

WORSHIP

By

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“God is spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Worship among the Israelites had become a mere formality — something done in a certain place at a certain time and in a certain way. It was soon to pass away, Jesus said, and Jerusalem would no more be the central place of worship. Time, place and ritual must give way to true adoration of God all the time, everywhere and in everything.

We must worship God in spirit and in truth, Jesus says. Worship is adoration. How does one adore Him whom he cannot see, feel or hear? Where is the incentive for such adoration and love? Since it cannot be from any visible or physical relationship, it must be motivated by spiritual or mental realization. Such a realization must come from the truth God reveals about Himself, so that our relationship to Him is spiritual; that is, intelligent. It begins in the mind as one hears the gospel, believes it and is renewed in the mind.

Paul accused the Athenians of being superstitious, because they worshipped a variety of gods produced by their own imagination. Their religion was summarized in their worship of the “unknown god.” Paul announced that what they worshipped in ignorance he would set forth in revealed truth, and proceeded to give a number of facts about God: he created all things, is Lord of all, gives life to all, provides all needs, desire all mankind to serve Him, and will ultimately judge all men through Jesus whom He has raised from the dead (Acts 17:23–31).

These are the basic elements of truth which ought to bring every person to humble worship of the Lord and a desire to know more of the nature, character and thinking of the One to whom all must give account. Unfortunately, the Greeks at Athens were not impressed by the truth, but rather preferred to admire their idols, the work of their own hands.

The same attitude prevails yet. When churches cannot stir their membership to attend a worship service for the simple purpose of encountering the mind of the Maker, the service has to be spiced up with a certain amount of entertainment, special guests, special music and attractions styled after the manner of Broadway and Hollywood. Instead of focusing on the truth of God so one can worship intelligently and truthfully, the focus of the church is upon man and his clever innovations. Even an examination of the average hymnal will reveal that most of the songs express man’s feelings and desires rather than the majesty, glory and purpose of God. In a recent issue of *Christianity Today* a discussion of modern hymnology deplored the fact that many of the common hymns express sentiment, but not truth. Poetic license must be allowed in music. But to sing words that express ideas contrary to God’s truth while worshipping Him I not merely being inconsistent, it is contradicting the one we claim to adore.

On one occasion, when I hesitated to use a hymn because it expressed doctrine contrary to Scripture, a woman said, “But when I sing, I just enjoy the music. I don’t

worry about the words.” Obviously she is not alone. As a former professor of mine once said, a great many people, when attending church, park their minds outside when they park their cars and the whole worship service takes place without any intellectual activity on their part.

According to Jesus, to worship means to think. But how much thinking is required in the modern church? People select a church on the basis of its location, its architecture, the fact that friends go there, its exciting youth program, its convenient nursery, and the way it makes them “feel.” Who is concerned about the truth that is taught?

The church has become play-oriented. The worship becomes a performance with the preacher the master of ceremonies introducing the acts, and the congregation the audience. The performers may be sincere and devoted to the task, convinced that this is the way to strengthen the Christian and exalt the Lord. But do they expose the mind of God? Do they bring the mind of the worshipper to encounter the truth of the Creator? It is a well known fact that performers have a tendency to become self-oriented, so it is not uncommon to have jealousies and envies issuing from the fact that someone received a higher billing than another.

The churchgoer becomes a spectator, who later leaves the assembly to judge the show and criticize the performers. Knowing this, the service is designed to present a Christ to suit everyone’s taste. One can go to church, be entertained, laugh, cry, experience a great emotion, and go away without ever having engaged the mind in any real thought and meditation of the deep and eternal truths God reveals about Himself.

In true worship, the worshipper is the performer, and God is the audience, the judge of whether or not we have worshipped well — in spirit and in truth.

A.W. Tozer notes, “There is only one Christ and the truly saved man has an attachment to Christ that is intellectual in that he knows who Christ is theologically. For you know there is the romantic Christ of the female novelist and there is the sentimental Christ of the half-converted cowboy and there is the philosophical Christ of the effeminate poet and there is the muscular Christ of the all-American halfback. But there is only one true Christ, and God has said that He is His Son.” (Chalcedon Report, August 1980)

It is **this** Christ that is to be worshipped. Unless there is an intellectual attachment to Christ in which we know who Christ is theologically, we cannot worship Him in spirit and in truth. We can go through the “acts of worship” (an expression never found in the New Covenant Scriptures) and still not worship. One can sing, pray, eat the Lord’s Supper, give his tithe and hear a sermon, and never thoughtfully adore the Lord. Jesus said of such worshippers, “You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophecy of you, saying, this people draw nigh unto me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:7–9).

Spiritual worship is not necessarily emotional worship. “Music which makes one feel good, touching anecdotes which draw tears, the magic oratory of a speaker which thrills his hearers, the clever showmanship of professional evangelists and singers who aim to ‘produce an atmosphere’ for worship(?) and which are designed to move the varied emotions of those in attendance, are so many examples of what is soulical and not spiritual at all. True worship, spiritual worship, is decorous, quiet, reverential, occupying the worshipper with God Himself; and the effect is to leave him not with a nervous

headache (the inevitable reaction from the high tension produced by soulful activities) but with a peaceful heart and a rejoicing spirit” (Arthur Pink).

Worship is not accomplished by turning off the mind to accommodate the emotions. It is the mighty truth of God that creates the worshipful emotions.

While the church needs to take a closer look at what is called the worship service, we all are to bear in mind that the worship of God is not confined to a time and a place, but involves all of life. As a friend of mine put it, “We go to the church on Sunday to worship God because we have been worshipping Him all week long.”

Worship is continuous. If we adore God and enjoy a mind-to-mind relationship with him, we are conscious of His presence and our dependence upon Him at all times. Our love isn’t something we turn on once a week for just an hour or two on Sunday. Public worship is essential for Christians, but a Christian cannot limit his worship to that. Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service (Greek = worship)” (Rom. 12:1).

Spiritual worship, therefore, is the submission of our lives to God, intentionally, purposefully, thoughtfully according to the truth He has revealed.

Certainly the worship of God requires our very best. The person who truly worships Him will do his best in whatever he does, “as unto the Lord.” His whole life, whether at work or at rest, is for the purpose of exalting God and glorifying Him. Yet this is not a natural instinct; it must be studied and learned. The more one grows in the knowledge of Christ the more he adores Him and tries to improve in service to Him and worship of Him.

This ought to be evident in the worship assembly. How can one say he worships when he only mumbles the reading of scripture and is too lazy to learn the songs of praise and practice how to sing them? No one has to have a great voice, but he does have to learn the song. It is a mark of meekness to be willing to learn and then lift one’s voice, as unmusical as it may be, to God in worship.

And what of the one who grows weary and begins to doze, even when the sermon is not all that dull? One who has not the heart and the will to participate in the public worship very likely never practices any private worship.

The most satisfying and meaningful worship is experienced as one brings his life, thought by thought and action by action, into submission to God. Whether public or private, we must worship with a will, with all of heart, strength and mind.

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