

TOWARD ENHANCING AN ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

Introduction

Worship is not an elective for a Christian who has enrolled in the school of Christ, it is a required course.¹ It is therefore important to know what characterises an ideal worship. In evangelical churches, it is widely recognized that we should study evangelism, Bible books and characters, systematic theology, counselling, preaching, and many other things. Too rarely do people consider the importance of studying and knowing how God wants to be worship. Worship is something people tend to take for granted.

This paper titled “Toward Enhancing an Acceptable Worship” has defined worship in its broader and narrow sense, it in the light of John 4:20-24 evaluate if the acceptability of worship depends on location; and also what makes a worship ideal or acceptable? The work includes a brief on attitude in worship and the researcher’s conclusion is at the close of the paper.

Definition of Worship

As stated by Denver Cheddie, there are primarily two words which are translated worship in the Bible: Hebrew Old Testament, *shachah* and its New Testament Greek equivalent *proskuneo*. They both mean to show respect to a superior with the idea of bowing down or falling prostrate.²

Cheddie defines worship as, “Worship is basically the practical outliving of eternal life.”³ He went further to say, “It is a life of brokenness before God that seeks to glorify Him in all it does, and makes Him the centre of its existence... true worship really begins with eternal life, which is a state of spirit-to-spirit communion with God.”⁴ That is to say for one to be able to worship genuinely, she or has to firstly be saved by accepting Jesus to his or her Lord and personal saviour. The salvation of the worshipper is a key ingredient in worship. To John M. Frame worship is, “The work of acknowledging the greatness of our covenant Lord.”⁵ This

¹ Elmer Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Lynchburg: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 1.

² Denver Cheddie, What is worship? www.bibleissues.org accessed on July 19, 2017.

³ Ibid,

⁴ Ibid,

implies worship to be an active. It is something people do, borrowing an idea from the title of a book by Robert Webber, one can say as much as it is a noun it is also a verb.⁶ At this point, one can see that worship is far different from entertainment. In worship people are not to be passive, it is participatory. Worship is honouring someone superior to the worshipper. It is therefore not the worshipper pleasing his or herself pleasing, but pleasing someone else who is higher.

One important question in regards to worship is how can worship be made better? Has a focus: better not primarily for people, but better for the one they seek to honour. It may be that worship that is better for him will also be better for the worshipper. But what must of first concern is to please him; any benefits for the worshipper will be secondary. So, worship is performing service to honour somebody higher than the worshipper. It is both “adoration and action,” to quote from the title of another recent book.⁷

Worship and Location

In the Old Testament worship is portrayed as an act of homage and devotion to God. It always took place at certain times and places. Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish worship (John 4:20). Their feast days and holy days were the occasions of worship as seen even in the time of Jesus and the apostles. The obvious problem with this type of worship is that it naturally tended to legalism. Time and again people were so sidetracked by the rituals of worship that they missed the true essence of humility before God, love for one another and a holy life (Micah 6:8). This was most evident with the Pharisees. Their worship was a matter of lip service with their hearts far from God (Matthew 15:8, 9; Isaiah 29:13). It became the ritualistic teaching of men and was not sincere. They had exchanged truth for tradition. It could even be said that they worshiped their worship more than God.

Most of the New Testament scriptures in the gospels and Acts described worship not to be far from the Old Testament practice of worship. Nevertheless, one of the most unique of them all in dealing with worship is John 4:7-26. In this passage, Jesus reveals a dispensational change in the mode of worship. “The time is coming and is even now when the true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth.”

⁵ John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996), 1.

⁶ Robert Webber, *Worship Is a Verb* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987).

⁷ Donald A. Carson, ed., *Worship: Adoration and Action* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

This does not only suggest have the right attitude before God as some people might have thought of, it indicates several other things such as:

- There would no longer be any special place or time for worship. Since God is a Spirit, He can be worshiped anywhere and anytime;
- Worship depends not on outward action but a spirit-to-spirit devotion to God;
- To worship in truth can refer to sincerity or doctrinal truth.

Jack Hayford said, “We are experiencing more than a change in worship, it’s a reformation of worship.”⁸ He claims the first reformation under Martin Luther was a reformation of doctrine, doing away with Roman Catholic doctrine. Now he maintains there must be a reformation of worship, doing away with European or Roman Catholic liturgy. Hayford wants a reformation in worship to reflect his form of worship that is the renewal worship service with emphasis on charismatic expression.

Historically, when Protestant church members have moved their home from one location to the next, they usually chose a new local church on the basis of doctrine, not on the basis of worship style. While the style of worship was important to them; doctrine was the final criteria. The priorities were: doctrine; the name of the church and denominational alliance. Basically, most denominations had the same style of worship that went with people’s denominational or doctrinal loyalty. Location does not determine the acceptability of worship.

The Measure of an Ideal or Effective Worship

The New Testament doesn’t give a complete description of worship and later material is sketchy and may contain inaccuracies. Nevertheless it is possible to get a general idea of patterns and developments.⁹ The worship of the early church was marked by informality and spontaneity. It was an age of the Spirit: people empowered by the Spirit spoke in tongues and prophesied bringing the message of God to the people. Any who felt led were able to bring a word, psalm, tongue etc, similar to the synagogue model but regulated by two guiding principles which are, edification and God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

The effectiveness of worship is not measured by atmosphere. That means the credibility of true biblical worship is not measured by how fast the songs are

⁸ Jack Hayford, *Worship His Majesty* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 88.

⁹ Ralph P. Martin, “Worship and Liturgy,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament*, Ralph P. Martin and Davids, (eds.), (Downers Grove; IVP, 1997), 1225.

sung, or how deeply people meditate in solitude. It is not measured by a new Plexiglas pulpit, a split chancel pulpit; or the new trend of using no pulpit at all. It is not measured by raising hands, affirming the Apostle's Creed, or congregational applause. It is not measured by responsive readings from both Old and New Testament, viewing the Living Bible projected on the screen, or listening to an expositional sermon based on a proper interpretation of the text. True worship is always measured by the response of the believer's heart to God. They that worship God must give Him the "worship" (The English term worship, connoted from "worth"¹⁰) that is due to Him. True worship is measured by:

1. The transformation of the worshipper because he or she has been in the presence of God;
2. It is measured by repentance because the worshipper has faced his or her sin and asked forgiveness;
3. It is measured by new insights about God that deepens the daily walk with God.
4. True worship upsets the way people have lived, and demands more sacrifice from the worshipper.
5. True worship never allows the worshippers to remain the same people they were before going into the presence of God.
6. True worship involves change and it also includes that which never changes.

People must be careful that they don't get the two in 6 mixed up. It is the people who change because they have been in the presence of an unchanging God. He doesn't adapt Himself to them, they adapt themselves to Him (which is usually a very shallow expression) because they yield to Him, they obey Him, they magnify Him and they lift Him up. The unchanging nature of worship doesn't mean they never change their forms of worship, nor does it mean they never re-arrange the order of service. Because worship is a response to God and He never changes; then, there are certain "self evident truths" in worship that cannot be manipulated. It is imperative that God be worshipped, our music beat is not imperative, nor is the atmosphere of the room. It is imperative that they worship Him in truth (John 4:23), which is the substance of worship. It is not imperative whether methods of communicating truth be a Bible expositional sermon, a devotional message, an evangelistic presentation of the gospel or a pastor's exhortation to godliness. It is imperative that they worship Him in spirit (John 4:23) which is the sincere

¹⁰ Frame, 1.

expression of their hearts. It is not imperative whether they express it with reverently bowed head, raised hands of praise or shouts of “Hallelujah.”

In a descriptive for one can say worship is like a car to get the worshipper from where they are . . . to where God wants them to be. Transportation and communication are imperative, the mode or vehicle is not imperative. While it is imperative that they worship God, how they do it has second importance (that the format of the worship) as long as it is in the light of John 4:24. Worship is like a car that gets the worshipper into the presence of God.

Attitude in Worship

According to Cheddie, “The proper attitude in worship is recognizing that God is the sole object of our worship, and thus can be practiced by exercising that attitude in all we do.”¹¹ One of mistakes people are making is worshipping as if they are in-charge forgetting that He is the one who is in-charge and things have to go His way not their way as it has often been. A study on worship and culture suggests that worship relates dynamically to culture in four ways.

1. It is trans-cultural, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture.
2. It is contextual, varying according to the local situation (both natural and cultural).
3. It is counter-cultural challenging what is contrary to the gospel in a given culture.
4. Finally, it is cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.¹²

In all this the most that God desires is purity of soul (salvation and the righteous state of the worshipper) and sincerity of heart.

Conclusion

Worship, as including both broad and narrow senses, is tremendously important to God. In Ephesians 1:1-14, Paul presents a breath taking vision of God’s sovereign purpose. He begins before time: God “chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world” (v.4). Then God “predestined us to be adopted as his

¹¹ Cheddie,

¹² S. Anita Stauffer, (ed.) “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture,” in *Christian Worship: Unity in Cultural Diversity*, 1, No. 3, (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1996),

sons” (v. 5), redeemed us through the blood of Christ (v.7), and revealed to us the mysteries of his will, which will be fulfilled at the end of history (vv. 9-10). The conclusion of all, the goal to which all history proceeds, is praise – the “praise of his glory” (v.14). “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” This statement of the goal of human life is a scriptural statement (1Cor.10:31). But to glorify God is to diligently worship him.

Throughout the whole Bible story-from eternity past until the new heavens and the new earth – God “seeks” worshipers (John4:23). It is unusual in Scripture to read of his seeking human beings. Seeking in Scripture is usually done by human beings, not by God. In the usual sense, God never seeks, for there is nothing hidden from his eyes (Heb.4:13). But the metaphor of seeking is appropriate, for in the Bible we read of God’s going to enormous trouble over many centuries, culminating in the sacrifice of his own Son, to redeem a people to worship him. Redemption is the means; worship is the goal. In one sense, worship is the whole point of everything. It is the purpose of history, the goal of the whole Christian story. Worship is not one segment of the Christian life among others. Worship is the entire Christian life, seen as a priestly offering to God. And when worshippers meet together as a church, their time of worship is not merely a preliminary to something else; rather, it is the whole point of their existence as the body of Christ.

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