

# Q&A

By Guy N. Woods, deceased

(Editor's note: The following is from Questions and Answers Open Forum, Freed-Hardeman College Lectures, Volume 1.)

**Q** *Of what does worship consist?*

**A** The American Standard Version at Matthew 2:8 has a reference to a footnote defining the word worship as follows: "The Greek word denotes an act of reverence whether paid to a creature (see ch. 4:9; 18:26), or to the creator (see ch. 4:10)."

1. Worship, then, involves an act. It is incorrect to say that worship is simply and solely an attitude of heart. Inasmuch as worship consists of acts, it follows that such acts are as much involved in worship and are as essential to it as the attitude that prompts them.

2. The Greek word for worship denotes an act ... paid. Worship involves an attitude, but an attitude that expresses itself in acts, which find acceptance in the will of another. Worship, therefore, necessitates acts. The effort to disassociate acts from attitude in worship was born of the desire to escape the opprobrium of adding unauthorized practices to the worship of God. Knowledgeable people who use instrumental music in worship are well aware of the fact that there is no authority in the New Testament for

its use. They seek to avoid the charge of adding to the divine will by the allegation that, after all, worship does not involve acts but attitudes, and therefore the instrument is really no part of the worship.

The effort fails for at least two reasons: (1) We have seen that it is based on the erroneous concept of what worship is; (2) it does not elude, but merely postpones the fatal dilemma. For, this worship which is alleged to be solely a matter of the heart and expresses itself, not by divine law but by the will of the worshiper, is either restrained or unrestrained. If unrestrained, then the will of the worshiper becomes the sole arbiter of the suitability of the act thus leaving the one who worships free to resort to whatever expressions of it one desires. The pompous worshiper behind stained glass windows in a great cathedral, the Salvation Army lass with her tambourine, and the religious snake handler may all properly claim justification for their choices of expression. Acts 2:42 may be disregarded as the expression of the divine pattern, and thenceforth each of us may be governed by our own wishes and preferences in our worship to God.

If, however, no will worship is acceptable but proper worship is restrained (as is the case, Col. 2:20-23), we may inquire, What is the restraining influence? We are thus brought back to the place where we should have started in any matter involving our duty to God: What does the New Testament authorize us to do in worship? The early church, under the guidance of inspired men, continued "steadfastly" in the apostles' teaching, which included singing, the Lord's supper, the contribution and prayers. These divinely given items are specifically said to have been the means by which the first Christians worshiped. (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2.) Less than these we cannot offer him and be in conformity to his will; more than these are an unwarranted and officious intermeddling with the will of God.

It follows, therefore, that in this, the Christian age, the use of instrumental music is unauthorized and unacceptable in the worship of God. "It was used in the Old Testament." Yes, along with the burning of incense, the offering of animal sacrifices

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and the practice of polygamy. These are not patterns we may properly follow today. The shadows of the old order have given way to the substance of the better way and under the clear light of Christianity such matters are conspicuous by their absence. (Hebrews 8:6-13). Let it be remembered and never forgotten that our Lord never commanded the use of instrumental music in worship, no apostle ever sanctioned it, no New Testament writer ever authorized it and no apostolic church ever used it!



**Q** “Would you please comment on the difference between serving God and worshipping God?”

**A** There is not nearly as much difference between these concepts as many today apparently believe. Occasionally, we see over the entrance to a church auditorium these words, “Enter to worship and leave to serve.” This concept results from ignorance of what the New Testament teaches about service and worship to God. It is not possible properly to make the distinction the above alluded to concept implies.

The word “worship” often occurs in the Bible. Nearly a dozen-and-a-half Greek and Hebrew terms are used to reflect some aspect of the matter. The most common of these is *proskuneoo*, literally, to kiss the hand toward, and, in use, to signify devotion, adoration, and love. Its first occurrence in the New Testament is in Matt. 2:2, and very often thereafter; and, in the American Standard Version there is a footnote to Matt. 2:2 (and frequent references to this note in subsequent appearances of the term), which contains an excellent definition of the word: “The Greek word denotes an act of reverence whether paid to a creature (see ch. 4:9; 18:26), or to the Creator (see ch. 4:10).”

It should be noted that worship consists of acts of reverence not merely reverence -- thus emphasizing that it involves vastly more than a disposition of heart and mind. It is not enough simply to be worshipful in spirit; we must allow this disposition to find expression in acts of reverence, acts, of course, approved of God (Acts 2:42).

It follows, therefore, that there is very definitely service involved in our devotions to Jehovah. Inasmuch as he has commanded us to worship him (Matt. 4:10; John 4:24; cf. Rev. 22:9), we are engaged in service to God when we thus do.

It is worthy of note that another Greek word

(*latreuoo*) whence our English word liturgy comes, means “divine service,” and is often applied to the duties of the Jewish priests, in their work, under the old order. They were typical of Christians today who are also engaged in divine service to Jehovah (1 Pet. 2:9; and cf. Rom. 12:1). We serve God in worshipping him.

On the other hand, there is very definitely reverence, respect, and adoration involved in acts of Christian worship. When, for example, a basket of food is carried to a needy family, the action is grounded in the concept of service, but it is done out of regard for our relationship to God, and to this extent involves an act of worship. Therefore, we worship God, in serving others!<sup>1</sup>

But, we must keep this concept within proper scriptural limits — not always done today. Some are suggesting that because there is an element of worship in all service, worship is not limited in time or place, and that it is not correct to speak of “acts” of worship performed “in church.” This view overlooks the fact that in the broader aspects of the matter we do indeed worship and serve God, if we are his faithful children, always and everywhere. But there is also a more narrow and restricted sense in which we are commanded to engage in specific acts in an assembled capacity, which cannot be performed acceptably in any other fashion. The early disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Five items are specified or implied here, teaching, singing, the contribution, the Lord’s supper, and prayer (Eph. 5:18-19); and these are essential to acceptable worship on the Lord’s day (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Heb. 10:25.) Observe that these acts were thus engaged in according to “the apostles’ teaching,” who, in turn, were instructed to teach these matters to all who were disciples. We thus have both apostolic example and divine command for the observance of these “acts” in the church in Lord’s day worship. (Matt. 28:18-20.)

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s comment: brother Woods understood that in the command given in James 1:27 (“Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world”) that the Greek word translated religion (*threskeia*) means, “ceremonial observance: KJV— religion, worshipping.” Hence we worship when we serve the poor — it is service of worship — or worship of service.