

4 Elements of True Worship

Worship is About Ascribing to God His Worth

(1 Chronicles 16:27-29; 2 Kings 17:36). First off, worship is not even about us to begin with. Worship is about God. It sounds simplistic, I know, but think about how easy it is to slide in and out of a worship service, giving scant attention to the Very One for whom the worship service exists. At the very least, such a truth should humble us and knock us off our high horses if we think we can somehow manipulate or coerce people into a worshipful attitude.

Worship is Ultimately for God, Not Us

People can get really worked up about worship styles. For many people, having the right sound in the worship music is the Big Deciding Factor over whether a church is good for them or not—or maybe even deciding whether those other people with that worship style are good Christians or not. The term worship style came about in part, due to the errant notion that worship is about us and about what pleases us—the type of music, or the choice of instruments, or the time period in which the songs were written. Obviously, there are some types of worship that may be so distracting to some people that they simply have a very hard time worshipping in such a setting. Their minds, culture, conscience, or upbringing make it impossible for them to tolerate certain manners of worship. Other times, a certain form of worship may indeed have negative qualities or actions, contrary to what the Bible teaches. The point here is to assert that worship is not about what pleases us, what we like, or even what we're comfortable with. You may have been very uncomfortable with the worship music of Israel, or even some of their worship practices (2 Samuel 6:13-23). Petty personal preferences aside, worship is about God. Worship is a response of humility, gratitude, and joy to His greatness (Psalm 100; Isaiah 44:23; Isaiah 51:11). We are often so concerned with what people will think about our worship, that we construct a barrier to true worship. Our attempts at a good worship experience morph into an insipid self-worship. "Should I raise my hands at this point in the song?" "Is this a good time to break out in 'spontaneous' prayer?" "What will they think if I ask the people to sing the chorus again?" "Is closing my eyes through the refrain a good idea?" When these types of questions become our preoccupation, we start worshipping not God, but ourselves. God severely warns against anything but God-worship, admitting that our hearts can be deceived away from Himself (Deuteronomy 8:19; Deuteronomy 11:6).

In Order To Worship, People Must See God

A study of "worship" throughout the Bible will confront you with a powerful truth. Praise or worship occurs as a response to who God is. For example, God is king; we must worship (Psalm 22:27). God made us; we must worship (Psalm 95:6). God is holy; we must worship (Psalm 96:9). God chose us and justified us (Romans chs. 1-11); we must worship (Romans 12:1). God is holy and righteous; we must worship (Revelation 15:4). Worship is a response to who God is. Therefore, true worship is about considering God. People don't need to see you in order for worship to take place. They need to see God. The question is not so much, "how can I help people worship," but rather, "how can I get out of the way so people can see God and worship Him?" We "worship with reverence and awe," because of the character and person of God (Hebrews 12:28). God has revealed Himself in Scripture. Therefore, meditation upon Scripture should be a major part of our worship. God has commanded that we pray without ceasing to Him. Prayer is a means of ascribing to God His worth. Therefore, reverent and meaningful prayer should be part of worship.

Worship is Purposeful

(Gen. 22:5; Judges 5:3; Psalm 9:1). People don't worship on accident. Worship must be intentional. Corporate worship is an outflow of what Christians ought to be practicing and living in their everyday lives (Romans 12:1). True worship involves the Spirit (John 4:23-24), because He can help us worship. In the Old Testament, worship was a far more eventful incident than just crawling out of bed on Sunday morning, throwing on some clothes, and dragging your family into church. Although that is surely a pretty noteworthy achievement, especially if you have young kids, it's not anything like what the ancient Israelites had to do. Worship often involved a multi-day journey, carrying supplies, camping equipment, animals, etc. Worship often involved slaughtering animals. Worship events lasted days. Sometimes, worship services themselves lasted for hours and hours, standing in the blazing Palestinian sun. "Worship" connoted a whole lot more than just showing up in a plush auditorium on Sunday morning. I'm not saying we need to make it harder on ourselves. I'm simply stating the fact that worship is an act of intentional purpose, not an accident, not a ritual, and not something that is a perfunctory fulfillment of a spiritual to-do list.

