

The Worship of the Church

**By Mark Mayberry
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Introduction

Man is a worshipful creature. In other words, he will inevitably worship someone or something. Unfortunately, worship is so often misdirected (Acts 17:22-23). Yet, this situation is totally unnecessary because God has clearly revealed Himself in the Bible (John 8:31-32). The Holy Scriptures teach that Jehovah is the only Being who is worthy of our adoration, reverence and praise (Psa. 29:1-2; Matt. 4:10). Furthermore, the One True God of Scripture has indicated the kind of worship that He desires to receive. Therefore, let us turn to His Word for instruction and guidance in this area.

The Day Of Christian Worship

The Sabbath was sacred under the Mosaic system, but the first day of the week carries special significance in the Christian era. On this day our Lord was raised (Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1, 19). The church of Christ was established on Pentecost, which always fell on the first day of the week (Lev. 23:15-16; Acts 2:1-4). On this day, Christians assembled to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), to give of their means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and to worship the God of heaven (Rev. 1:10-11).

The Acts Of Christian Worship

In the Old Testament period, worship was expressed through animal sacrifices, grain offerings, the burning of incense, temple service and rituals, etc. What does God require of his people in this Christian age? A study of the New Testament reveals the church engaged in five distinct acts of worship: observance of the Lord's supper, singing songs of praise, adoration and edification, offering up prayer and supplication unto God, the giving of free-will offerings, and the earnest proclamation of God's Word.

The Lord's Supper

A central part of Christian worship is the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7). This spiritual feast must be observed properly and with the right attitude (1 Cor. 11:23-30). It is a communion, a commemoration, a memorial and a declaration of our faith. Through partaking of the Lord's Supper, we call to remembrance our suffering Savior. This act not only celebrates the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, it also looks forward to His second coming. Moreover, it is an occasion for disciples to examine themselves. Wonderful blessings come from a proper observance of the Lord's Supper, but those who take it lightly stand on the brink of condemnation.

Singing

God has chosen singing as the type music that He desires today. This is clearly evident from so many New Testament passages (Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16). In this way Christians can encourage one another and also offer up praise and adoration to God. In order for this act of worship to be acceptable, it must be done according to the proper form (i.e., in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs), and with the proper spirit (i.e., by making melody and grace in the heart). Every disciple must participate. We should not focus on the mechanics of singing so much that we forget its purpose. Neither should we view it as simply a form of entertainment. The faithful child of God does not mindlessly mouth the words of a song; rather, he meditates on its meaning and message.

The question also arises, may we worship God with mechanical instruments of music? This issue has been dealt with in detail in other lessons. However, here it is sufficient to say that our answer will depend upon our basic intent in worship. Are we trying to please God or ourselves? If we want to please God, then let us be content to worship Him as He has directed. The New Testament specifies singing as the kind of music that God desires today. Those who walk by faith will be content with that divine decree.

Prayer

The early church was a praying church (Acts 2:42; 12:5, 12; Eph. 6:18-19; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). Prayer is a fervent expression of our heart's desire and longing. It is an act of faith that expresses our dependence upon God. The skeptic views prayer as nothing more than wishful thinking, but children of God recognize it as an avenue of communication with their heavenly Father. The prayer of a righteous man is both powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Giving

Sacrifice has always been an important part of worship. From the beginning, God has expected man to give back unto Him a portion of those blessings that he has received. Ultimately we are only stewards because God is the possessor of all things. Proper stewardship involves appropriate sacrifice unto God.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul spelled out certain obligations we have in giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2). To begin with, our giving should be regular and periodic. New Testament churches were commanded to give "upon the first day of the week." When he said, "let each one of you," Paul was emphasizing the personal responsibility of every member to give to the Lord. The statement, "lay by him in store" indicated that our giving should be with purpose and planning. Christian giving should also be proportionate. God expects a man to give "as he may prosper." The amount we give should be in proportion to the blessings that we have received. Moreover, the people of God are instructed to give liberality and cheerfully (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:6-7).

Paul instructed the early church to follow this pattern so that "there be no gatherings when I come." This passage deals specifically with his efforts to help the poor among the saints in

Jerusalem. Jewish Christians were suffering and the Gentile brethren had an obligation to help them. Paul would soon be coming, and their collection must be ready. There was no time to waste. There is, however, an enduring principle here revealed. The work of the church is ongoing. There is work that always needs to be done, and we never know when special situations may arise. Regular giving is necessary so that the church might be ready to fulfill her God-given mission. We should give so that there will be no deficit or lack, and so that no work would be left undone. Let's also remember to make up our contribution whenever we are out of town.

Preaching And Bible Study

Each Christian should seek to grow in knowledge (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Pet. 3:18). It is through a study of God's word that we are edified or built up in the most holy faith (Eph. 4:11-16). Let us never drift away from a worship that is Bible centered.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us recognize that worship must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). In other words, it must be offered with the proper attitude and according to the proper form. True worship demands presence, participation and purity. The purpose of worship is not to entertain men, but to please God. Therefore it is imperative that our worship follow the New Testament pattern (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).