

The Privilege of Worship

Dee Bowman

Our English word “worship” is derived from the Old English weorth (worth, value), and the suffix ship, which means condition or office. It was originally used to express the worthiness or dignity of some person or office. Today we use the word to describe certain actions, both mental and physical, which are used to extol or venerate God. Strictly speaking, worship is the adoring reverence of the creature for the Creator. Because of our regard for His gloriously high station and majesty, we worship Him.

Worship is a privilege as well as a duty. To ask, “Do I have to attend worship services?” is to me like asking, “Do I have to eat this homemade ice cream?” Worship services will never seem to be drudgery to a God-fearing Christian, but an exalted privilege and opportunity to pour out his filial devotions of mind and heart toward his Father God.

Worship is an individual affair. It takes place in a man’s heart, his mind. A person may appear to be worshiping God when he is not. Conversely, it is also true that a person may not appear to be engaged in worship when he actually doing so. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) that worship has not to do with the place, but with paying homage to the right object, God, with the right attitude, “in spirit,” and “in truth.” No acceptable worship can be extended to God without regard for these principles of truth.

Sadly, some religionists today are of the mistaken notion that anything offered in devotion to God is acceptable worship. Such is not the case. Sincerity, by itself does not constitute worship. And to affirm that such is the case is to be either willfully mistaken or naive to a fault. In John 9:1-9, Our Lord condemned the “worship” of the Pharisees, saying, “full well ye reject the commandments of God that you may keep your own traditions.” He has just warned that “in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.” Paul, in Romans 10:2-3, accuses his Jewish brethren of “having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge,” and of “going about to establish their own righteousness.” Any extending of worship and service to God certainly must be sincere, but service to Him in ways which are not approved are not worship, and are not acceptable service.

It is a serious matter to feign worship to God. One must be very careful that he does not just “go through the motions.” Such is not worship at all—any more than worshiping in ways He has not approved. Because of the lack of heart-involved devotion in worship “many are weak and sickly among you” (I Corinthians 11:30). True worship, extended with the proper disposition and respect will greatly edify and strengthen us as it intensifies our faith and our hope. But worship that is merely “played at” is not only impotent, but tends to wash away our true spiritual character.

When you pray, do you truly worship God? When you sing, do you pour out the adoring reverence you feel for God? And do you reverently consider the message and significance of the song? When you partake of the Lord's Supper, is it merely a formalistic ritual that "we have always done" or do you truly discern the broken body and loving blood shed by Christ which is memorialized in the great supper of the Lord? If you cannot answer these questions properly it is a serious indictment of your devotion to the Lord, and should be attended to with due consideration and without delay.

What a blessed privilege worship is! Our worship should be guarded and attended to with love and with due grateful thoughtfulness for its worth and value to each of us. Let us be careful. Let us not let our devotion to God become some sort empty ritual to be observed, as if it were a recurring arduous task which we must observe. Rather, let us see it for what it is: a wonderful opportunity to exalt and praise our great God and Father, a glorious privilege to glorify his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, and a joy to give high feelings of thankful respect for the Holy Spirit for the word of salvation He has supplied for our use.

If we will pay careful attention to our worship—both public and private—the congregation here will be stronger and more influential than ever before. Acceptable worship always strengthens.

How about you, brother or sister? Is your worship a true reflection of your love and appreciation for God, or is it only an occasional remembrance of Him, and then mostly only when you need Him? Better be careful with your answer.