

"The Nature of Worship"

Many worship each Sunday, but do they understand what they're doing? Hello I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study In Search of the Lord's Way. Some churches have forgotten God and turned their worship into musical productions. Well what does God desire in worship?

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for the Lord's Way. The Bible gives us God's standard of truth. And we want to practice the truth and so we search the Scriptures. Thanks for spending this time with us. We want to hear that you're watching or listening. We want to be a part of your life each week.

When churches assemble to worship, God is present with His people. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 18verse 20, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." What do you think about being in the presence of God? Right now, what if you found yourself in the very presence of God? Perhaps it is frightening. Revelation 1:17 says John fell at the Lord's feet "as though dead." Perhaps it's exciting. Perhaps it alarms your conscience to be in God's presence. You may be thinking like Isaiah of the sins of your life and realize that God knows all about them. Perhaps God's presence is comforting, reassuring in the midst of your storms. Perhaps being with God makes you want to say "thank you."

Worship is a spiritual matter; and true worship exhibits a sense of awe and reverence in the presence of the DIVINE. The word "worship" (*proskuneo*) means "throwing oneself on the ground to show respect and awe." Many Christians today have little sense of the difference between what is holy and what is common. God has always expected to be treated as holy in worship.

Some people think God ought to be happy and thankful that He received any worship from us at all. People who act like that forget the grandeur and the majesty of our great God who created us. God isn't obligated to us; we are completely dependent on Him for life, for salvation, and for our future.

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Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, and then we'll read from Psalm 103 verses 1to 5.

Our reading today comes from a psalm of David. Psalm 103 verses 1 through 5. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, *bless* His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit,

Who crowns you with loving kindness and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So *that* your youth is renewed like the eagle. That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father we're grateful for the joy we have in Christ. For all the blessings that we have from Your hand and Father we praise You and glorify Your name. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

We must take the holiness of God seriously. To be holy means that one is separate or set apart from others. To be holy means to be set apart for a special and higher purpose. Something that is holy is special in that it has no contamination. We must never treat what is holy as if it were something common. God is not just holy; He is utterly holy. He is worthy of reverence, of awe, and of adoration. For instance, the Lord's name is so holy that one must never take it in vain.

Holiness requires the absence of evil and the presence of righteousness. God's holiness means that He is absolutely pure in being and in nature. He is completely pure and righteous in His will and in His acts. Holiness, on the one hand, implies entire freedom from moral evil; and, upon the other, absolute moral perfection. The God of the Bible is utterly holy—He sets the standard for morality. And unlike the Roman and Greek gods, He's not warlike, adulterous, or spiteful. Unlike the gods of the pagan cults that were popular in the first century, the God of the Bible is not bloodthirsty or promiscuous. He is the one and only God of mercy and justice who cares personally for His followers.

1 John 1verse 5 says, that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." There's nothing impure or common about God. Habakkuk 1:13 says about God, that "*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness *with favor*." Our God, whom we worship and serve, is holy. He is sacred, not common; pure and clean. And we can never treat Him as if he were human, or weak, or flawed. He is holy and perfect, far above us!

Isaiah describes what it's like to come into the presence of a holy and awesome God in Isaiah 6verses 1to 5, "In the year of King Uzziah's death (he says) I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, (Isaiah speaking) "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I'm a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Now how we approach God in worship matters greatly. We should not presume that God will accept whatever we have to offer. God distinguishes between what He desires and what man dreams up. Just because someone calls something an act of worship does not mean that God accepts it. What men think is worship may not be what God regards as worship.

To worship God acceptably we must ask God what He requires for worship. Now true worship always thinks of pleasing the One Whom we worship. And only God can determine what acceptable worship is. After all, He is God and He's the One that we're worshiping. Shouldn't He have a say in how we worship?

The Bible says in Leviticus 10 verses1to 3: Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange (or unauthorized) fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, "It is what the LORD spoke, saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.'" Now this event is in the Scriptures, so that we might learn from it.

Nadab and Abihu were the sons of Aaron, the nephews of Moses. And for several days before this incident they had participated in their own consecration and the consecration of the tabernacle with many sacrifices. Leviticus chapters eight and nine tell of this beginning of Israel's worship in the tabernacle. And ten times Moses had given them instructions, telling them what the Lord commanded them to do. They did just as the Lord commanded until they decided to act on their own authority. Now carelessness didn't excuse Nadab and Ahibu; hearts wanting to praise the Lord didn't excuse them from going beyond the authorized commands. They acted on their own and paid a very dear price.

They presumptuously took their firepans and placed incense in them. Then they went to an unauthorized place to get “strange” fire for their incense. It was unauthorized fire, illegitimate fire. And they offered up something other than what God instructed. They offered it spontaneously in response to the glory of the Lord coming down. Well, the Lord didn’t command them to do this and didn’t give them permission to use “strange” fire. God punished them for acting on their own authority. God has never accepted worship that ignores what God’s instructions are but what some man invents. People sometimes forget God’s desires; they turn their attention to what people like and they want.

Now the Lord Jesus in Matthew 15 and Mark 7 clearly condemned using the traditions of men. The Lord said that when people follow the traditions of men, they transgress the commandments of God. Now according to their tradition, they were taking the money that should go to support their elderly parents and declaring it “Corban” or devoted to God. By pronouncing this money Corban, the Pharisees could use this money selfishly in worship, so they would look good.

Well in Matthew 15 verses 6 to 9, the Lord said, “So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

When people act on their own, they show that their hearts are not right with God, because they haven’t listened to Him. Listening to men rather than listening to God makes our worship vain. Well why? Because in listening to the teachings of men, we stop listening to God. We treat God as less than men. We haven’t given Him the holy place in our hearts that He deserves.

In Colossians 2:20 to 23 the Bible says, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!” (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with the use)—and it’s in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? And he says these are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence.”

“Self-made” religion happens when people act on their own authority and do not obey what God teaches. God doesn’t permit “self-made” religion, because it fails to show Him the reverence that He deserves. Now it may appear to have value to people, but God detests it. People may enjoy what they call worship; they may think it draws a great crowd; but forms of worship that ignore God’s teaching and originates in the mind of men violate God’s will. True worship to God always comes from listening to the teaching of God.

God wants all His people to worship Him and praise His name. He seeks for true worshipers. Now true worshipers worship Him in spirit and in truth. The New Testament has no special class of worshipers such as the Levites under the old covenant. According to 1 Peter 2 and verse 5 all Christians are members of a holy priesthood and their place is “to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The churches in the New Testament did not have choirs or special music. They all sang from their hearts as a congregation. To worship means "to adore or to pay divine honors to as a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration. They did not fall for the notion that worship was for them. Worship was how they gave of themselves to God rather than what they received from the people around them. They didn’t think of themselves as an audience or spectators. They came to worship not to see a performance.

Now early churches didn't have theatrical performances, light shows, or bands. They didn't hire professional musicians to perform for them. There's a difference between worship that comes from the hearts and lips of everyone in the pews and a performance that comes from professionals on the stage. The Bible says in Hebrews 13 and verse 15, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." God doesn't choose the musically talented for worship but exclude everyone else.

To worship is to revere God; but to entertain means "to engage the attention with anything that causes the time to pass pleasantly; or to amuse." Entertainment is "an interesting or amusing thing, as a show or performance." Now entertainment in and of itself is not sinful. But God never intended for entertainment or a performance to replace the worship of the church. The purpose of worship is to glorify God, and in many places what some call worship focuses not on God but on the performer or performers.

Some churches today contain very little worship to God and a great deal of show to attract a crowd. Performers become religious "stars." We now have an entire entertainment industry devoted to Christian praise music. Well why have Christians why have they made a commercial enterprise out of worship? Why have we focused on the talent of the performer, glorifying people rather than the glorifying God?

Worship is an expression of reverence and adoration toward God. Worship is our response to a gracious and holy God, and it needs to be placed in this context if it is to be properly understood. It is right to remind ourselves in church that we are not the audience. God is! He is there to receive our praise and adoration. We have met there to honor Him. And our task is to "please Him." This is why we can never, never, never cheapen our worship by turning it into entertainment. We must glorify God and Him alone.

Now some folks don't find any value in Biblical worship; they prefer something more exciting or appealing. They think worship should be for their benefit; and so they come to worship to "get" rather than to "give." There are certainly many things in church that bless our lives; but we get out of worship what we put into it. One man endures worship and leaves bored and empty, while another leaves blessed and refreshed by the experience.

Why? Well the man who leaves empty has his mind on himself, while the man who leaves blessed has concentrated on God. He's taken time to count his blessings, to remember the cross, to meditate on what God has done, and to be thankful. He can see the value of singing songs of praise. And he values speaking to God in prayer. Oh, he grows spiritually by remembering Christ in the Lord's Supper. He cheerfully gives of his means! He loves to hear God's counsel in the Word, because he loves God. Love makes the difference. Worship is declaring our love, our praise, our adoration, our thanksgiving, and our commitment to our gracious God in heaven. Oh what a pleasure it is to praise Him. Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that You have given us the opportunity to worship You in spirit and in truth. Father may Your will be done on earth just as it's done in heaven. This we pray in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Before we worship, let's prepare our hearts and spirits to praise and glorify our God. Let's enter worship with praise and thanksgiving. In worship let's devote ourselves to God with loving hearts. And when we leave worship, let's show Him we love Him by living holy lives. The Bible says in Hebrews 12 verses 28 and 29, "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

Now God seeks people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God is seeking for you to make your heart right with Him. We truly worship when we revere the right Person, doing the right thing with the right heart. Does the worship where you go to church, does it please God? Is that worship according to the teaching of the Scripture or does it involve the traditions of men?

Is your heart right with God? Now to get your heart right, you must approach God in faith and love. You must be willing to obey Him in all things. You must be willing to repent. Now this is to give up what is sinful and human and to embrace what is Divine and what is true to God's will. With your faith, love, and repentance, you must be willing to confess Christ as the Son of God and to be baptized. Baptism is the time when the blood of Jesus Christ washes away your sins according to Acts 22:16.

And when you're baptized, the Lord causes you to be born again into the family of God. He forgives you, adds you to His church, and gives you eternal life. Such blessing ought to make you want to worship and praise Him all the days of your life. Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in the area served by this station. They strive to worship according to the teaching of God. And they focus on worship not performing, and they want everyone to participate. They would love for you to worship with them in spirit and in truth.

Well we hope you've been blessed by today's study of God's Word. If you want this free book about Worship or a CD, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word with us and be sure and tell a friend about this program. Let them know that you're watching and encourage them to watch the program too. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.