



Faith Pulpit

What Constitutes Worthy Worship?

There is a great deal of confusion today about what constitutes appropriate worship, whether we are talking about personal or corporate worship of God. Some expect worship to make them feel good and therefore want church services by which they feel affirmed and satisfied. Others link worship with entertainment, and church services are planned accordingly. These views mistakenly assume that worship is intended to enhance the personal pleasure of the worshipper. This is not true. What does the Bible have to say about appropriate worship?

1. Proper worship is directed toward God alone.

Our Lord told the Samaritan woman, “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him” (John 4:23). The psalmist David commanded God’s ancient people: “Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto His Name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:1,2). The Apostle John, in Revelation 19:9–10, fell at the feet of the angelic messenger to worship him, and he was rebuked with, “See thou do it not . . . worship God.” Worship is, therefore, not to be focused on others, but is to be directed toward Him.

2. Proper worship is related to God’s holiness.

One has but to take a Bible concordance and look up “worship” and its related terms to note the many passages which connect it to the holiness of God. Psalm 29:2 reminds us to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness,” and Psalm 99:3, 5 and 9 command God’s people to worship God because “The LORD our God is holy.”

One of the great Old Testament scenes of worship is that of Isaiah the prophet being commissioned by God. Here we are told that the prophet “saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isaiah

6:1–13). The seraphs cried out at the scene, “Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.” Note that this experience did not make the prophet feel good or serve as entertainment. His response was, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

3. Proper worship is a recognition of His worthiness.

The dictionary defines worship as reverence or respect paid to a divine being. It comes from an old English word meaning “worthship,” that is, recognizing one’s great worth. When applied to the LORD, it speaks of His deity, greatness, and power. In Revelation 4:10–11 and 5:8–14 we behold the scene in heaven where God the Father and God the Son are worshipped, and that worship is connected to His worthiness. “The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that sat on the throne, and worship Him that liveth forever and ever, . . . saying, ‘Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honor and power . . .’” (4:10,22 the “...four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb...and they sang a new song, saying, ‘Thou art worthy. . .’” (5:8,9); “worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing” (5:12); “And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, ‘Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him That sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him that liveth for ever and ever” (5:13, 14).

In genuine worship there is more than a mere intellectual recognition of Who God is. There is also the human response to Him of submission and adoration. This is clearly seen in the Revelation 4 and 5 texts to which we have already referred. We are told that the twenty-four elders “fall down before Him” (4:10) and “cast their crowns before the throne” (4:10); they “fell down before the Lamb . . . and they sang a new song” (5:8,9); “And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped Him” (5:14). This response may take various expressions—through music (“they sang a new song” [5:9]), through giving (Matthew 2:1,2, 9–11), through prayer and praise (Revelation 4 and 5), through assuming a physical position indicating submission and respect (Psalm 95:6), and through a willingness to obey God’s will (note Isaiah’s response in Isaiah 6:8—“Then said I, ‘Here am I; send me.’”). The response, however, must include the inner attitude, and not just be outward form. Notice the comments of our Lord to the religious leaders of His day who were careful to observe all of the proper outward trappings of worship (and He does not condemn them for this!): “Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, ‘This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me.’” (Matthew 15:7,8).

4. Proper worship is based upon sound teaching.

In Psalm 29, David commands God’s people to worship Him (verses 1 and 2), and then he provides appropriate information about God (His powerful acts—verses 3–9; His sovereignty—verse 10; His

protection of His people—verse 11). Christ warned that it was possible to worship in vain, and He connects this with “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). The heavenly worshippers in Revelation 4 and 5 specifically identify their worship as a response to correct information and understanding of God and His acts (“Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, Which was, and is, and is to come”—4:8; “Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory and honor and power: for [because] Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created”—4:11; “And they sang a new song, saying, ‘Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for [because] Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth’”—5:9, 10).

Proper worship, then, is our response to being confronted with truth about God—His holiness, sovereignty, and mighty acts. It is a response of submission to Him and an acknowledgement of His claims upon our lives; it results in greater love and appreciation for Him, an increased reverence for being in His presence, and a new resolve to live for Him.

Dr. George Houghton

Former VP of Academic Services at [Faith Baptist Bible College](#) | [Other Articles](#)

George Houghton, former vice president for academic services and college dean at Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, is a graduate of Bethel College, Central Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary, and holds a Master's and a Doctor of Theology degree from Dallas Theological Seminary. He retired in 2010 after serving for 36 years at the institution.