

535 How Can I Genuinely Worship God?

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God's Answers to Life's Questions

Popular forms of “worship”—if you can call it that—these days often takes the form of a concert or a show. Performers with their own microphones accompanied by musicians create deep emotions about religious matters. Many people hear solos and bands perform for them and lose sight of what real worship is all about. Just because a person feels something does not mean he has worshiped God in a way that pleases God. What then is worship? What is it that God wants from us?

A woman entered an ice cream store on Kansas City Plaza for an ice-cream cone. After making her selection, she turned and found herself face to face with Paul Newman, who was in town for the filming of a movie. He smiled and said hello. Newman’s blue eyes caused her knees to shake. She managed to pay for her cone, then left the shop, heart pounding. When she gained her composure, she realized she didn’t have her ice cream. She started back into the store to get it and met Newman at the door. “Are you looking for your ice cream?” he asked. She nodded unable to speak. “You put it in your purse with your change.”

I wonder if we realize what it means to come into the presence of God Almighty! When we worship, we worship God. Whether in private or in public, God Himself is aware of our hearts and our lives when we sing or pray. He is there when we commune around the Lord’s table. He knows our hearts when we are listening to His Word; and He sees when we make an offering of money. How we worship matters to God, because God is the One who receives our worship. If we worship Him without any regard to His will, we may be insulting Him rather than glorifying Him.

Pharisees in the first century had gotten in the habit of practicing their “righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them” (Matt. 6:1). You will remember they sounded a trumpet before the crowds when they gave their alms (monetary gifts to the poor). They stood up and prayed long, loud prayers in the synagogues and on the street corners. They painted their faces when they fasted. Jesus called them hypocrites and declared that they had already received their reward. God would not be blessing them.

Jesus said, “But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4). “But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (6:6). “But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (6:17-18).

We shake our heads at the hypocrites of old, but I wonder about people today who make a show out of their worship. Sometimes going to worship is more like going to a concert. People have taken an act of loving praise and turned it into a performance for ourselves. Rather than offering praise to God, we clap for the people who are up front and appearing like entertainers. Is this what God wants from our worship? Does God really want us to turn our churches into stages and perform for the audience? Or does God want our hearts and praise to focus upon Him?

The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 13:15, “Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” Our praise is to go to God, not the people up front with microphones. Paul said of our musical worship, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). God must always be the focus of what we do in worship.

Worship is an intentional act. Just because we sing a Christian hymn does not mean that we have truly praised God. To worship, a person must intend to worship. A preacher stayed in the home of a sweet family, and each morning the lady in the home would sing a hymn while cooking the eggs. The preacher commented on her lovely voice and how spiritually in tune she was. She laughed and replied, “Not really. I sing one verse for soft-boiled and three verses for hard-boiled.” Whether in church or at home, Christians in worship must mean to worship.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul describes how Christians ought to worship the Lord in the taking of communion, the Lord’s Supper. He said in 1 Cor. 11:23-26, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes .”

At this point we see a little bit into the mind of God, how He thinks and how He wants us to worship Him. Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:27-31 “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.” One can profane his worship.

When people’s minds wander off and they pay no attention to the great sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, eating the bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine is meaningless for them. In fact, by not disciplining ourselves to remember, we can cause our souls to become weak and sick. And if a Christian persists in ignoring God, he can even sleep (or die) spiritually. You see, how we worship matters to God and matters to our souls. When we lift our voices in song or prayer, let us pray with all our hearts as sincerely as we can. Let’s not just go through the motions.

Jesus said in John 4:23-24, “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” God wants worship that is in spirit, that is, with all our hearts and souls—genuine love, adoration, thanksgiving, and praise that honors and glorifies Him. Who would want a “thank you” that was not meant? Who would like to hear “I love you” from someone whose mind was elsewhere? If we are going to worship God, let’s do it from the heart.

God is worthy of our very best when we worship him. David said in Psalm 121:1, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’” Worship is as much an attitude as anything. When you go to church, worship the Lord with all your heart and soul. Go expecting to sing and pray to God, who loves you and wants to be close to you. Think through what you sing to the Lord. Does it reflect what is inside your heart? Would you want someone to sing that way to you? Sing and pray earnestly with love and with your heart.

Jesus said He also wants worship that is “in truth.” True worship is always going to be according to the truth. It asks what will please God and what has God desired from our worship. True worship considers the will of the One worshiped more important than his own will. A true worshiper will say like Jesus, “not my will, but Thine be done.” A true worshiper of the Lord wants to obey the Lord in everything. How sad it would be to worship the Lord only to find that our worship to the Lord is unacceptable, that it displeases the Lord, or that it is in vain!

Jesus spoke about the Pharisees who observed human traditions in Matthew 15:7-9, “You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” Jesus said that if men follow human traditions and commandments rather than the teaching of the Scripture, their worship is vain, meaningless. They may honor with their lips, but their heart is far from me and focused on following the will of man not God. This is vain worship, futile worship.

James gives us a little more information about things that will render our worship as vain. He said in James 1:26-27, “If anyone thinks he is religious (*effective in the pew*) and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” One cannot live an ungodly life or have an ungodly tongue and expect his worship in the pew to be approved by God. God wants us to be on Monday what we claim to be on Sunday.

Worship that God wants comes from the whole person loving him with his tongue and with his life. John said in 1 John 4:20-21, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.” To be right with God, we should strive to be right with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Worship and service is how we show love to God. You can’t love God while you hate your brother or sister.

John also reminds us that our prayers, our worship needs to be according to God’s will. In 1 John 5:14-15 John said, “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” True worship always comes from a heart that is in submission to the will of the Father, who wants to serve Him fully and freely. Do you have that kind of heart? Do you have the heart that says, “Thy will be done?”

The way to be right with the Lord is to be obedient to His will. Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). When we love and trust the Lord, turn away from all sin, confess His name and are baptized (immersed in water) into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we enter into that right relationship. Our worship then as children of God is a pleasing sacrifice to Him. If you have not yet obeyed the Lord, do so. Give Him your heart and your obedience. Let us pray.

Worship is not something done for us. Worship is something we do. It arises from our hearts and through our lips, giving praise, thanksgiving, love, and adoration to our gracious and wonderful Father in heaven. Many people who listen to others perform think they have worshiped. In reality, they are only witnesses of the actions of others. Worship is not something induced in you by others. Worship is something you do from your heart because of the love that is in you. This is why a religious concert is not worship but merely a religious show.

Don’t be fooled into thinking new forms of religious entertainment can substitute for our worship. It cannot! You see, no one can worship for you. That’s something God expects you to do for yourself. Worship is not a time to “showcase” talents; it is the time for each of us to say to God from the heart how much we love Him. That’s why in churches of Christ, we put our focus on singing from the heart to God, not watching musicians perform for us. We don’t have solos, because we want everyone to worship, not get caught up in a show.

If you are not going to church anywhere, why not visit one of the churches of Christ near you. They would love to have a visit from you and to study the Bible with you. If you have a Bible on the shelf that you haven’t read in a while, why not begin reading it. If you haven’t prayed much lately, why not take some time to talk to the Lord. Ask him to help you find the truth. Don’t get sidetracked by the pop psychology religions or the Christian entertainment industry, go to the Bible to find the truth.

We’re not here to get your money. We’re here to help you get to heaven. All the expenses are paid by your friends at Concord Road Church of Christ in Brentwood, Tennessee. If you are in our area, we’d love to meet you. Worship with us some Sunday at 9 am or 6 pm. You are always welcome and wanted. If you cannot visit us, there is a wonderful congregation of the churches of Christ near you. We’d love to hear from you. Until next week, we remind you to look to God for all your answers. God bless you and we love you from Concord Road.

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