

LESSON ESSENTIALS

THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

LESSON 3: THE THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

When we think of living a life as an act of worship to God, we might consider someone who becomes famous creating music or the architect beautiful buildings to the glory of God as someone who is more spiritual than someone who washes laundry or sweeps the street for a living. But all of these acts can be spiritual acts if they are done humbly, with our best effort, and offered to God. Birds sing to the glory of God, flowers bloom for the same reason. We must do what we are made for as an act of worship.

Many times when we think of 'worship' we think of the singing that happens when we gather together as a church. However, the Word of God does not allow for such a narrow understanding of the practice of worship. If not just singing, then what is worship?

Worship does not just happen. It is an intentional and deliberate act. We cannot accidentally worship our Creator.

To have any other person or things as the priority or focus in our thoughts, actions and words, is to commit idolatry.

When we speak of worship, we are speaking of the ways that we show our reverence, our admiration, our love, and our valuing of God. We may have feelings of reverence or admiration, and so on, and we can call those ‘worshipful feelings.’ The way that we demonstrate our inner posture to God is our ‘acts of worship.’ These acts can come in many forms. In fact, as the opening quote indicates, when you serve the Lord with the gifts that He gave you, for His glory, and with His worthiness in mind, any act can, and should be, considered an act of worship. 1 Corinthians 10:31 instructs us this way: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” All. Everything. Not only is the singing during a church service to be done with a worshipful attitude, but even your eating, your work, and your leisure ought to be viewed as opportunities to worship the Lord.

Romans 12:1 takes the instruction further as Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” That is to say, your whole life – everything your body does – is to be lived as worship! Our thoughts, our actions, our words – all of these can be acts of worship to our great Lord!

To have any other person or things as the priority or focus in our thoughts, actions and words, is to commit idolatry. The Lord made clear to us that we are to have no other gods before Him (Deuteronomy 5:8). While we may not think we have other gods before the Lord, as soon as we try to exalt, promote, impress, or consider anyone or anything more than we do the Lord, we have worshipped that other god.

Worship does not just happen. It is an intentional and deliberate act. We cannot accidentally worship our Creator – which means we must be intentional about worshipping God and doing all things for His name. When you consider the emphasis on pursuing godliness throughout scripture (for example Titus 2:12, 1 Timothy 4:7, 1 Timothy 6:11, and 2 Peter 1:5-7), and when you realize that ‘godliness’ is another way of saying “God focused,” then it becomes clear that any action that is not intentionally focused on God is turning towards someone or something else. That amounts to worshipping false gods or idols. Practically speaking, this often takes the form of worshipping ourselves!

This also indicates that you can do the same action repeatedly, sometimes worshipping God and sometimes not. An employee can work diligently at his job in hopes of securing a promotion and a good reputation. Or he can work diligently at his job to be a good example of what it means to be a godly man of integrity who reflects the character of God.

A mother can tend to her children’s needs impatiently and with frustration, resenting the hard work she is required to do. Or she can tend to her children’s needs being reminded of how the Lord patiently cares for her needs, and praising Him for His attention in her life.

A farmer can plant, water, and weed his crops with anxiety and worry, watching the weather and fearing that he won't be able to provide for his family. Or the farmer can plant, water, and weed his crops trusting that the Lord will provide for all of his family's needs no matter what kind of yield the harvest brings.

As you can see, there are ways to worship in every area of life. It is not only by singing praise songs, by praying, by reading the Word, and by listening to sermons. Certainly those are powerful means of worship, too, and should be enjoyed and participated in frequently! However, the Lord loves when His people glorify Him. He delights in our worship of Him, and He gives us an unlimited number of ways to do so.

When we worship together as the Church, in a small assembly or large, our worship should be intentional, God focussed and God honouring. This means that when we sing, we should sing with all that we have to God, and sing lyrics that honour Him. When we play music, we should play skillfully and when we read scripture together, we must read with attention. This focus on God's holiness, His greatness, His love for us is not only an act of obedience, but can change our lives as well! When we see ourselves in relation to the Almighty, All Powerful Creator who loves and adores and rescues us, will that not in turn make our sorrows very small and our lives ones filled with joy?

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IN REVIEW

- Any action that is not intentionally Godward (or godly, God-focused) is necessarily worshipping something or someone else.
- Worship is not only singing, reading, and praying, but is actually your whole life lived out for the glory of God, and reflecting His character.
- The Lord delights in our worship of Him and shares that joy with us!

HAVE YOUR SAY

- What gifts or abilities has the Lord given you that you can use for His glory and in a worshipful way? Look for ways this week to change how you use those gifts, or to change how you think about those gifts to inspire a more worshipful attitude as you use them.

- Are there areas of your life where you know that you are worshipping other gods by how you are living? Take time now to confess your idolatry to the Lord and to return to Him with your whole heart. He will forgive you and will welcome you back to Him with open arms.

- What brings you the greatest feeling of worship or closeness to God? Spend time doing that now, and then ask the Lord to give you that sense of closeness to Him in the other actions of your life as well.

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