

Faith Pulpit

Doing Worship God's Way

Our faith is an internal faith. Contrary to our natural predispositions to focus on the external and evaluate everything by the visible, God focuses on our hearts. No wonder the supreme goal of the believer is to glorify God. This magnificent theme echoes and reechoes throughout Scripture. All other goals and aspirations, as vital as they are, simply serve God's glory.

But how does one glorify God? He created man to have fellowship with Him (Col. 1:16), and we are His purchased possession (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). But what is fellowship? Fellowship is the response of the believer at all three points of human personality—mind, emotions, and will. Fellowship is not simply a static relationship; it is a vital, deliberate response of the yielded believer to his God. He knows God personally, he loves God intimately, and his will is in submission to God completely. It is clear that the believer's worship, then, will reflect true fellowship. If not, it becomes simply “sounding brass” and “tinkling cymbal.”

Several principles about worship can be found in John 4:19–24. First, God desires worship (v. 23). If we are to respond to Him as He wishes, we will bring praise, adoration, and obedience to the One Who alone is worthy. The primary purpose of worship is directed toward the object of worship, not the worshipper.

Second, only certain people can worship. Simply having a worship “service” in no way guarantees worship, since neither unsaved people nor carnal believers are capable of it (v. 22).

Third, worship is based on truth. Jesus made it clear to the Samaritan woman that her “worship” was based on ignorance, but that true worship is based on the Word (v. 22). Obviously, corporate worship, as well as private worship, is not expressed by falsehood. Our music, for instance, should be a reflection of the Word of Christ “dwelling richly” in us, and a demonstration of the wisdom of God.

Fourth, worship must be in spirit (vs. 23, 24). The balance between truth and spirit is important. They are not seen here as two separate ideas, but as one. God is declared to be a Spirit as well as Truth. There is, then, a subjective response to a knowable God, reflecting itself in a fervent love for God that involves the entirety of man (Matt. 22:37). This over-arching commandment, to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, encapsulates all of biblical worship.

Fifth, there is no prescribed place of worship (v. 21). It follows, then, that there is no specific time to worship, either. To argue these statements is to miss the point. Biblical worship is inward and should be the constant habit of a believer who is in fellowship with God and is, therefore, glorifying Him.

This is not to say there is no such thing as corporate worship. When thinking of the New Testament church, much stress is put on “body life.” Churches did many things together to celebrate the Lord, including prayer, singing, communion, preaching, etc. Corporate worship is essential to the Body of Christ (Heb. 10:24, 25).

But what should be the elements of worship? Isaiah 6:1–13 answers the question. There must be recognition of Who God is (vs. 1–4), producing a corresponding recognition of our own worthlessness and God’s forgiveness (vs. 5–7). In turn, we will respond to God’s grace in service and renew our commitment to God’s Word (vs. 9–13).

Practical concerns regarding corporate worship deserve attention. Does the whole service fit together? Do the music and message complement one another? Does our practice draw people into biblical worship? Does the service flow? Does it climax too soon or too late, if ever? Do our worship leaders point to God or to themselves, or to the style, or things that don’t matter? Is there wasted time? Is the service manipulative? Simply put, does the service glorify God? If not, it is not a “worship” service no matter what we call it.

In contemporary circles, too much focus is placed on the method of worship. Is loud better than quiet? Is fast better than slow? What instruments, if any, do we tolerate in our services? What physical posture best expresses genuine worship? Clapping of hands? Hands raised with palms upward? Swaying to the tempo of the music? These questions do not imply that methods are irrelevant. They are not. But our methods should reflect biblical worship. Some methods please the worshiper so that the worshiper becomes the focus of the methodology. When we think correctly about worship, we are much more likely to do correctly. And that brings us to the crux of the matter.

The root words for worship in both Testaments clearly argue that an appropriate concept of worship is to bow down, fall prostrate, or be as one who licks his master’s hand, suggesting the relationship between a dog and its owner. But again, we risk externalizing worship and thereby miss the point.

The danger of implementing another outward expression of worship, as legitimate as that expression might be, is that we fall into the common trap of worshipping the method rather than the Master. This

error is all too prevalent in our superficial age where image is more important than reality. The subtle tendency for man is inevitably to draw attention to himself rather than to his God. The flesh loves to appear religious and parade its religion. Nothing receives more scorn from the Lord than hypocrisy.

An opposite danger is that we create disputes, divisions, and outright conflict over methods of worship. The discussion should begin with message, not method. When a believer truly worships, we should not be overly preoccupied with exactly how that worship expresses itself. Our concern should be understanding true worship and allowing believers to express it properly. Let's resist the devil's scheme to distort and destroy the true ministry of Jesus Christ, and return to the great test of all commandments, which is to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, all of our souls, and all of our minds. Obviously, every congregation has different levels of spiritual maturity, and these differences express themselves accordingly. Let's not cater to immaturity, but bring our people to a thoughtful, biblical understanding and expression of our faith. Let's worship!

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