



The nature of true worship

1. True worship is brought to God only by those who are *born of the Spirit* of God. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh*", Jesus said, and therefore all so-called worship by unregenerate sinners is carnal. Only a new heart can sing the new song (Psalm 40.3).
2. True worship can only be given *through the Holy Spirit*. "*True worshippers worship the Father in spirit*" Jesus said, and so only by that enlightenment which the Spirit gives to our minds, and the consequent feelings He creates in our hearts, can our worship be edifying and pleasing to God. The Spirit's gifts of leadership in pastors and teachers are a vital part of public worship.
3. True worship is *structured by the Scriptures*. "*True worshippers worship ... in truth*", Jesus said. The Bible reveals to us the God whom we worship and how we are to worship Him, "*with reverence and godly fear*." The Scripture creates the atmosphere and the themes of the prayers, the praises and the preaching. Thus we have a standard for knowing what is right and what is wrong in all that is sung and said. Also we enjoy a marvellous liberty from all the traditions and devices which unspiritual men introduce in a vain attempt to 'make' worship more 'relevant' and 'meaningful'. True worship is essentially simple.
4. True worship is *God-centred*. It is not 'inspiration'-centred; it is not feelings-centred; it is not even Jesus-centred — we are not 'Jesus-worshippers.' It is centred upon the Father. "*True worshippers worship the Father*", Jesus said. Of course, the Father can only be worshipped through the Son; and the whole Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Ghost is the object of our worship. To be sure, we worship Jesus, but it is wrong to worship Jesus only, to make Him the centre of worship to the neglect of the Father.
5. True worship arises from a *continuous walk with God*. A man who spares God hardly a thought for six days will not be able to worship Him aright on the seventh day. If such a person says how much he 'enjoys' the worship, then there is something wrong with it! He is being entertained, or being given that vague sense of challenge which the natural man enjoys. Whereas in the midst of true worship such a man should feel estrangement from God and learn godly sorrow for his neglect of the Lord of glory.
6. True worship *requires preparation*. A man cannot stroll casually into the presence of God without any preparation of heart and soul and then expect 'instant worship.' David said, "*When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek*" (Psalm 27:8). True worship on the Lord's Day arises from a seeking frame of mind, encouraged by earnest prayer for God's blessing upon the Saturday night and the morning of the Lord's Day.
7. True worship should be *followed by consideration*. That is why we exhort people to take care how they employ their time when a service is over. All the profit from hearing God's Word opened up and applied can be destroyed. Grace is a tender plant; it can easily be damaged. If one is to profit from the worship it must be by a real attempt to retain the main thrust of the preaching.
8. True worship always arises from *great views of God and low views of self*. The prophet Isaiah sees the greatness of the Lord (Isaiah 6) and cries, "*Woe is me for I am undone because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts*." John on Patmos sees the Lord (Revelation 1), and tells us, "*I fell at his feet as dead*." Anything new introduced into worship which does not have the exaltation of God as its purpose is simply a concession to the search for novelty which characterizes all natural men.

9. True worship is always *accepted by God*. How careful we must be of harbouring low thoughts of our worship! Such derogatory terms as those which describe worship as a 'Hymn sandwich' only encourage the attitude that our worship is formal, outward, and lacking in liberty, and that if we were really worshipping then there would be noise, spontaneous leadership and excitement. In fact, in true worship men are not always sitting on the edge of their seats wondering who is going to be next to say or do something unexpected. No, they have little thought of the means of worship; their thoughts are upon God. True worship is characterised by self-effacement and is lacking in any self-consciousness. The publican stood afar off, hung his head and prayed, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.' In our services, guided by Scripture and dependent on Christ, we are indeed worshipping God; we are not going through the motions, or merely wanting to *worship*; we worship the living God in spirit and in truth, knowing that the Father actively seeks such to worship Him! We do not believe that all the new emphases on spontaneity, and participation in leading the worship by men and women and young people, has led to more God-consciousness and true worship. On the contrary, there are widespread evidences that worship is in decline. Consider for example the changing language with which God is addressed. Over twenty years phrases have changed thus:

We worship thee, O Lord our God.
We worship you, O Lord our God.
We worship you, Jesus.
We praise you, Jesus.
We want to praise you, Jesus.
We only want to praise you, Jesus.

Is this progress and maturity in public prayer? What does this new language of prayer 'We only want to, etc.', mean? The contemporary stumblings, and one-sentence uncertainties, compare unfavourably with the confident affirmations, developed arguments and sustained reverence observable in the praying of a former generation.

10. True worship is *climaxed on the Lord's Day*. The liberty into which God's people have entered under the new covenant is not one that results in their coming together only when they feel 'led.' In the apostolic church worship had its set times. On the first day of the week they assembled to break bread, to hear the Word of God and to discharge their stewardship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Even if they did not feel like it at all on that day, and felt more of a religious frame of mind on the third day, for instance, it was upon the *first* day that they were to gather for worship. So it is today. We are not 'Fifth Day Adventists' of the Thursday evening house fellowship where we boast of the 'wonderful' blessings and 'marvellous' fellowship, where the Lord 'really' meets with all ten of us. No, we meet in the Spirit on the day appointed, the Lord's Day, and with all the people of God.

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For further reading: 'The Spirit in Public Worship' in *The Gifts of the Holy Spirit*, C. R. Vaughan, *The Banner of Truth Trust*, 1975, pp 415, J 2.15.