

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

ASSOCIATION OR IDENTIFICATION

Discipleship Series - Part 5

By Rayola Kelley

This is the fifth article in the Discipleship Series. We have considered whether we are a sinner or a saint when it comes to our status in Christ. We have examined what is truly influencing our perception about God and life, as well as carefully considering if the quality of our life can be regarded as blessed of God or cursed by the ways of sin, self and the world. Last month we examined whether we are resisting when it comes to us truly giving way to God, or whether we have learned how to come to a state of true repentance.

As pointed out last month, it is important to understand the significance of godly repentance. Repentance allows us to turn around and face the harsh reality of our sins, moral deviation and hopeless state of sin and death. It allows us to fling ourselves on God in faith that He is able to bring life to our hopeless state of spiritual ruin, allowing us to walk in hope or expectation to a new beginning, a new life, and a new future.

This brings us to the next aspect of godly repentance. It allows us the means to become totally identified with our Lord in His death, burial and resurrection. The Apostle Paul talks about this identification in *Romans 6*. Identification points to being united in spirit, outlook or principle in order to become the same as or to share oneness.

We know according to *John 17*, this oneness was a major theme and desire in Jesus' prayer. It not only pointed to agreement and fellowship, but it was also the means in which the world would know that the Father sent the Son into the world. Clearly, such oneness would be seen in the Christian's life.

We are called into the place of

complete identification with Jesus; therefore, we need to understand what it means for our Christian life. The first aspect that Paul brings out about this identification is the fact that we are dead to sin. Keep in mind that the death, burial and resurrection points to the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (*1 Corinthians 15:1-4*).

Jesus died for our sin, was buried and three days later rose from the grave. If we believe this in our heart and confess that Jesus is Lord, we shall be saved (*Romans 10:9-10*). But, we must keep in mind that for Jesus to provide the way of salvation, He took on the disposition of a servant, by taking on the form of a man. In other words, Jesus became totally identified with us in order to address our sin problem.

Hebrews 2:9-10 gives us this insight: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." When Jesus became man, He was made lower than the angels. However, He had to take on a body to take our place on the cross as our Advocate. He had to suffer death in our place so we could inherit eternal life. The Apostle Paul stated that He became sin, or was made a sin offering so we could be made into the righteousness of God in Him (*2 Corinthians 5:21*).

The Lord Jesus Christ serves as our example. He went the way of Calvary to experience death. Likewise, we must experience death if we are going to truly become identified with Him in His life. He was put to death because of our sin, and we must become dead to sin to experience the essence of His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

If our life is hid in Christ as Co-

lossians 3:3 states, it signifies our death to the old way of life that was subject to the Law. The Law is what declares that we are sinners because we have transgressed it; therefore, we are worthy of death. The Apostle Paul, in explaining how this all worked, related in *Romans 7* how if we are living according to the dictates of the flesh, we are bound to the Law in the same way husbands and wives are bound to one another. There is no way we can get away from the Law outside of our death. However, if we are identified to Jesus' death, we are already considered dead, freeing us to have a new husband, Christ Jesus.

Clearly, if we fail to come into identification with Jesus in this way, we still remain bound to the Law. It is in Him that we stand forgiven, redeemed and restored into a new, complete life.

Some of you might be asking how such identification can occur. The Apostle Paul also addressed this question in *Romans 6:11-12*: "Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in its lusts". Reckon is a mathematical term. It means to count something as true no matter what angle we may approach it. When we consider reckon in this way, it simply points to faith. Faith is clearly a matter of reckoning a matter as being true. The Apostle Paul stated that the life of Christ that he was living in his body, he did so according to his faith in the Son of God (*Galatians 2:20*).

This brings us to the next part of being identified. We must be identified with Him in burial. We are told in *Romans 6:3* that we have been baptized into Jesus, which means we have also been baptized into His death. Baptism points to total immersion. Our lives have been totally immersed into Christ. Just as Christ was hidden in the grave, we are hidden in Christ. Just as the old was put off through death to allow the new to come forth, our old life that was marked by sin and death, must be reckoned as dead in Christ, in order for the new to

come forth. Keep in mind, the grave represented the victory of sin and death that freely reigned, but when Christ rose from the grave, it lost its victory. The reality of sin and death was silenced by the lifeless tomb of the grave, proving that the grave cannot hold life that has been empowered by resurrection of the new, eternal life of God.

In Christ, as believers, we not only become identified with Him in death, but our old life has been buried in His death. This allows for the last point of identification, the resurrection of the new. Notice, it is not the resurrection of the old, but of the new. The old has been left in the baptism, or grave, of death, allowing for the new to come forth. The Apostle Paul put it this way: *"For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection"* (Romans 8:5).

It is important to point out that what stands as a place of identification is the cross of Christ. Standing before the cross of Christ allows us to see the dreadful reality of our sin. But, when one truly becomes totally identified or immersed in the work of the cross, which is death that leads to burial, then the expectation or hope of the cross can truly be realized. The hope of the cross of Christ is life that now abides in us. This life is not only eternal, but it has been empowered by resurrection. Sin has no claims on this life, death has no part in it, and the grave has no power over it.

Life is the glorious reality for those who are truly hid in Christ. These individuals look forward to realizing the fullness of this life in eternity. Meanwhile, this life allows these people to live unto God. Instead of yielding the members of their body as instruments of unrighteousness, now they can become instruments of righteousness unto God, fulfilling their purpose in this present world and reaching their potential in light of the next.

This brings us to the second group of Christians, those who associate with the Christian way. Those who are associates to the Christian way may keep company with believers, attend services, and develop

common interest, but will fall short of becoming identified with Christ. These are the people who are forever walking on the outskirts of the deeper Christian life. They may claim, or give the impression, that they want such a life, but they never really enter into the door that would lead them into the secret chambers of communion to experience it.

Sadly, it is not unusual to encounter people in the religious realm who do not want to really become identified to Christ. Even though it is His life in us that truly distinguishes us as His people, these individuals show no real desire to become identified with this life. Those who possess this attitude are simply associates to the Christian life.

There are various ways that people become associates to the Christian life. For example, there are those individuals who become associated to Christ through family. Since these people's families are linked to the Christian belief, they conclude they must also be Christians. People that operate from this premise assume that such association identifies them to Christ, when in reality it simply identifies them to their family. However, these people do not really possess the life of Christ. They are assuming that such identification will somehow allow them to slide into heaven. However, the Bible is clear that if a person is not born again of the Spirit and the water of the Word, they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Another way people become associates to the Christian life is through religious association. People who associate themselves to a particular school of thought, denomination or religious leader will fall into this category. When people's identification is based on such associations, it becomes obvious that they are not looking to Jesus as their only source of life and hope. We are told that there is only one mediator between God and man, and that is the man, Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). Granted, these points of identification may possess aspects of Christianity, but when people are looking to such sources as their mediator or point of identification, Jesus will simply be tacked on to their religious activities to bring an appearance of credibility. In such a situation, we can see that instead of serving as the sole source or

inspiration behind them, Jesus has been replaced by that which has no power to save.

The Word of God is clear. Jesus is the only author and captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10; 5:8-9). He alone saves. To embrace and experience Jesus' salvation, we must become identified with Him in His work of redemption. Such identification requires us to believe what has clearly been established in the Word of God. To believe not only requires us to receive Jesus' salvation as a truth, but to accept the responsibility of walking in obedience according to the way that has been laid out in the Bible. The writer of Hebrews makes this statement about Jesus: *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"* (Hebrews 5:9). (Emphasis added.)

The third way people sometimes associate with Christianity is in name only. Anyone can say he or she is a Christian. These people can associate themselves to Jesus by using His name. In other words, they will drop his name to fit in to the scene. However, dropping the name of Jesus in the crowd or using the title of Christian does not identify a person as being a Christian. It is true that salvation cannot be obtained in any other name but Jesus. But, a person must know Jesus in order to be saved. Knowing Jesus requires having a relationship with Him. Therefore to use His name without knowing Him is the same as using His name in vain. It has no real personal meaning other than be used as a point of credibility. Such people may know of and about Jesus, but they do not know Him.

The important question is, what keeps people from truly becoming identified with Jesus? After all, we see some people coming so far in their life in Christ, but stopping short of becoming identified with Him. There are three reasons people do not fully become identified with Jesus.

The first reason is that such people refuse to consecrate their life to Christ. The Apostle Paul relates consecration as presenting our bodies as living sacrifices. The life we live as Christians is the life of Christ, but we must consecrate the members of our

LONG DISTANCE RUNNERS

By Jeannette Haley

As with any sporting event, every athlete knows that there are certain basic elements that must be present if he or she is to achieve the ultimate goal—being a winner! The World Olympics definitely brings this fact out. No person ever succeeds by merely “wishing,” “hoping,” or “dreaming” about bringing home the gold, any more than a hungry person with an empty dinner plate can produce a juicy T-bone steak by “wishing,” “hoping,” or “dreaming” about it.

As far as sports go, long distance runners are obviously in it for the long haul. First, they must focus on their goal. There are no shortcuts to the finish line. It must be established right up front that it will take incredible endurance, training and preparation to reach the goal. This involves a plan of how to obtain that goal, and a disciplined schedule. A winner possesses perseverance, discipline, focus, determination, commitment, and a deep desire that refuses to be sidetracked or hindered in any way. Any compromises, however slight, through this long process can spell disaster and defeat. It goes without saying that being a winner involves incredible sacrifice, self-denial, and total dedication. Anything less is simply not acceptable.

The Apostle Paul was very familiar with the competitions of the Olympic Games since they were established around 776 B.C. In his letter to the church at Corinth, he wrote: *“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” 1 Corinthians 9:24.* In this verse Paul is comparing the Christian life with running a race. While not everyone is cut out for physical sports such as running, every born-again Christian is required to be a “spiritual athlete” and understand that Christians must live daily as though they were running a race. This race is not to put the Christian into competition with other believers, but rather it is a necessary daily discipline if one is to obtain the prize, an incorruptible crown.

The true Christian life, and the race we are to run, involves spiritual

warfare, self-control, restraint of appetites, self-denial, and mortification of the flesh. In other words, if you are a Christian, you cannot afford to be a mere spectator on the side line of life and expect to receive the prize.

Any athletic endeavor involves much preparation. The same is true for the Christian. Both athletes and Christians must be outfitted in the proper attire in order to be winners. *Ephesians 6:10-18* outlines the special clothing and equipment the overcoming Christian must possess. Concerning exercise, *Hebrews 6:14* tells us that *“strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”* God expects us to live out (exercise) what we learn. “

A proper diet is indispensable to any athlete if they are to maintain the ability to function at peak performance. So, too, believers must have the proper spiritual diet. You might say that the Christian’s spiritual diet consists of bread, water and meat. It may begin with “milk” but growth into perfection (maturity) cannot take place if the Christian never advances past the baby stage. The Apostle Peter wrote, *“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” 1 Peter 2:2.* The tragedy is, most newborn babes in Christ are content to settle for being bottle-fed “milk” for the rest of their lives as they settle into some comfortable church routine, expecting the pastor, or others, to coddle them and somehow carry them on blankets of ease right up to the pearly gates. Or, they tune in to “Christian” TV and “eat” whatever is dished out, thus deluding themselves into thinking that they are now “educated” in the faith. Others find their faith defined by popular writers who neither fear God nor know Him. The end result of all this is not mature or fully developed believers, but rather a company of spiritually immature, retarded misfits who are not only unfit and incompetent to run the race that Christians are called to run, but are equally unfit for the kingdom of God.

Jesus, whose words in these last days are largely ignored, twisted, taken out of context or redefined and watered down, meant it when He said: *“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that pro-*

ceedeth out of the mouth of God” Matthew 4:4b. Are you living by every word that has proceeded out of the mouth of God as recorded in the Bible?

Job knew the preciousness, power, purpose, and preserving supremacy of God’s Word. He declared: *“Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” Job 23:12.* Can you declare with Job that God’s Word is more highly revered by you than the food you need daily?

Look at *Jeremiah 15:16*: *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.”* Can you honestly say that the Word of God is the “joy and rejoicing” of your heart?

Consider *Psalms 119:103* which states: *“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea sweeter than honey to my mouth.”* Have you found the Words of God to be “sweet” to your “mouth” compared to the distastefulness and bitterness that is the result of involvement with sin and the world?

Therefore, Christians must get past the milk stage and grow up by partaking of the Bread of life (Jesus), the Giver of Living Water (Jesus), and the meat of the Living Word (Jesus, the Word become flesh, John 1:1.) We cannot run the race, and finish the course if we are self-centered rather than Christ-centered.

To the church at Philippi, concerning this incredible spiritual race, Paul wrote: *“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” Philippians 3:13, 14.* Thus we see Paul comparing the Christian life to a race in which, in order to win, one must let go of the past, and focus on the goal. No race was ever won, and no mountain ever scaled by any athlete who insisted on continually looking back and worrying about their past. In order to “press toward the mark,” there must be single focus and concentration on the goal. Remember, Jesus said that His yoke was

easy, and His burden light. We cannot walk with Him under His yoke, on the straight and narrow road, if we insist on hauling along all our old baggage. But, it doesn't just end with us grabbing on to Jesus' promise of a light burden and easy yoke, but if we read the entire passage, in context, we see that the key to having this promise fulfilled in our lives is "learning of Him." (See Matthew 11:28-30.)

The problem is most Christians feed on spiritual "fast food." Listening to a sermon once or twice a week isn't going to feed your spirit any more than eating one or two meals a week is going to nourish your body. Grabbing a Scripture here and there as you dash out the door isn't going to help you "pass the test." Paul admonished: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" 2 Timothy 2:15. Therefore, how can you be a confident Christian worker that God approves of if you never study the Word of God, are unable to understand and discern it, much less live it and be skillful in teaching it? In the world of sports, any runner who was ignorant of the rules and regulations, as well as a thorough understanding of the course he or she was running would miserably fail. As has already been emphasized, it takes hard work, practice, patience, perseverance, determination, focus, and commitment to be a skillful athlete and the same is true for the Christian runner.

Writing to the Galatians, Paul said, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? Galatians 5:7. Again, Paul is emphasizing that we are in a race and that it is maintained through obedience to the truth. The Christian life can be hindered in many ways. People may oppose us, even members of our own family, but we are not here to please people, but God. False teachers (and they abound) can trip us up and cause great spiritual damage and confusion. A little leaven, or sin, can not only take us on major detours, but destroy our testimony, ruin our credibility, separate us from God, and bring us to destruction. False doctrine can be as dangerous, or fatal, to our spiritual lives as a misplaced detour sign on a race track would be to us physi-

cally. Evil influences can also wreck havoc with us as we struggle to focus on the goal.

The key is to know, believe and obey the truth. The problem is today we are being deliberately and systematically brainwashed by the god of this world (the devil) into believing that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Satan and his workers would have us believe that there are many ways to heaven; that the Guidebook (the Word of God) is outdated or worse yet, in error and unreliable; that right and wrong are outdated modes of thinking; that there are no moral absolutes; that being politically correct is right, and standing for righteousness is wrong.

Satan doesn't care if we run "a" race, just so long as we don't run "the" race that God has called us to run. He will lead us to believe that we can pick and choose which race we want to run. He doesn't care if we decide to settle on our laurels in some dead church that only teaches church doctrine, or perhaps doesn't teach at all, but just goes through the same old church formula week after week. In fact, Satan loves to deceive Christians into thinking that their outward religious life adds up to the same thing as running the race that Paul wrote about, but according to God's Word, there is only one acceptable race, and the qualifying rules have never changed.

Hebrews 12:1 admonishes us: "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Who are these witnesses? They are none other than all those who have gone on before us in faith. (Hebrews 11) All of the faithful who have ever lived, and all who have died as martyrs, down through the centuries, have left us with a powerful witness of the Christian life, God's faithfulness and power, and how we are to run the race, or live as believers. These men and women of God have shown us the way, demonstrating by their life and death how to run the race. Again, they were victorious in life and more than conquerors in death because they laid aside "every weight," and the

"sin" which would disqualify them. They exemplified the patience, faith and commitment that it takes to be a winner.

As Paul was heading down the home stretch, he penned these succinct and powerful words to Timothy: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" 2 Timothy 4:7. What incredible satisfaction Paul must have felt in his heart at the completion of his race, knowing that in all three areas he had overcome every obstacle, overcome every temptation to stop short of the goal, and overcome every attack on his faith.

Finally, Paul wrote, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" 2 Timothy 4:8. The question is, can you, can I, proclaim with confidence that we have indeed fought a good fight, finished our course, and kept the faith? Can we, with Paul, be confident that there is a crown of righteousness laid up for us that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give us if we love His appearing?

Maybe as you read this, you realize that you are not even in the race at all. Perhaps you have been taught that all you had to do to get to heaven was to "accept Jesus," and go to church every Sunday. Maybe you've been taught that once you are "saved," there is nothing more required of you, and that you can go on living your life as you always have lived it in the past. The harsh reality of such a philosophy is far from the truth.

If you can honestly say that you have merely been bumping along through life, day after day, rather than running the race set before you, don't you think it's time to find out what God requires of you, and to repent before it's too late, and begin running the race that God has set before you? May it be so!



body as a living sacrifice to ensure that the life of Christ is not only established in us, but also worked in us. For example, we must develop the inward disposition of Jesus, that of lowliness or humility. We must let His mind transform our mind so that we can have agreement. We also must learn how to walk as He walked in this world, dead to its influence, and alive unto the will of the Father.

The second reason people become associates to Christ is because they refuse to surrender all of their present life to Him as Lord and Master. After all, we have been bought with a price; therefore, we do not belong to ourselves. To consecrate our lives is to set them apart from the world to God, but to surrender our lives points to total abandonment. We abandon all ties with this present world and the influences of our self-life in order to surrender all else to God for His purpose and glory. The problem with many Christians is they will surrender certain aspects of their lives, while holding onto rights to determine what they surrender, in what way they will surrender it, and when they will let go of it. To reserve any right to any aspect of our lives is not surrender or total abandonment. Those who refuse to surrender all for God's purpose will never gain their complete life in Christ.

The third reason people operate as associates to Christ is because they lack true faith towards God. They have not chosen to trust Him with every aspect of their life. What has not been submitted out of child-like confidence to God becomes a point of unbelief in a person's life. Such individuals will fail to trust God in all matters of life that proves inconvenient or does not make sense to them. As a result, such people will only associate with Jesus in areas that will not challenge their self-sufficiency, personal understanding, and weak character.

This leaves us with the necessity of examining our present status in Christ. It is vital that we examine to see whether we are in the true faith that exemplifies a growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 13:5). Perhaps in your

examination, you will have to admit that you are simply an associate to Christ. If so, you need to be born again from above with the very life of Jesus. Humble yourself in true repentance and need for salvation, and ask Him to forgive you of your sin, and come into your life as Lord and Savior.

Maybe you are one who has come so far in becoming identified with the life of Jesus, but you have stopped in unbelief from entering into complete identification with Jesus. As a result, you walk in and out of the spiritual aspect of the Christian life into the fleshly ways and entanglements of the old life. If so, you need to repent of your independence and unbelief, and humble yourself before the Lord of lords and King of kings with the intent of paying the complete price of abandonment to secure your life in Christ.

Admittedly, I have been an associate in the past, but discovered that it leaves one empty, uncertain and miserable. But, thanks to the faithfulness of God, I have discovered the place of total identification in Christ. It is challenging, but a blessed place of assurance in Jesus, communion in the Spirit and peace in one's relationship with the Father.



LETTERS & EMAILS

"I just LOVED the way she [Rayola, June newsletter] nailed the whole Oprah CULT! She left no stone unturned, and I so admire her for hitting it head-on! NICE job! Also, I loved the analogy you drew in your article! You gals always send out such good food to us --- thank you for breaking Bread with us, and marching forward unashamedly proclaiming the Truth of God's Word!!!" - FL

"We need each other, don't we, Sis? There is no way any of us can be a lone ranger and win our race. I'm finally seeing this in my own walk - I cannot make it isolated and alone. Thank you Jeannette & Rayola, for helping me along the way." - WV

"I do believe there is a group of people that is working to pull down the US.. To make us willing to go into a one world order.. And I believe it is Close.. And this all is part of the PLAN to bring us down.. Yes, it's not going to

be the same.. But not many will listen.. So I don't say much to people.. Even in the Christian world.. There are many wolves that are bringing the church down.. And will go into this Plan.. And I have found.. The so called.. CHURCH.. (that we have come out of) Will not heed a warning.. So I haven't been throwing my pearls to the swine... Only the ones that seem open.. do I talk anything too.. I believe my EX friends.. Not my choice.. will be the ones that turn us in.. Sad.." - OH

"And prayer-less American Christians are going to experience the worst. Boy are they in for a rude awakening. All their platitudes and 'God bless us' clubs we call churches are going to wake up one morning to find all their world in ruins. THEN what are they going to do? You think they could pray then?" - AR

"I just wanted to say I'm thankful for these daily devotions and even more so as my eyes are being opened to how my flesh operates!!! In conjunction with chapters 5 and 6 in "The Battle for the Soul", I can see things more clearly now than I ever could (Rayola's teachings have been difficult for me to understand but the light is entering in now more and more). I now, for the first time, am really beginning to understand how my flesh can influence my daily walk before the Lord and also how I'm either being led by my spirit, the spirit of the world (both are the wrong spirit), or the Spirit of God (the RIGHT spirit)." - WV

"I am soooooooooooooooooo thoroughly enjoying this whole series on FLESH! I love it when FLESH is exposed for all that it is! Nice job, Gals!!" - FL

"I've learned a valuable lesson today - our God is good, and He is always right on time with everything He does in our lives. He is faithful to even the very minute things in our lives if we are faithful to surrender them to Him. I am learning that He is interested in them because they are important to us - even in our jobs. I am thankful that He is with us wherever we go, and wherever we may find ourselves in our daily lives. I know I have much to learn and not a whole lot time to learn the lessons, but I'm thankful that God isn't in a hurry and His grace is sufficient. He is True and Faithful....just like the true friends He brings into our lives who bring us encouragement when we need it the most." - WV

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

PRAISE & WORSHIP

Q: *I have heard a lot about praise and worship, but I have witnessed many different expressions of both. Is there a right way to praise and worship God?*

A: The answer is yes, there is a right way to praise and worship God. However, praise and worship is also a personal matter that must be properly discerned by the individual. To put these two issues in perspective, it is important to understand that God's people are collectively as a group called to praise and worship, but true worship happens on a personal level. In other words, each person must come into a place of personal worship before God. It is in such a place that true communion can happen between God and man.

People who are really into contemporary praise and worship remind others that God inhabits the praises of His people, and that we should enter His gates with praise and thanksgiving. What many people do not understand is that the purpose of praise was to lead a person into personal worship. Praise and thanksgiving actually are the means to exalt God in the mind to ensure the presence of a right spirit. Once the mind is being lifted above the world as it considers the greatness and majesty of God, the heart will follow in the adoration, honor and expectation of true worship towards the true God of heaven.

Praise actually sets up an environment in which the presence of God can come down. It is as the person enters into God's presence and ascends upward in adoration towards Him that he or she can come to a true place of worship. It is from this place that a person will be able to worship God in the right spirit according to truth. Therefore, we are told in *John 4:21-24* that true worship will not be determined by a particular location, but the inward condition of man. In fact, the Father seeks the true worshippers who worship Him in spirit and truth.

To understand this in a right way, let us now consider what it means to enter the gate with praise and thanks-

giving. There was only one real gate that God's people could enter in the Old Testament that would lead them to worship. This gate served as the opening into the outer court of the tabernacle or temple. Once they entered the gate, they were immediately met with the Altar of Burnt Offerings. This is where all sins were addressed. Praise points to joy and thanksgiving to a grateful attitude, but once faced with the cost of sin, praise would take on a sober, humble attitude as it would consider the cost for a person to come into the presence of a Holy God to worship Him properly.

For Christians, the gate represents the redemptive work of Christ. The altar we must face is the cross of Christ. It is the great sacrifice of Christ that establishes the real reason for praise. It is not just a matter of us recognizing who God is, but what He has truly done for us. Such recognition should produce praise and thanksgiving.

There was also the laver in the outer court that reminded the priests of their need to be cleansed before entering through the door of the Holy Place. For you and me, the Word of God cleanses us in the right way, allowing us to enter by way of Jesus, our good and glorious Shepherd. It was in the Holy Place that the priest ministered before God as they kept the flame burning on the Candlestick. The bread on the Table of Shewbread had to be properly prepared and presented to ensure communion that comes from partaking of that which is set apart as holy. Then, there was the Altar of Incense; it had to constantly emit the fragrance that was truly acceptable to God.

For Christians, the Candlestick reminds each of us that we must be walking in the light of Christ to properly address all personal sins. The Table of Shewbread points to Christ as the bread from heaven that we must constantly partake of to ensure our life in Him. The Altar of Incense points to prayer and emitting the fragrance of Christ's life (*John 6:35; 2 Corinthians 2:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 John 1:7*). Clearly, the Holy Place was to create an awareness of God as a means of preparation for entering into true communion with Him in the Most Holy Place. We,

therefore, must conclude that all acceptable praise and worship must find their origins, as well as be inspired, according to the awareness of God and His great work on the cross.

It is beyond the veil, located behind the Altar of Incense, where the real place of communion is located. The veil of the temple reminds us that we enter into this incredible place of fellowship because of Christ's sacrifice (*Hebrews 10:19-21*). The truth is anyone can get caught up with his or her idea of God, but facing the harsh reality of the cost of our sins will establish the right attitude of humility.

This brings us to the realization that there are two ways in which God's people enter into true communion with Him. They are through praise or brokenness. As you consider brokenness, it represents a state of humility as well as serving as a sacrifice, while acceptable praise will establish an attitude of humility as we consider God in light of His holy character (*Psalms 51:17*). As the New Testament Priests, we must remember that Jesus serves as our sacrifice that has prepared the way for us. It is from the premise of Christ's redemption that we as priests offer the sacrifice of praise (*1 Peter 2:5-9*). But, praise that lacks true humility will ultimately end in fleshly worship that may leave an awareness of how the experience has personally affected the person, but no real awareness of God.

The debate about praise and worship is whether the Spirit of God has inspired people's attitudes and actions, or whether they are riding the emotional wave of sentiment that is fleshly and worldly in attitude. The first sacrifice will prove to be acceptable to God, but He will resist the second type of sacrifice for it is considered unholy or defiled. This is why we are instructed to test the spirits to discern whether our praise is an acceptable sacrifice; therefore, we are ready to enter into a place of true worship, or whether it has been perverted. Sadly, there can be a fine line between acceptable praise and fleshly worship.

I do hope this will answer some of your questions. Remember that God truly will honor those who desire to worship Him according to His Spirit in light of the truth as to who He is and what He has accomplished for us.