

# Discipleship Dimensions

In exploring what worship is, this month's article looks at the idea that worship is *thankfulness*. The text in the Bible from which to begin this look is Hebrews 12:28 which reads as follows: *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.*

The first thing this text teaches is that worship is a *response* to God. Worship, then, is not something done in a vacuum; worship has an object which, for the believer, is God. Indeed, in the case of Christians, worship of God is a commandment as seen in Exodus 20:3, having to do with who He is and His worth.

The word "therefore" in the text indicates that worship is a response to God. The word refers back to the immediately preceding two verses, which speak of the one thing that will remain unshaken by God, namely His kingdom, as well as the preceding eleven chapters which deal with faith that looks to the future for one's inclusion in God's kingdom based on what He has done and promised in the past.

The link between the kingdom of God and one's response to God is the reality that the text sets forth, namely, that the believer is

receiving this kingdom! But what does that mean? It means that God has redeemed His people in Christ to be a part of His kingdom as kingdom citizens, as being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and as somehow participating in His rule both in the present and in eternity. In Christ, God has made His children perfect (Heb. 9:28; 10:12 & 13), and finally has given them an inheritance (Matt. 5:3; 25:34; Col. 1:13 & 14; II Thess. 1:5; James 2:5). Moreover, these things are not only future (Rev. 22:3-5), they are a present reality as seen in the words "are receiving" in the text.

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In short, the believer is to worship God because He is the sovereign king of the universe, and because His kingdom is glorious (Psalm 145:11-13), eternal (Daniel 4:3), and it will never be destroyed (Daniel 6:26). And the believer is to worship God because He has chosen to include those who come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ as part of His kingdom.

The text goes on to say that having received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, the appropriate response of worship to God is *thankfulness*. The Greek word in the text translated "thankful" is the word *charis* which is most frequently translated "grace." The word "grace" brings to mind that

salvation is a free gift of God (Eph. 2:8 & 9. Cf. II Cor. 9:15) Thus, believers are to be thankful to God for this gift of salvation - they are to recognize and acknowledge the undeserved benefit of, and receive the gift of, salvation. Such thankfulness not only expresses a proper response to God, it demonstrates and echoes His character as a wonderful, marvelous, good, kind and gracious God, and such worship redounds to His glory both now and in eternity. (Eph. 2:6 & 7)

Finally, the text teaches that the offering of the worship of thankfulness to God is acceptable when offered with reverence and awe. Indeed, it is fair to say that thankfulness to God is by definition acceptable given that the Greek word translated "acceptable" can also be translated as "well pleasing" or "well done." The thought, therefore, is that being thankful to God is "God pleasing worship"; it is worship "well done"; it is, in a word, acceptable, and God looks on it with favor. (Cf. Abel's offering from the flock as compared with the offering of Cain in Genesis 4:3-7)

This "God pleasing worship", however, must come from a right concept of God, one that brings about reverence and awe. A proper concept of God understands that He is unapproachable because of His utter holiness (Exod. 19:10-12; Is. 6:1-5), that He is all powerful (Dan. 4:35) and that He is a consuming fire (Deut. 4:23 & 24; Heb. 12:29). Thus, God is to be revered and revered,

lifted up and exalted, feared and respected, all in the context of that understanding of His nature and His power over life and all that is. And because of the fact that but for their salvation in Christ, believers would stand judged along with all those who have rejected God, but instead are brought near in a familial relationship with Him through the blood of Christ, what better or more appropriate response to God than the worship of thankfulness.

Hebrews 12:28 says that thanks to God and an attitude of thankfulness to God is actually worship of the Almighty God. Such thanks is a response to God, and such response is in fact His will for all Christians (I Thess. 5:18) Such thanks is worship of the Almighty God who, out of His great grace, saved those believers who otherwise deserved judgment and death, and brought them into His kingdom with a full place in that kingdom. It is worship in response to that Almighty God, a fully acceptable offering to Him, that is mindful of His power and awesomeness, and of the great and wonderful thing He did in bringing salvation to individuals.

What about you? Are you in awe of God? Do you tremble when you think of the enormity of your having been plucked out of darkness and placed in His kingdom as a child of God through your faith in Christ? Are you mindful that your receiving of His kingdom is both a present and a future reality? Your proper response

to God in view of these things is the worship of thankfulness -- thankfulness with reverent respect and awe of God for who He is, what He has done and the glory that is rightly due to Him.

Altogether, "be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe," and do so as a lifestyle and a practice, do so both as an individual and with other believers, and do so with words as well as action for God is indeed worthy of your worship of thankfulness.