad day and a conflict with someone. I said, “Oh Lord, how can I worship You when I'm feeling this way?” The answer came to me quickly: “You can worship Me because of Who I am.” I realized it wasn't about how I felt, what mood I was in, or if I could conjure up some *feelings* of praise. It was about turning my eyes to the One Who is

true and worthy and about looking at Him and not myself. It was about pondering His attributes and Who He is and giving the thanks and praise due to Him. As I did that, I was lifted above my situation and was able to rejoice in Him.

During many worship services in my early Christian life, the worship became a “worship of the worship” rather than a praise to God and a true *bowing down* to all that He is in reverence and praise to Him. In fact, the carnal feelings it brought was akin to the carnal feelings I had at dances I went to before being saved. Many mistake the carnal good feelings for spiritual experience or the presence of God. Who is worthy of true praise but God Himself? So many “worship songs” can be repetitive, meaningless phrases sung over and over about how we feel rather than words of Who God is and what He has done for us and our response of thanks and praise to Him. It's those truths of praise to Who He is that lift our hearts in true love and praise to Him. We can work ourselves up to an altered state of consciousness singing meaningless phrases over and over, worshipping the feelings we have while doing so and call that God's presence. I know; I've been a part of worship teams that have done that many times. In fact, in one instance after singing the same phrase over and over and over, when we as a team tried to change to a different song, the pastor said to us, “No...when you change, it *breaks the anointing*.” It was no *anointing*; it was a mesmerizing that was being built up in order to put people in a trance so that they would receive whatever this man told them to receive. When we get away from the true presence of God and His Word, we cannot tell the true from the false in what God's “presence” is. I did not see it until I got out from under it.

Feelings are a funny thing. They can counterfeit a true presence of God. They can lie to us in many ways. If we are a person that depends on feelings, sensational experiences, or impressions, we can easily be deceived. God had to chastise me in my walk to break away from what my feelings told me and learn to trust in Him alone and what His Word told me. I had to choose at one point between what I was being *told* to accept from God and what *His Word* was telling me when the two were in conflict. I had to choose His Word alone as the only true “Word” I could count on and the voice of the Spirit, which is expressed to us in His written Word. I remember in an intense “worship” service one time – supposedly during “revival” in a church I was in at the time – I suddenly realized that in all the hype, liveliness, and supposed manifestations of the Spirit, I was sensing a wall between God and myself. I said to myself, “I have to get away from this and get back to God.” What? During revival I had to get “back to God”? I shocked myself. Here I had been going to all these meetings to get “revived.” I was spending time fasting, praying, worshipping, etc. Why was I so spiritually dry and empty? I did get away from it all and got alone with my Bible instead and sought God with all my heart, bowing down to Him in spirit and in truth. The Lord, little by little, began showing me I was depending on the wrong thing to draw me close to Him and that He was testing my heart to see if I would truly submit to Him. I saw what I had thought was my pursuit of a stronger spiritual life and more of God as a very self-centered pursuit. It was for me, not for His truth and glory. I got on my face before God and said, “Lord, I surrender every experience, every feeling, all of what I've learned, to You and ask You to cleanse me, to teach me all over again, and to lead me in Your truth.”

God has been doing that, and He has opened up His Word of life to me in so many ways that my heart cannot help but delight in His glory and from my innermost being give Him true praise and honor. My desire to glorify Him with my whole life grows stronger and stronger the more I see His glory. That glory is manifested more through my life as I spend time “sitting at His feet,” feasting on His manna from Heaven. My eyes are on Him as I see Him revealed to me through His Word, and my sin and pride becomes repulsive to me. I would rather die than fail to

please Him, and it grieves my heart when I do. This was not a feeling worked up in a moment of hyper “praise”; rather, it is something He has slowly worked in my heart over time of learning from Him and letting Him teach me and reveal Himself to me. I learned there are no shortcuts to “spirituality” or spiritual maturity. To be truly filled with the Holy Spirit, one must be truly filled with and submitted to His Word, which has control of his or her life. The Spirit and the Word agree, and the Word is the written expression of all He is and does and desires to do in us and through us. It has not changed because God never changes. It is perfect and needs no adjustments according to cultural changes.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

(Colossians 3:16)

I'm sitting here listening to hymns as I write this. The words are rich and full of meaning of God's glory, His grace to us, His love, and His attributes; and my heart responds in delight and in praise to Him. It is in true response of our heart toward God's revealing Himself to us that causes true praise. It is a living according to that, once our hearts are open to Him, that shows a worship “in spirit and in truth.” I always wondered why some people could loudly praise God in a service at church raising their hands and tears coming down their eyes and then continue in a very carnal Christian life where self is obviously first in all they do and little thought is given to God's will in their life. It's because their so-called worship was an emotional experience worked up more for themselves than to God's glory – rather than a response to God's holiness truly seen, calling them to a holy life in Him. There was no bowing down to Him in adoration and submission.

There is a difference between praise and worship. We worship Him not just with our words, but with our lives and how they are lived.

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

(John 4:23-24)

Worship (Webster's 1828 dictionary)

1. To adore; to pay divine honors to; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration.
2. To respect; to honor; to treat with civil reverence.
3. To honor with extravagant love and extreme submission; as a lover.

Strong's Concordance

shâchâh

shaw-khaw'

A primitive root; to *depress*, that is, *prostrate* (especially reflexively in homage to royalty or God): - bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship.

So much of what pretends to be worship today is a mockery of truly bowing down before a holy God, prostrate before Him in submission to Him and giving Him the praise and thanks due His name. To bow ourselves down before Him in true humility and submission to all that He is, adoring Him, giving reverence to Him, and praising Him – extolling Him in gratefulness for all He is and has done – this is what God is looking for. This is the kind of true worship and praise that truly glorifies Him in our hearts and to all who are around us. This is the kind of praise and worship that changes our lives and strengthens our hearts toward righteousness and living in harmony with His Word. It's what purifies our hearts before Him, because the more we truly look at Him, the more we want to be like Him and live lives pleasing to Him. This kind of worship takes us out of ourselves and is not about “me” but about God and continues in our life lived for His glory.

True praise and true worship will bring true experience with God that will last and have an effect of godliness in our lives and our desire to walk as He walked, pleasing to God always in all we think, do, and say before the God Who sees all. And that day when we finally see Him face to face, we will truly not be able to hold back the praises that will want to come forth from our innermost being with all that is within us in a very true purity. That will be an amazing day! – a day we will share in His glory and know Him fully as we are fully known.

“When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

(1 Corinthians 13:11-12)

Amen, come Lord Jesus! We long for that day!