

A Biblical Approach to Worship

Preface

In an age when words have lost their historical meaning and terminology has been redefined by culture, the word “worship” in the biblical sense has fallen victim in similar fashion. I am burdened to reestablish this word in the true biblical sense in order that our worship will become more Christ honoring and God-centered. Worship is the ultimate function of the church that represents the vertical relationship that believers have with the Father. Worship is the reason that man was created and the reason sinful man was redeemed.

Jesus addresses the issue of worship in John 4:23, 24 stating that the Father desires those who will worship in spirit and truth. Jesus’ point is that the Father does not desire religious acts of worship, but worship that comes from one’s inmost being (spirit) that is consistent with revealed Scripture and centered on Christ (truth).

Worship in “spirit” is worship that engages the spirit or the heart of a person. True worship flows from the inner person of a man and involves the intellect and the emotions that is described in many of the Psalms (Psalm 45:1; Psalm 103:1; Psalm 51:17; Romans 1:9). Worship in “spirit” contrasts worship that is just an outward ritual which God rejects (Isaiah 1:13,15; 29:13, Jeremiah 7:9-10, Matthew 15:7-9). The corporate worship of the church must be without hypocrisy and deceit, therefore worship in “spirit” should be a sincere expression of love and adoration for our God.

Worship in “truth” is worship that occurs in response to God's gracious revelation of Himself in both creation (general revelation) and the Word of God (special revelation). True worship cannot occur apart from an understanding of who God is (Acts 17:23), and thus every aspect of worship must conform to the truth of God's Word.

John Piper describes worship as:

"Truth without emotion produces dead orthodoxy and a church full of artificial admirers (like people who write generic anniversary cards for a living). On the other hand, emotion without truth produces empty frenzy and cultivates shallow people who refuse the discipline of rigorous thought. But true worship comes from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are the bone and marrow of biblical worship." (DESIRING GOD, Multnomah Press, 1986.)

The following statements are values that I believe are consistent with Scripture regarding worship and its practice and implementation. I do not claim that these statements are original in thought or all inclusive but rather a culmination of years of reading the scripture and authors who are more biblically educated than myself. These statements are reflected in the practice of my personal worship as well as the ministry I oversee.

Soli Deo Gloria

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A. The God of Worship – The Object of Our Worship

A high view of God: Our view of God will directly influence the way we worship Him.

1. Our view of God is fundamental in our approach in worshipping Him. In order for our worship to be acceptable, we must recognize that we come before a holy God who is without sin (Psalm 145:17; 1 Peter 1:16; 1 John 1:5) and that this same holiness is manifested in His written law and word (Romans 7:12; Psalm 19: 8, 9; Leviticus 10:1-3).
2. We must recognize that God is the initiator of true biblical worship. This initiation is consistent in Old Testament covenants with Abraham, Moses, and David where God first established the worship relationship with His people. This worship relationship continues in the church today as the Father seeks those who will worship in spirit and truth (John 4: 23, 24).
3. God is a jealous God, demanding our worship solely for His pleasure alone. Our worship of God is an act of obedience giving honor that is due to Him alone (Deuteronomy 4:24; 6:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 10:31).
4. We must heed Paul's instruction to Timothy and recognize the God that we worship is eternal, immortal, and unchangeable, in who we can only receive salvation (1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 13:8).
5. We need to recognize God as sole creator and sustainer of life (Psalm 104; Matthew 6:31-34).
6. We acknowledge God as the God of grace, showing unmerited favor by giving eternal life to us. For it is grace alone that flows God's love and salvation to His chosen children (Romans 3: 23-26; Romans 5:20, 21; Ephesians 2: 8, 9).
7. We realize that God is a God of mercy rooted in divine goodness and supercedes sin. This mercy is great, abundant, and everlasting (Psalm 86: 5; 103:17; 136:1).
8. We recognize God as being a spirit and He seeks those who will worship in spirit; we recognize God as being truth, therefore to be true worshipers we must worship in spirit and truth (John 1:1; 4:23, 24).

9. If God is truth then His holy word (The Bible) is the only inspired (God-breathed), infallible rule and authority, which is sufficient for all areas of living (Psalm 19:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, if our worship misrepresents the Word of God, we pervert the truth about God and dishonor Him.

B. Jesus Christ – The Priority of Our Worship

1. Jesus Christ is the gateway to heaven's throne room. To deny Christ His rightful place in our worship is to invalidate our worship as a whole (John 14:16).
2. Jesus Christ was the ultimate sacrifice that satisfied God's standard of holiness. He was the perfect sacrificial lamb that was offered up once and for all the sins of mankind (Hebrews 10:5-14).
3. Jesus Christ is God's truth and living word (John 1:1). It is through this living word in which we receive spiritual cleansing and sanctification (Ephesians 5:26).
4. As we worship in truth we recognized Christ as our "Bread of Life" and by partaking of this bread He satisfies our spiritual hunger (John 6:35, 48-51).
5. As worshipers we have an advocate in Christ Jesus who lives, pleads, and intercedes to the Father on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24, 25).
6. Jesus Christ is our High Priest, reconciling sinful man with a holy God, giving worshipers direct access into the Holy of Holies (Hebrews 10:19-23).

C. The Worshiper – Our Response in Worship

As a people of worship, in whom God has taken permanent residence (Ephesians 2:19-22), the following qualities, attitudes, and attributes are represented in scripture as a part of worship:

1. A sense of "bowing down" before the Lord in reverential awe, fear, and devotion (1 Chronicles 16:25; Psalm 5:7; 96:4, 9; Matthew 14:32-33; 28:8-9);
2. An attitude of adoration and thanksgiving (1 Chronicles 29:13-14; Psalm 89:1; 92:1-4; 95:6-7);
3. As an act of service and obedience (Joshua 5:14; 1 Samuel 1:27-28; 15:22; Romans 12:1,2, 9-11, 14:15; Hebrews 12:28-29);

4. A sense of confession because we fall short of God's glory because of our sin (Joshua 7:19; 1 Samuel 15:30-31; Psalms 51:15-17) and because God does not accept worship when sin goes unconfessed (Isaiah 1:11-15; Hosea 6:4-6; Amos 5:21-24; Matthew 5:23-24);
5. As sacrificial acts (1 Chronicles 16:29; 2 Chronicles 29:28; Hebrews 13:16);
6. Corporate worship that includes public prayer (1 Chronicles 29:11-20);
7. Corporate worship that includes the public reading of scripture (Nehemiah 8:5-6; 1 Timothy 4:13);
8. Corporate worship that includes the public giving of offerings (2 Corinthians 9);
9. Corporate worship that includes the offering of praises (Psalm 92:2; 66:3-6; 71:22-23; 89:1; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 5:9-13);
10. Corporate worship which includes the use of instruments (2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Chronicles 15:16; 25:6; 2 Chronicles 5:12-14; 7:6; 29:25-28; Nehemiah 12:27);
11. Worship included singing in a corporate and private setting (Exodus 15:1; 1 Chronicles 16:9, 23; Psalm 66:1-2; 71:22-23; 81:1; 89:1; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16).

D. Ministry of Music and Worship: The Application in the Local Church

1. Because our worship is offered solely for God's pleasure and He is jealous to receive such worship (Exodus 20:4-5; 2 Chronicles 5:13; Psalm 50:22-23; Romans 1:25-26), then:
 - a. It is vital that talent (singers and musicians) being used to lead God's people in worship are focused on God as the center of attention (not self) and not aiming to entertain man;
 - b. Those leading worship should be modest in attire, not distracting worshipers from offering God their worship;
 - c. We should not allow our focus to be deferred to "worship" appearance such as musical style or liturgy. When worship becomes an issue of preferences and we can benefit from those preferences, it then becomes idolatry.

2. Because our worship is a celebration of God and His attributes and works (2 Samuel 6:5; Psalm 81:1; 92:4), then:
 - a. Our worship should be offered up to the level of God and not diminished to the perspective of man;
 - b. Our worship should be a joyful expression of such attributes with uplifting musical qualities and text that truthfully edifying;
 - c. Our worship should show a sense of wonder and reverential awe that is deserving of God.

3. Because scripture had requirements for singers and musicians who lead worship in that they were trained and musically skillful (1 Chronicles 15:22, 23:3-5; 25:6-8; 2 Chronicles 34:12) and were set aside for service (Numbers 8:24-26; Deuteronomy 14:27-29; 1 Chronicles 9:33; Nehemiah 10:39; 12:27, 47), then:
 - a. We should teach those involved in worship/music ministry the importance of their service;
 - b. We should identify those musicians who have a proper heart attitude of worship and a high proficiency and skill attached to this area of service;
 - c. We should offer opportunities in identifying skilled musicians and training them for service with in the local church.

4. Because scripture emphasizes excellence in the presentation of our worship and anything less than our best effort is not acceptable (in heart attitude and skill), then:
 - a. We should always strive for excellence and bring our best as a sacrifice of service and worship;
 - b. Worship should be lead by those who are adequately prepared (spiritually) and well-rehearsed (musically) in order to lead the body before God.