

OUR MIND AND HEART MUST BE PART OF OUR OFFERING

—by bishop Nikiforos Theotokis—

“Who touched Me?” (Lk. 8:45). This question voiced by our Lord Jesus Christ contains a teaching that is necessary for our salvation, even if most people fail to take it into consideration. A multitude of people were surrounding and crowding around Christ, yet He never asked anyone of them “who touched Me?” As soon as the lady with the issue of blood touched the edge of His garment, however, He immediately inquired, “Who touched Me?”

Such a large crowd of people were in direct contact with Him as others were pushing their way to get to Him, yet no power came forth from Him, nor did anyone who touched Him receive grace. When the lady with the issue of blood touched the edge of His garment, however, healing power immediately sprang forth from Him, and the lady at once received the gift of health. What does this teach us? That none of our works are pleasing to God, nor are they of any use to us if we do not also offer our mind, our heart, and our soul to God as well.

The masses followed behind Christ with their bodies; the lady with the issue of blood raced after Christ not only with her body but also with her mind: **“For she said to herself”—**that is she thought to herself—**“if I only touch His garment, I will be healed” (Mt. 9:21).** The people who followed Christ offered Him honor and bodily comfort; the lady with the issue of blood offered Him reverence and worship with her mind and heart. They offered to Him only their physical service; she offered to him both her soul and her body. This is why their offering was not accepted by Jesus, and why it remained fruitless. The lady’s sacrifice, on the other hand, was accepted by Christ and produced the desired result. Jesus spoke not even one word about the crowd. With respect to the woman, He stated that she touched Him, and He proclaimed her faith: **“your faith has saved you” (Lk. 8:48).** They not only received nothing, but they were not even permitted to enter into the house of Jairus to witness the miracle Christ would perform. The lady was granted both the peace of God, **“Go in peace” (Lk. 8:48),** and the cure from the disease that was plaguing her: **“and be healed from your affliction” (Mk. 5:34).**

This lesson (that we must approach the Lord with our mind and heart) was taught by God in the old law, it was preached by the holy prophets, and it was re-confirmed by the Only-Begotten Son of God. This lesson is the foundation of the Gospel’s commandments, the basis of the faith, the rule and paradigm of every virtue and good deed—even though most people neither pay attention to it nor attempt to implement it.

God, indeed, gave a commandment in the old law for people to offer Him sacrifices of bulls, sheep, goats, incense, fine flour, and other material gifts. However, He specified, **“Now every gift of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the Lord’s covenant to be lacking from your grain offerings. With every gift you shall offer salt to the Lord your God” (Lev. 2:13)**. What does this salt signify other than prudence and discernment? That is, the undivided attention of the mind to God, which is expressed through a material sacrifice.

Yes, God gave a commandment to offer material sacrifices. However, when the Jewish nation offered Him material things but distanced their heart from Him, then He clearly announced that such gifts are unbeneficial and useless: **“These people draw near to Me and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and they worship Me in vain, teaching the commandments and doctrines of men” (Isa. 29:13)**.

God commanded that sacrifices and other gifts be offered to Him. However, He clearly stated that a sacrifice to God is the humble disposition of the spirit, and that **“a broken and humbled heart, God will not despise” (Ps. 50:19)**. When the Jews offered Him a multitude of sacrifices without a humble spirit and without contrition and humility of the heart, then He censured them: **“What is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of lambs. I do not desire the blood of bulls and goats” (Isa. 1:11)**.

God appointed times of prayer, fasting, and feasts, and He requested these of man. However, He prescribed and requested these as external indicators of the soul’s disposition, as visible proof of the soul’s faithfulness and devotion to Him. When the essential purpose of these actions ceased to exist, then He expressed His aversion to all these things. First, He referred to them collectively by stating: **“Who required these things from your hands?” (Isa. 1:12)**. Then, concerning prayers that were offered in the temple, He said, **“You shall no longer tread My court” (Isa. 1:12)**. Concerning fasting, He spoke thus, **“Nor if you should bow your neck like a ring and spread sackcloth and ashes under yourself, could you thus call such a fast acceptable” (Isa. 58:5)**. Finally, concerning the various feast days, He announced, **“I cannot endure your new moons, and fasting and holy day. Your new moons and feasts My soul hates” (Isa. 1:13-14)**.

Through the Law of Moses, God asked for our mind, our soul, and our heart: **“You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your whole power” (Dt. 6:5)**. Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, having validated this law with the following words, **“This is the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:38)**, further taught us what constitutes true worship and reverence that is pleasing to God.

The Samaritan lady believed that the geographical location constitutes and perfects worship to God. Thus, she said to the Lord, **“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (Jn. 4:20)**. The God-man, however, with His response taught the entire world who the true worshippers of God are. **“The hour is coming,”** He said, **“and it is now, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (Jn. 4:23)**. Why? Because, **“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24)**.

In this manner, the Son of God delineated the standard of true worship and reverence that is pleasing to God. This rule and example is both justifiable and beneficial. It is justifiable because man does not consist only of a body; rather, he is comprised of a soul and a body. God is the creator and fashioner of both these parts. Since the soul is an immaterial and eternal spirit, it is incomparably more valuable and more closely related to God than the material, physical, and corruptible body. For this reason, God asks that worship is carried out with the soul more so than the body. Moreover, it is a beneficial model because when we offer our soul to God, then it, through the power given to it by divine grace, will lead and direct the body to carry out every type of virtue and good deed.