

REASONABLE WORSHIP

By

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“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.” (Rom. 12:1).

The last two words in this verse are better translated “reasonable worship.” The word *logikos* appertains to the mind or reason. This is to say that the real worship of God is not mere ritual, but involves intelligent thought.

W. E. Vine says, “The sacrifice is therefore to be intelligent, and the idea suggested is by way of contrast to the sacrifices offered under the law by ritual and compulsion. The presentation is to be made in accordance with the spiritual intelligence of those who are new creatures in Christ.”

The word for worship is *latreia*, meaning “to serve,” and came to mean that to which one would devote his whole life. In the above verse Paul urges us to worship God by committing to Him our entire lives. William Barclay writes, “Real worship is the offering of everyday life to God...Real worship is something which sees the whole world as the temple of the living God and every common deed an act of worship...A man may say, ‘I am going to church to worship God,’ but he should also be able to say, ‘I am going to the factory, the shop, the office, the school, the field,...to worship God.’”

Worship under the Old Covenant involved sacrifices of animals. The death of Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, made an end to all such sacrifices. Now we worship by giving ourselves, presenting our whole lives, to God in reasonable (intelligent) service (worship).

Spiritual and reasonable worship, then, is the offering of one’s body and entire life to God. It takes place in daily living, as one recognizes his body to be the temple of God, and all his actions throughout the day as things done to please and glorify Him. This leads to the exhortation of Paul in the next verse: “And be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

One of the sad observations of our time is that many churches have fashioned themselves after the world in order to win its approval and increase their membership. What is called the worship service is often more like a theatrical production. Worldly values are used in order to “market” the church on the basis that the end (church growth) justifies the means.

To present ourselves as living sacrifices to God requires that we separate ourselves from the world. This doesn’t mean isolation, or that one doesn’t continue to work and do

business with the immoral people of the world” “for then you would need go out of the world,” as Paul writes (1 Cor. 5:10). But it means one has a different set of values, and lives to please God rather than joining in with the world and its pagan pursuits.

Of course, worship involves more than our service, or conduct and our daily works. One word used in the New Testament for worship is *proskur*, which means “to kiss the hand toward.” It means an expression of sentiment toward God, a sentiment that must come from the heart. Perhaps one of the best definitions of worship is adoration. Like genuine love, it is continuous, not something we do at a specified time and place once a week.

The late R. M. Bell wrote: “Since worship is love carried to the highest conceivable degree, it too, is continuous. Worshipers may have a weekly gathering in which they give public expression to their inner feelings, but these public expressions – preaching, praying, singing, giving, etc. – are not, in themselves, worship. They are called acts of worship, but they may be acts and nothing more. Worship, like love, is neither seen nor heard; it is felt. Worship is within.”

Worship is not confined to a certain place at an appointed time. The woman at the well of Sychar wanted to argue with Jesus about the right place to worship: Jerusalem or Gerizim. But Jesus said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The ceremonial worship in Jerusalem and Gerizim was to pass away, and Christians were to worship Him in a spiritual way, at all times, in all places. True worship is a matter of the mind and heart, as we reach out to God in humble adoration and seek to know and glorify Him.

Some interpret the phrase “in spirit and in truth” to mean that there are certain true acts of worship which are allowed. And anything less or more is unacceptable worship. Acts 2.12 is the “proof text” for this position. It reads, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.” But one will note that nothing is mentioned here about worship. One could worship while doing any or all of these things; but one could also do them and not worship at all.

In fact, in studying this subject I was surprised to learn that not once in the New Testament does it say that God’s people ever came together to worship. The assembly was never called a “worship service,” and the people are never spoken of as “worshipping.” Of course, this is not to say that they did not worship as they assembled. My guess is that they did, but you won’t find it stated in scripture.

Nor did they have “houses of worship” in the modern sense. There were no church buildings until the third century. They met in homes, or public places, and we have no clue as to an “order of service” in their meetings. Our present “Worship Service” is derived from five sources: (1) Old Testament worship of Israel (in the Temple); (2) Roman Catholicism, passed on through the Reformation; (3) Pagan practices which were never fully abandoned by new converts; (4) Some New Testament practices; and (5) The format for many of today’s worship services seem to be copied from the theater (TV, movies, etc.).

Some go to church looking for an escape from reality, and find it in the “exciting” programs of fun and games. Those who seek an opportunity to worship and fellowship in the precious truth of Christ may be greatly disappointed. True worship is confronting reality, the reality of a relationship with God. Often the assembly becomes a place to be entertained or to hear a lecture by a skillful speaker, rather than a gathering in which saints assemble to edify one another and worship Jehovah.

What about music? If the assemblies described in the New Testament ever used music, either vocal or instrumental, it is no where mentioned. While singing is mentioned seven times in Acts and in the Epistles, in each case it refers to individual singing or a duet (in the case of Paul and Silas in prison), but not to congregational singing which is neither commanded or even mentioned. Congregational singing is mentioned in the Revelation, and there it is always accompanied by instrumental music (Rev. 14:2-3; 15:2-3).

This doesn't tell us that congregational singing is wrong , it merely tells us that it is not essential in worship, although to many of us it is a very precious part of our worship.

If one can worship anywhere, anytime, without a program or religious ceremony, then why should one attend the weekly assembly? Why go to church? We may go to worship, to pray, to edify each other, to observe the Lord's Supper, to encourage one another, to plan and/or report on the work of evangelism, for fellowship, to bear one another's burdens. If you do any of these things with a sincere heart of love for God you worshipped. We are urged to assemble to strengthen our faith and hope and to encourage each other to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:22-25).

As Owen Still, Jr. wrote, “We come to worship together on Sunday, because we have been worshipping individually all week long.” We assemble for other reasons, but it is good to worship together when we assemble.

Worship is a mind-to-mind meeting with God through our redeemer, Jesus. God is not found in signs and ritual and feelings, but in the truth, as it is revealed to us in the Bible and as we put it into practice in our daily lives.

Let not our worship be the vain following of human traditions, as Jesus said of the Pharisees and scribes: “This people honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Matt. 15:8)

Let us follow Paul's directions: “And whatsoever you do, in word or in deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Col. 3: 17).

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