

Misconceptions about Worship

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John 4:23–24 (NKJV) “*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*”

I believe the issue of worship is at the heart of true revival. There are a lot of misconceptions about the terms “revival” and “worship.” Revival is the turning of God’s people from sin and false worship to righteousness and true worship. If revival is about the return of God’s people to true worship, then let’s first recognize what are *not* the criteria for true worship.

First, *sincerity* is not the criteria for true worship. We live in a time when people feel it is okay to worship any way they want as long as they are sincere. Sincerity has been accepted as the litmus test for legitimate worship. The problem is that people can be sincere but sincerely *wrong*. May I point out that the Muslim men who flew the two jet airliners into the Twin Towers in New York were *very* sincere! Did God accept their sincerity as the qualification to enter heaven? Every religion is full of sincere worshipers. So we see that sincerity alone is not what defines true worship.

Second, *passion* is not the criteria for true worship. We are all emotional beings, some more than others. But emotions are fickle and easily distort reality. Just listen to the heated exchanges between parents and the referees at their kid’s baseball or basketball game! Unfortunately some falsely conclude that they cannot worship unless they are moved emotionally. The pressure to produce “exciting” worship has caused many churches to buy into hype just to keep the demanding crowds and their offerings coming. But passion is characteristic of false religions too. Consider the passion of the prophets of Baal in their worship: “*And so it was, at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, ‘Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.’*”²⁸ *So they cried aloud, and cut themselves, as was their custom, with knives and lances, until the blood gushed out on them.*²⁹ *And when midday was past, they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice. But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.*” (1 Kings 18:27-29 NKJV) Before Paul came to know Christ, he was very passionate and went to great extremes to persecute the church. And yet, his worship was unacceptable to God. Later Paul spoke of the zeal of his fellow Jews: “*For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*”³ *For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*⁴ *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*” (Romans 10:2-4 NKJV) Passion and zeal apart from the true knowledge of God is misguided and profits nothing. As we can see, passion alone is not the criteria for true worship.

Third, *external forms* and displays are not the criteria for true worship. It does not matter if the forms are traditional or contemporary. Some go to great efforts to make sure that the “form” of worship is right and give little consideration about the God who is being worshiped. More often than not, these forms are nothing more than traditions designed to impress men rather than God.

Fourth, the use of *musical instruments* is not the criteria for true worship. Worship existed long before musical instruments. In fact, the early church did not use musical instruments because of their connection with pagan worship. In the Old Testament musicians and singers were used to praise and glorify the Lord. In today’s entertainment driven culture, worship bands and worship teams take on a life and presence of their own. Some become an idol that steal attention and

worship from God. The sense of God's "presence" felt in some churches is so dependent upon musical instruments that if a blackout occurred, it would be the end of the worship service!

Fifth, *methods* and *techniques* are not the criteria for true worship. When walking into some "cutting edge" churches today it would seem that Christian worship depended upon a masterful manipulation of the "atmosphere" with lights, smoke, sound, visualizations, dancers, guided spiritual tours into the heavenly realm, etc. Honestly, is this the kind of worship that the Father is seeking? On the contrary, these things can rob us of true worship by substituting a tantalizing psychological experience in its place.

While there are many misconceptions about worship, there is also true worship. In Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria, she questioned Him about which worship was the most legitimate—the Samaritan form of worship on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria or the Jewish form of worship on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. Jesus answered her question by pointing out three kinds of worship.

The first kind of worship we might call "Ignorant Worship." This is worship that is sincere but is ignorant of the truth. Jesus said to the woman, "You worship what you do not know." The Samaritan's knowledge of God was incomplete. They limited the revelation of God in Scripture to the first five books of Moses. Because they rejected the other sixty-one books of the Old Testament, their understanding of proper worship was flawed. Years later Paul addressed the ignorance of the Athenians in their worship: *"Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; ²³ for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: ²⁴ God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. ²⁵ Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.'*" (Acts 17:22-25 NKJV)

The second kind of worship is what we might call, "Informed Worship." The Jews worshiped God in an informed way because they accepted all of the writings of the Old Testament. They understood that God not only spoke to Moses but to the prophets and to David as well. It was David who transitioned the ark with God's favor to Jerusalem, setting up a new order of worship in the house of God. Although the Jews worshiped God in an informed way, they fell short of pleasing God.

The third kind of worship is what Jesus called, "True Worship." True worship involves worshiping the Father in spirit and in truth. It is not based upon Samaria or Jerusalem. True worship is not limited to a certain time or a certain place. True worship occurs anytime and anyplace before the throne of God in heaven where the true tabernacle of God exists. True worship is "unleavened" worship, free of evil motives and sin: *"Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* (1 Corinthians 5:8 NKJV) True worship is Gospel-centered with the Cross of Christ front and center. True worshipers are the true "circumcision *who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,*" (Philippians 3:3 NJV) True worship is acceptable worship.

Don't be misled by misconceptions about worship. Don't settle for being an ignorant worshiper or even an informed worshiper. While the world is looking for another worship experience, the Father is looking for *true worshipers*.

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