

# Wilderness Christianity: Are We Worshipping in Spirit and Truth?

In part one of this series, we tackled controversial statement No. 1: *It is possible to love God with your whole heart and yet, not KNOW Him.*

To love God with all your heart and all your soul only is incomplete because it is missing one of the most important factors of becoming like Christ—your mind. Scripture makes it abundantly clear: Don't say you love Him and then not keep His commands. To know God's mind means that you must take the next major step into the next level—and in my humble opinion, it is the most important step. You must come under the authority of God's Word. You simply cannot have God's mind on the things of this life apart from allowing that mind to teach you His Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

How many unmarried couples are sitting in our services and then going home to cohabit? How many of your teens are sleeping together or shoplifting or cursing or fill in the blank? How many abortions? How many are gambling? How much gossip? All of this while lifting hands in our services and seemingly engaged in the worship experience.

So let's launch into controversial statement No. 2:

*"It is very possible that one of the greatest obstacles to spiritual growth and being a Christian who "walks in truth" may very well be what many of us love the most—powerful praise and worship.*

WOW! That's a powerfully strong accusation to make, and one that can get a man beat up in the church parking lot. Praise and worship are incredibly critical to the church experience

in the 21st century.

In the summer of 1993, I was in Denver, Colorado, where there was massive youth conference that lasted a full week. On the final day, there was a huge rally in a field and there were literally over 100,000 people gathered in this field. As the sun began to heat up the August sky, teens started dropping like flies and I spent the next two hours solid scooping up teenagers and carrying them to medical tents. After the first hour, the National Guard was called in to help with the medical emergency.

I remember watching the papers eagerly over the days that followed to see what was reported. One of the major articles explored the findings for what caused this crisis. In short, what happened was that the kids had feasted on junk food and soda all week long and then, in the heat of day, their bodies simply shut down, some tragically. They were dehydrated to catastrophic levels.

Then the article said something very powerful. It said that they had all they wanted to eat and drink. No one "felt" hungry or thirsty, but it was a "false full." What they chose to eat would not sustain life in the heat of day. What a powerful springboard for the rest of this article.

The bottom line is that music, religious or otherwise, makes us feel a lot of things—happy, joyful, sad, reflective, in love, playful and even contemplative. Full. But the church experience, including the praise-and-worship portion of the service, should do more and will do more.

True worship is to worship in spirit *and* truth, and far too many come to church to worship the worship experience itself, while neglecting to participate in the discipleship and Bible study opportunities that are there for the taking. Too few pastors take responsibility for holding those leaders accountable for their daily walk.

I will take it another step—too many worship leaders spend an enormous amount of time on the music part of their calling and very little on their spiritual growth in God’s Word. They spend even less time discipling and growing those God has placed in their care. Too many lead worship for their set time in the service and then head to the green room, only to surface 40 minutes later completely disengaged from everything the Holy Spirit has done that has led to this powerful moment of decision.

Singer and songwriter Chris Tomlin said this: *“True worship is not just the words and the music. True worship is about changing lives.”* Author and teacher Henry Blackaby (author of *Experiencing God*) put it like this: *“Worship anticipates not only an encounter with God, but also a clear next word from God. Out of worship comes a clearer and more focused relationship of faith and obedience. Worship is God’s way of developing character and directing the life into the center of His will. The ULTIMATE outcome of consistent worship is a life totally yielded to God, on God’s terms.”*

The book of Amos is an incredible book of prophecy written at a time when the children of Israel were rebelling against God. In this book, God was completely fed up and outright disgusted with His people. He had had it! Soon they would experience His judgment.

Throughout the last half of Amos, and especially in chapter five, we find a culture that I believe parallels the 21st-century church in far too many ways. God’s response serves as a warning for our churches today. Just because you have church, does not guarantee God has anything to do with it.

*“I hate, I despise your festivals, and I am not pleased by your solemn assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings or your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard the offerings of your fattened animals. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of*

*your harps. But let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:21-24, MEV).*

Just a few facts about the people He was addressing: They were thick in sin—walking in it, living in it, and committing acts daily that grieved their heavenly Father. All the while they commemorated the holy days, assembled in sacred assemblies weekly (church), experienced music services and offered up songs to their God (praise and worship) and gave faithfully to the church (tithes and offerings). They went about their daily lives as though they were completely unaware of an angry God and the stench of their daily sin.

Psalm 50 says it so well:

*“What right have you to declare My statutes, or take My covenant in your mouth? You hate instruction, and cast My words behind you. When you see a thief, you are pleased, and have a share in those who commit adultery. You let loose your mouth to evil, and your tongue is bound to deceit. You sit and speak against your brother; you accuse your own mother’s son. These things have you done, and I kept silent; you thought that I was indeed like you; but I will reprove you and make a case before your eyes. Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver: Whoever sacrifices a thank offering glorifies Me and makes a way; I will show him the salvation of God.” (Ps. 50:16-23, MEV).*

*Note: For part two of this article and part three of this series, tune in Wednesday.*

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