

To worship is to revere and honor, to devote oneself to the praise, even the love and adoration, of the object of worship. The examples that the questioner gives of chanting to the worship object and of burning, offering, or sacrificing things of value to the worship object, are indeed traditional examples associated with religious worship. They are not, though, practices in which Christians generally engage today. Christians do not sacrifice things to God for appeasement, atonement. They do not because God sacrificed his Son Jesus to end all need for atonement, for redeeming the person making the offer in the eyes of God. Those who accept God's sacrifice on our behalf have no need of sacrificing for him. Christians do not generally chant because the living God does not seek ritualistic appeasement but instead loving relationship.

So why and how do Christians worship? Christians worship God not to appease, not to earn or avoid or coax or cajole, indeed not out of duty, as if one earns good marks from God, but instead out of love. Christians genuinely desire God. Wanting to experience God's presence, Christians worship, both in public gatherings and in private celebration. Christians expect that God's Spirit will be present and active when they worship. They expect to feel God's kind and loving, gentle and comforting, filling and thrilling presence. Yet even when they do not feel the presence of God, they still worship, believing that he is present whenever they turn to him with a pure and desiring heart. Christians worship for relationship.

Christians also worship in thanks, with gratitude, in celebration of who God is, and how God conceives of them, to show their appreciation. Christians know who God is, the creator of all things, wholly good, Spirit, love, and truth, all-knowing, all-powerful, not just victorious but unchallenged, the one without whom the world would not exist. Christians also know who they are relative to God, sinners, corrupt, undeserving in the extreme for once having rejected God, and yet loved above all else because in the image of God. This knowledge, too, gives Christians cause for worship, that God stands so far above them and yet made them, knows them, bears a likeness to them, that they should revere him, must adore who he is.

Yet above all, Christians worship God because they know what God has done for them, sending his Son into the world to die for them and rise again for them to bring them back to God. Christians worship God because God rescued them, saved them,

redeemed them, made them whole and lovable again, embraced them when they were not worthy of embrace. Christians worship God because the cost of God's rescue of them was so great, beyond measure because the cost was God himself who is beyond measure. God gave his Son so that God could treat Christians as his adopted children, worthy of his Son's own inheritance, which is the kingdom of God. Christians worship anticipating their promised reward, which is God himself, to be present for eternity with God's Son.

How do Christians worship God if not by chant and sacrifice? They gather to compound their reverence and joy, to bring corporate honor, collective praise, to a fully worthy God. They then pray together so that God would hear directly and openly how they agree that he is worthy of their honor, worthy of their deepest admiration and greatest acclaim. They then lift their hearts, voices, and faces in glorious song to God, declaring to him his own prized and precious attributes, for what does a rejoicing heart wish to do more than to sing? As Christians sing to God, they may also shout, they may also dance, they may also raise or clap their hands, smile or laugh, and weep, not in sadness but in overflowing gratitude and joy.

Other Christians worship in reverential silence, stilling the mind, voice, and hands so that the heart and spirit can swell. They may clasp the hands in prayer or open the hands toward heaven that God's blessing may fall. They may bow the head and they may kneel. They may even lay down, prostrate before God, submitting all to him. Other Christians may worship in banquet and festival, while other Christians may worship in fast and withdrawal, all to show God that they think so much of him as to give to him whatever they may bring of themselves.

In worship, Christians receive back God's blessing. Their spirits soar, their minds clear, their will resolves, and their hearts melt in joy. Their mind and body heal, they repair relationship, they forgive and receive forgiveness. They celebrate victories and mourn loss, all in the presence of God. They learn things about themselves and others, about callings and situations and opportunities and mistakes. They prepare for the week, prepare for the season. They close chapters and open new books. They arrive and embark. They finish and they start. And when finished in worship, they walk forth carrying the presence of God.

Why should anyone worship? Worship shouldn't seem so strange to the non-Christian because people still worship many things today, although not so obviously as something like burning incense to a Polynesian tiki god. People revere entertainment stars and sports stars. They honor inventors and chief executives. They praise philanthropists and politicians. They devote themselves to sports teams, musicians, television programs, and artists. In their worship of these secular rather than sacred things, they chant, shout, and pour generous libations. They clap and raise their hands. They smile and laugh in victory, and mourn and weep in defeat, having devoted themselves to the objects of their worship. Thus, we worship anyway. The thing is to choose wisely that which, or he whom, you worship. Christians have made the best choice.