



## How ought we to worship?

Worship is giving God glory, praise, honour, and homage; acknowledging His sovereignty over us and our dependence on Him; inward reverence, respect, outward obedience and service; communion with God through invocation, adoration, meditation, faith, praise, prayer and the receiving of instruction from His Word, in public and in private.

### Worship in spirit and in truth

Worship must be "*in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24): a simple, inward, Spirit-led, heart-felt response to the revealed reality of God's will and work.

In *The Nature and beauty of gospel worship* John Owen focused on Ephesians 2:18, which speaks of access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit: True decency, order, and beauty of Christian worship lie in its Trinitarian and evangelical character, as an exercise of faith on the part of worshippers.

*"This is the general order of gospel worship, the great **rubric** of our service... If either we come not unto it by Jesus Christ, or perform it not in the strength of the Holy Ghost, or in it go not unto God as a Father, we transgress all the rules of this worship."*

With respect to the idea that ornate buildings and rituals have anything to do with the 'beauty' that God seeks and finds in the worship of His faithful people, Owen reminds us that Christians are themselves the temple and dwelling place of God, and that true worship, though done on earth in the body, is actually 'performed in heaven' (cf. Hebrews 5:20; 9:24; 10:19, 21; Revelation 4).

Worship is an act of the mind, applying itself to the knowledge of the attributes of God. It is also an act of the will, whereby the soul adores and reverences His attributes, embraces His goodness, enters into intimate communion with Him, and sets all his affections upon Him.

### The Spirit's work in worship

Only the regenerate can worship God acceptably, for only they have hearts that truly go out to Him in humble adoration. Therefore we must find healing in Christ's wings, before God can find spirituality in our worship.

Spiritual worship is performed only with the Spirit's active help, since it requires sincerity and singleness of heart. It involves acts of faith, love, humility, and self-trust, and must be an expression of the heart's desire for God. To desire worship as an end in itself, is carnal; to desire it as a means for communion with God, is spiritual.

We must reflect back to God the knowledge that we have received of Him through His revelation. He is a Spirit of infinite happiness, majesty, greatness, holiness and glory; therefore we must approach Him with cheerfulness, reverence, humility, and purity. He is also infinitely provoked by us; therefore we must worship Him in the Name of the atoning Mediator and Intercessor.

### Delight in worship

*"That all true believers whose minds are spiritually renewed have a singular delight in all the institutions and ordinances of divine worship is fully evident,"* writes Owen (Psalm 42:1-4, 63:1-5,

84:1-4).<sup>1</sup> Why do they delight in it? The saints do not merely seek God; they also find Him. Worship is not only an expression of gratitude, but also a means of grace, whereby the hungry are fed, and the empty are sent away rich. For there is in worship an approach of God to man. "God's presence in his ordinances" is a reality.

The ordinances of Christian worship are "ways of our approaching unto God," and "we are always to come unto God, as unto an eternal spring of goodness, grace, mercy, of all that our souls do stand in need of." "To make a pretence of coming unto God, and not with expectation of receiving good and great things from Him, is to despise God." An aimless, careless, casual, routine habit of church-going is neither rational nor reverent. Owen asks piercing questions:

*"What do men come to hear the Word of God for? What do they pray for? What do they expect to receive from Him? Do they come unto God as the eternal fountain of living waters? As the God of all grace, peace and consolation? Or do they come unto His worship without any design as unto a dry and empty show? ... Or do they think they bring something unto God, but receive nothing from Him?"<sup>2</sup>*

### **Lukewarmness in worship**

Owen's application of this is painfully searching:

*"Many of the better sort of professors are too negligent in this matter. They do not long and pant in the inward man after renewed pledges of the love of God; they do not consider how much they have need of them... From hence springs all that lukewarmness, coldness, and indifference unto the duties of holy worship, that are growing among us."<sup>3</sup>*

### **Parts of worship**

Reformed worship includes: praise, prayer, preaching, sacraments, teaching and discipline. In all these activities God comes to meet His people gathered in the name of His Son, but most of all in preaching. Preaching is the most solemn and exalted action, and therefore the supreme test of a man's ministry. Preaching the gospel solemnly and publicly to the congregation is interpreting the written Word of God and applying it by exhortation and reproof to the congregation, the supreme means of grace. It is not the letter of the Word that ordinarily converts, but its spiritual meaning, as revealed and expounded.

For worshipers, therefore, the hearing of sermons is the most momentous event of their lives. They are exhorted to listen to the Word preached with awe, attention, and expectancy. Preaching must lead to prayer and praise.

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### **Endnotes:**

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *Works*, VII: 430f.

<sup>2</sup> John Owen, *Works*, VII: 439.

<sup>3</sup> John Owen, *Works*, VII: 439.