

The Heart of the Matter:

Lesson 11: The Christian's Attitude Toward Worship

1. A "Going to Church" Mentality

By the way we refer to worship we often promote the idea that it is something we periodically go to a designated place to do. That is, we confuse the broader concept of worship with the "assembly." At its most basic level, worship is an act of reverence toward God in recognition of His divine glory and power. This is something that can be offered by an individual anytime, anywhere. Having said that, there *are* certain occasions which we have set aside to worship *corporately*. How we view those occasions will in large measure be determined by the value we place upon worship to God on a personal level.

2. Reverence for God

As these lessons are addressing a *Christian's* attitude toward things, we must assume a degree of reverence for God *already exists* within the believer. But the human capacity to take things for granted, even miraculous things, is well demonstrated throughout history. For example, the Jews persisted in irreverence when God's presence among them was daily demonstrated by a column of fire and smoke. They continued to berate Moses even after God opened the ground and swallowed Korah.

Likewise, even after coming to the Lord in genuine penitence and gratitude it is possible for the Christian to flag in his

fervor toward God. We must make constant effort to not let our appreciation of God go stale and wane in our desire to demonstrate our adoration for Him.

3. Losing the Joy of Worship

God faulted Israel for allowing worship to become a hated drudgery. They said things like, "*When will the New Moon be*

past, that we may sell grain?

And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?"

(Amos 8:5). God rebukes them: "*And you have been weary of Me, O Israel.*

You have not brought Me the sheep for your burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices ..." (Isa. 43:22-23). Through Malachi He says, "*But you profane it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible.'* You also say, '*Oh, what a weariness!*' And you sneer at it ... *Should I accept this from your hand?"* (1:12-13). Thus God accuses Israel of despising His name (Mal. 1:6-7). Our attitude toward God will most definitely be manifested in our worship.

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4. The Quality of Our Worship

When our enthusiasm for worship fades, the quality of our worship will suffer. With little true desire to commune with God, our prayers will be shallow and brief. Jesus, on the other hand, engages in frequent and lengthy prayers (cf. Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 11:1). Indeed, it is hard to imagine Jesus lamenting, as some

"In John 4:20 ... Jesus says that there is no one place to worship. The concrete act is lifted up into the sphere of spirit and truth which now controls it. This does not mean a total spiritualizing of worship but the possibility of true worship at all times and in all places."
[*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 949]

among us do, “I just don’t have that much to say in a prayer.”

Singing is another act wherein we can directly state our praise to and adoration of God (*“singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”* – Eph. 5:19). Regardless of the musical expertise one may possess, the heart that is overflowing with respect and gratitude toward God will be enthusiastic. We betray ourselves by robustly singing with the radio but muting ourselves in worship.

In reference to the observance of the Lord’s supper, Paul directly admonishes us to examine our attitude lest we fall into condemnation: *“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body”* (1 Cor. 11:28-29). The element of worship is not in the eating and drinking *per se* but in the inward appreciation for the sacrifice and its significance.

5. Attitude Toward the Assembly

If we have a proper view of God and the privilege of worshiping Him, this will necessarily carry over into our view of the periodic gatherings of the church. A lack of enthusiasm and interest searches for excuses not to attend. Spiritual immaturity allows activities of lesser importance to interfere. When we absent ourselves from worship by using excuses that would not fly with the boss or even get one excused from jury duty, then we are demonstrating something about our deeper feelings toward God.

But even one’s diligent attendance does not ensure that his worship is acceptable. Some have a purely social interest in attending worship; others are motivated by guilt and a fear of reprisal for being absent.

It is easy to allow the social elements of worship to overshadow the divine elements. We must constantly remind ourselves that the assembly of the saints is an opportunity to go before the Lord as a group and draw strength from each other in so doing. Corporate worship is not a Biblical “Dating Game,” nor is it a fashion show, a sham for visiting relatives or a prelude to eating at Mama’s.

Perhaps one of the worst things we have done to undermine a sense of reverence in worship is to put a clock in the auditorium (actually, the *worst* thing is wearing those infernal beeping watches). While I am not in favor of open-ended worship periods or hour-and-a-half sermons, I do think too many are much too conscious of the clock. Various elements of our worship are superficial or rushed so that we may complete everything by the end of the magical hour that we devote to the Lord.

Our hurried, harried, clock-watching way of life makes me wonder whether we would even desire a lengthy, leisurely opportunity of worship. Long concerts or movies, overtime sports events, hours in boats, tree stands or on golf courses, i.e., spending a lot of time *doing things we enjoy*, testify against our impatience when worship runs a little long. Eternity is an awfully long time to worship God for people who get antsy after an hour.

6. Worship vs. Service

There has been considerable discussion on the subject of what constitutes worship and whether it is to be distinguished by general acts of service and obedience unto the Lord.

Some have maintained that anything and everything a Christian does is worship, for all should be done out of respect for the will of God. They may ridicule a church for differentiating “worship” from

“Bible study” on their sign or in advertising. “As if ‘Bible study’ isn’t worship,” they scoff.

But it does seem that the term “worship” (Gk. *proskuneo*) is reserved for overt acts of praise or reverence offered to God (or to Satan or to men, for the same word is used in each context).

For example, the wise men traveled far to see the infant Jesus. They told Herod, “*For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him*” (Matt. 2:2). “*And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him*” (Matt. 2:11). Likewise, the leper came and worshiped Jesus (Matt. 8:2); the ruler worshiped Jesus as he begged for the life of his deceased daughter (Matt. 9:18); the disciples worshiped Jesus in awe after He walked to them on the sea (Matt. 14:33).

Many other examples indicate that worship is a specific act of homage to God. It is true that everything we do must be motivated out of respect for God, but strictly speaking I am not worshiping when I discipline my children or go to work. This erroneous idea of worship has led to the corruption of the assembly into gymnastics meets, drama productions, feats of strength and other carnal entertainment. They reason, “Since God gave me this ability, and I am glorifying Him through it, it is an act of worship.”

May we cultivate an attitude toward God which is worthy of His great majesty: “... *let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire*” (Heb 12:28-29).

Questions for Discussion

1. Look up “worship” in a Strong’s Concordance. Which number is found most often in the New Testament? Write down this word and its definition as found in Strong’s.
2. How would you answer someone who says, “I don’t think it’s important to go to church. I don’t have to be in a building to worship God.” How is he right? Wrong?
3. Discuss some social elements of worship that might interfere with a reverent attitude.