

What Worship Isn't

We will begin this study by looking at several of the misconceptions prevalent in the thoughts of people attempting to engage in worshipping the living God. Most often these efforts stem from a true heart-felt desire to worship. We must be careful not to harbor a judgmental attitude as we peruse this article. Indeed, there shouldn't be even a hint of ridicule in our hearts for if we are totally honest with ourselves we have all had our misconceptions about what true worship is. And likewise we have at one time or another strayed into 'unfruitful areas' on our journey in pursuit of worshipping God. I invite you now to examine with me some of these aspects as we look at "What Worship Isn't".

At the top of the list of what worship isn't is:

- **Worship isn't appeasing God!**

I'm sure you have heard this story before - it goes something like this; "God is really angry with us and we are unworthy of His love. If we don't grovel before him and do something to appease Him he is going to punish and destroy us!" In almost all primitive and modern day religions you will find this conception about God. People believe that God is angry with us. So in order to please God you have to grovel before Him, be a good person, or do good deeds in order to get on His good side. Usually there has to be some kind of sacrifice on your part to make him happy and win His favor.

This fallacy has gripped our thinking and robbed us of the true Biblical view of God and how he really feel about us. One of the reasons we stumble at the idea of God's love and grace is because, living in this world and culture we are taught that, "there is no free lunch"-that nothing good comes to us without much effort on our parts. So we reason that if we begin to worship Him we will begin to make Him start loving us. That in doing so we will build up points on His scorecard and make Him eventually smile upon us.

But in light of the message of grace found in the New Testament how is it that we can slip into this mentality? The revelation and work of Jesus Christ utterly destroys this misconception! God has revealed in Jesus Christ without question the message that the Supreme Being loves us! Jesus painted a picture of a compassionate and loving Father who unconditionally invites all to eat at His table of mercy and grace. In Christ's sacrifice God's love shines brightest! Moreover in Romans Chapter 8 verse 31 Paul exclaims, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul goes on to conclude that incredible chapter with these words, "nothing in all creation shall be able to separate us from God's Love"!

Therefore God already loves us. His love is unconditional and free. Although undeserving recipients we are still loved by Him regardless of all our faults and failures! In fact His loving arms are open wide, more than ready to receive us. And you don't have to grovel! You simply go to Him with a thankful heart and begin to love Him back! Loving God back is what worship is all about.

The second point is closely related:

- **Worship isn't Manipulating God so you can get what you want!**

Every week many churches fill up inside with people singing worship songs to Jesus and the heavenly Father. But underneath their outward displays of worship are other underlying motives. Many worshippers think, "If I please Him He will give me what I want!" They mistakenly think that by going to church and singing songs, saying prayers, and by putting money in the offering plate that God will have to bless and protect them! In fact some teach that God has to give you what you want if you have followed the correct formula!

Those of you who are parents of teen-agers probably know what its like to have your son or daughter come to you only when they need something – especially money or the car keys! I can picture God saying over and over again to us, "Is that all you want from me is the car keys?" Have the words to the classic children's song "Jesus Loves Me This I Know" been changed to, "Jesus Loves me this I see, for the things He gives to me"? God wants you to love Him back and worship Him for who He is-not for what you can butter Him up to give you! God sees into our deepest motives and is disappointed when we try to worship Him only in order to get things from Him.

This leads us to point number three:

- **Worship isn't just empty ritual.**

Worship of the living God isn't just going through a prescribed ritual. All over the world worshippers every week participate in all sorts of ceremonies and rituals as a part of their regular weekly worship schedule. But if your heart is not engaged, if you are just doing it out of habit and tradition it isn't true worship! Worship isn't merely going through the motions. In the book of Isaiah God says, "these people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me". In Amos 5:21 God even goes further and says, "Take away from me the noise of your songs!" Finally in Hosea God says, "I delight in loyalty rather than ritual sacrifice and knowledge of me more than burnt offerings." God expects our hearts to be engaged in worshipping Him.

On the other hand let us be careful not to be overly critical of our prescribed forms of worship! Many of these ceremonies and rituals help to effectively open the door to the presence of God.

Again, I don't want to suggest that if we don't feel something in each prayer, song, or ceremony that something is necessarily wrong with our worship experiences and that we should cast aside all our ceremonies, liturgies, or rituals in favor of nothing but ecstatic religious experiences. This leads us logically to our next statement.

- **Worship isn't just seeking out spiritual ecstasies or emotional feel-good experiences.**

There are many worshippers today that have fallen prey to this trap. Every week they seek a spiritual high or emotional fix from their worship services. There is much high-energy worship music being performed today and many are getting touched emotionally by just the music instead of the Spirit of God! Unaware that they are addicted they continually seek out more and more emotional or ecstatic experiences instead of seeking to engage in true worship of the living God.

However, this is not to imply for a minute that worshipping God somehow bypasses the emotions entirely! For when you love God with all your soul, mind, and strength your emotions will be engaged with tangible emotional results. I think it's significant that many of the fruits of the Spirit have emotional qualities associated with them. Fruits like Joy, Love, and Peace. How can you not feel Joy or Peace? It is impossible!

In my opinion there is no greater emotional experience in this life than experiencing the presence of God himself! It is an encounter with the creator and source of all being! It is holy and pure - energizing and invigorating! And it has a profound emotional effect on everyone who has tasted it! There is nothing like it – nothing even comes close! His presence is more precious than anything!!

On the other hand God's word is true and the message of Jesus is to be obeyed regardless of how we feel at a particular moment. If what you are feeling on Sunday doesn't carry over to Monday you are still God's child and expected to continue to walk in the light! You may not feel like doing what Jesus said to do but do it anyway. The main point I am making here is that you don't worship God just to feel something!

- **Worship isn't a flight from the real world.**

Sigmund Freud held the opinion that all religions were a psychological crutch. He believed that many times the religious experiences people went through were more escape from reality than anything else. Instead of facing their problems he believed religious people tend to blame everything on the devil or on God! Instead of facing their own responsibilities they would sink further into denial. There is some truth in his observations. It is so easy to play the blame game, much more comfortable to be transported to the realm of the "Spooky-Natural", than to face the cold hard facts of reality. Truthfully, there is no doubt that at

times the Christian life is beset with trials and difficulties. But the psalmist David wrote a song with these words, “ I will bless the Lord at all times. His praise shall continually be in my mouth”! Not just at high-powered praise and worship events. Not just where Christian people congregate. Not just at prayer meetings and bible studies. God’s Spirit and presence are everywhere! The “whole earth is filled with His glory!” So you can worship Him on your job, at the supermarket or while fixing a flat tire! You can worship Him when things are not going well! If your worship experiences don’t translate in to practical, down to earth living for Jesus, then you need to take a hard look at your worship experiences. Wanting God to take care of all your problems? Maybe He is saying, “There are things you need to take care of, responsibilities that you need to face, and commitments that you must keep”!

Finally how can we be “salt and light” if we always retreat into our own holy huddles? How can we let God’s message of grace shine out to a watching world if we can’t live out by example the message of Jesus? No instead of retreating, God wants us to be fully engaged in thankful worship right in the middle of the real world. God wants you to worship Him with your whole life! I would like to conclude this article with a quote from John Piper” If what you do to worship God In a church service doesn’t motivate you towards greater obedience, then call it what you will, but it *isn’t* worship!

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Songs Of David