

Worship 101
July 30, 2017

Have you ever traveled the wrong way down on a one way street? I did. I was about 19 years old and driving home one night through an unfamiliar neighborhood. I can still picture the intersection in my mind. It was at the bottom of a hill. I stopped at the stop sign, saw no one coming from any direction, and proceeded straight ahead and up the hill. Beyond the top of the hill, as I came to the next stop sign a car came up behind me with flashing red lights on top.

I did not have an excuse. I just failed to notice the DO NOT ENTER signs at the previous intersection. The officer gave me a ticket. Fortunately there was no one coming down the hill the right way.

Many in our culture today believe there are no wrong ways to do something. The right way is whatever you think best. However, that could end in tragedy on the roads if everyone simply used whatever lane they liked best.

It could end in tragedy if pilots used whatever runway they thought was best instead of the one the control tower tells them to use.

It could end in tragedy if you swallowed whatever medicine was in the closet no matter what it was designed for or whose prescription it is.

It could end in tragedy if you studied for the test the class had last month, instead of the one the teacher was handing out now.

We just can't make up life as we go along. God has determined the best way, the right way to live. The best way, the right, is His way.

One of the things God has decided for us is how to worship Him. There is a right way to worship our creator and a wrong way to worship Him. I guess, if you make up your own god, an imaginary god, then it doesn't matter how you worship. But the creator of the universe has definite ideas about how we are to worship HIM. The author of the book of Hebrews instructs us as follows...

Hebrews 12:28-29 (NIV) ... let us... worship God acceptably...

There IS an acceptable way to worship God. That means there is also an unacceptable way to worship God. If you want to please God with your worship, you need to know what God expects. So let us see the acceptable way to worship our God. Jesus speaks of this to the Samaritan woman in John, chapter 4.

John 4:23-24 (NIV) Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

God is seeking a certain kind of worshipper. God is seeking one who worships in spirit and in truth. Let me unpack this for you this morning.

1. To worship in spirit means to worship with your heart, mind, and soul.

Your physical presence alone is NOT worship. To worship God in spirit means we must worship with our heart and mind and soul. Your spirit is the complete you. To worship God with your spirit means you must be engaged in worship with your whole being. If just your body is present in an event called a worship service, you may or may not be worshipping. Just being here on Sunday morning is NOT worship. Your heart and mind and soul must be engaged in worship.

Let me illustrate with a common experience. Have you ever read to the bottom of a page in a book and realized, "I don't remember what I just read." Your eyes read each word. A small part of your brain registered each word. But you missed the big picture because most of your mind, and certainly your heart, was focused on something else.

In that same way you can go through the motions of worship here on Sunday morning, and yet not really be worshipping at all. You can be present, sit when told to sit, stand when told to stand, be silent when someone is speaking or praying, and even sing the songs, while your spirit is somewhere else. Your heart is somewhere else. God taught us this through the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 29:13 (NIV) The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.

These people were in the right place, at the right time, going through the right motions, and saying the right words, but their hearts were somewhere else. They were at the temple because it was their habit to be, their tradition to be there. They were expected to be there by other people. That's what the prophet meant by "rules taught by men". They were present physically, but they would rather have been elsewhere. Their hearts were elsewhere.

Some of you may be here today out of habit, out of tradition. You may be here mostly because someone else expected you to be here. Maybe you are attending public worship today for a reason other than worship. We've had politicians come to our services to meet voters. We had one guy come to see if we were large enough to hire him as an associate pastor. Some people go to worship to meet girls or to meet guys. Maybe you came to please your parent. These motives are not about worship and do not honor God. God is not honored when you come here for the wrong reasons.

Let me share with you a common wrong reason. The person who says, "I don't get anything out of the worship services," has missed the point. Worship is about giving, not getting.

(worship = "to give worth to")

The word worship literally means "to give worth to".

We increase God's worth (glory) by telling Him how important He is to us.

This is the essence of worship. When we are paying attention to God, when we are expressing how important He is to us. When we are communicating our hearts to Him, we are giving Him the attention He deserves.

Let me give you a picture of worship.

God is the audience.

The people present are the presenters.

The worship leaders are the promoters of worship.

The Bible mentions many different physical expressions for worship. Among them are singing, shouting, standing, kneeling, dancing, testifying, playing musical instruments, and raising hands. Any of these can be used as a part of your true worship. But then again, any of them can be engaged in and be empty of true worship. None of them are automatically acceptable as worship. You can stand in a worship service when told to and be thinking about what you want for lunch. That isn't worship.

Let me offer some instruction about how to worship acceptably.

> Listen closely to the prayers and agree in prayer when you can.

That means that when the person praying says something you agree with, make it your prayer too. When the words apply to you that the person prays aloud you might quietly, or silently, say "Amen" or "Yes, Lord" or "I agree", or "Me too!".

You have to listen carefully and focus on the person speaking to understand what is being said. So don't use the prayers to clear your throat or get out your lozenges. Even if you are not focused on the prayer, others are trying to. Remember that cellophane is extremely loud during a prayer.

> Pray the words of the songs to God.

Singing with the mouth and not the heart is not worship. You must pray the words in your mind and your heart. You must pray them to God. Of course, you must mean them. You may not agree with all the lyrics of all the songs. But the parts you do agree with, you can pray to God.

I mentioned a few moments ago that the worship leaders are promoting worship. The choir is a worship promoter when they are singing. So...

> Listen carefully to the words of the choir and pray your agreement when appropriate.

The choir is attempting to lead us into the presence of the Lord. Some songs are written as prayers to God. Hymn numbers 2 & 3 are examples of these.

Some are written as encouragement to others. The song Shout to the Lord has this element to it as well as the first.

And some songs are a testimony to our personal experience of God and/or our commitment to Him. The choir song the morning was predominantly of this type. They sang, "We'll walk by faith."

All of these can be echoed by the listener. Listen to what the choir is singing, and pray your agreement.

It can be hard to understand the words since you don't have the lyrics. You don't have the words in front of you or on the screen. The choir uses techniques to make it easier for us to understand what they are singing. But any noise out here makes it more difficult for people to understand the words.

I often tell the children here that there are two times that we need to them to be especially quiet during the service. Those two times are during the prayers and when the choir is singing. That is because people are listening for the words being spoken or sung. They are not on the screen for people to read them.

> Pray your offering into God's hands.

The offering is not an intermission.

Think about what you are giving and why. Use the offering as a time of dedication of these gifts back to the Lord. Pray your offering to Him.

> Ask God to use the sermon to speak to you.

And when He does so, respond in prayer. Pray your understanding of what God said to you. Pray your praise of this truth. Pray your confession of sin. Pray your commitment to living for Him.

2. To worship in truth is to pray the real you...

Acceptable worship tells the truth about YOU. You can't fake worship with God. He knows your heart. Don't pretend that you are thankful for your life if you are really angry at God for how it is going. Don't thank Him if you are really discontented with what He has provided. Don't make commitments to living for God if you have no intention to keep them.

God isn't fooled by what you say if it doesn't match what is in your heart. God is not honored when you lie to Him.

You can be honest with God. He won't reject you if you are honest. Honesty is what God is looking for.

Worship God as you are. Pray the truth about you.

To worship in truth is to pray the real you in the Good News of Jesus.

If you do not believe the good news of Jesus, then your worship will be unacceptable. Jesus' death and resurrection are the basis for our being able to worship God at all.

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NIV) Therefore, since we have a great high priest... Jesus the Son of God, let us ... approach the throne of grace (God) with confidence...

Jesus paid the price for us to be able to worship acceptably. Jesus paid this price when He died on the cross. Our faith in Jesus is the foundation for all of our worship.

We must come to God by faith in Jesus. Only in this way is our worship acceptable.

So I ask you this morning, have you put your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord?

There is an acceptable way to worship God. It is by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. This brings us into a relationship with God where our worship, in spirit and in truth, is acceptable to God.

Christian, are you worshipping God in this way? Or does your practice need some improvement?

And you who have not confessed Jesus as Savior and Lord, will you do so this morning?