

Worship in Spirit and Truth

Principles for Christian Worship from John 4:16-29

- I. God cares about how he is worshipped
 - a. The Samaritans believed they were worshipping God and thought that Mount Gerizim was the true place of worship, but Jesus says they were not worshipping God, rather the worship of the time was from the Jews because it was with the Jews God had given the covenant
 - b. Our worship is determined by God's nature.
 - i. God is spirit
 - ii. Therefore, we must worship him in spirit and truth
 - c. The Father is looking for people who will worship him in this proper way
- II. Our worship is to be centered around God
 - a. "We worship our Creator-God 'precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so.' What ought to make worship delightful to us is not, in the first instance, its novelty or its aesthetic beauty, but its object: God himself is delightfully wonderful, and we learn to delight in him.

In an age increasingly suspicious of (linear) thought, there is much more respect for the 'feeling' of things – whether a film or a church service. It is disturbingly easy to plot surveys of people, especially young people, drifting from a church of excellent preaching and teaching to one with excellent music because, it is alleged, there is 'better worship' there. But we need to think carefully about this matter. Let us restrict ourselves for the moment to corporate worship. Although there are things that can be done to enhance corporate worship, there is a profound sense in which excellent worship cannot be attained merely by pursuing excellent worship. In the same way that, according to Jesus, you cannot find yourself until you lose yourself, so also you cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship and pursue God himself. Despite the protestations, one sometimes wonders if we are beginning to worship *worship* rather than worship God. As a brother put it to me, it's a bit like those who begin by admiring the sunset and soon begin to admire themselves admiring the sunset." – D.A. Carson¹
 - b. Psalm 96 and 98
- III. Our worship is to be centered in Christ (in truth)

¹ Carson, D.A., *Worship by the Book* (Zondervan, 2002), 22.

- a. He says that we must worship in truth and Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, ESV).
 - b. The Gospel of Christ is central to our worship
 - i. We have been justified, or made righteous, in Christ (Rom. 3:21-26)
 - ii. We have peace with God to enter His presence (Rom. 5:1-2)
 - iii. We have been baptized into Christ and are united with him (Romans 6:1-11)
 - iv. We are united in one Body in Christ (1 Cor. 3; Eph. 2:11-22)
 - c. Jesus is our High Priest and Mediator
 - i. Jesus mediates this new covenant we have with God as the High Priest, meaning he represents us before God (Heb. 8)
 - ii. Jesus makes intercessions to God on our behalf (Heb. 7:25)
- IV.** The Holy Spirit empowers our worship (in spirit)
- a. “Through illumination he enables men to understand the truth... He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.” – BFM Section 2c
 - b. The attitudes and traits we need for proper worship come from the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-11; Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 2:18-21)
 - c. The Spirit empowers our worship and teaches us how to worship (Rom. 8:26; Phil. 3:3)
- V.** Jesus was bringing about a change in the worship of God
- a. The Old Covenant was a foreshadowing of Christ (Col. 2:16-23; Heb. 3:1-6)
 - b. Worship would no longer be dependent on location
 - i. The temple would not be necessary (John 2:19-22; Heb. 9:1-11)
 - ii. We are now the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 2:4-5)
 - c. The Old Covenant has passed away (Heb. 8:13)
 - d. The sacrifices of the Old Covenant are obsolete as Christ has made one sacrifice for all time, fulfilling the sacrificial requirements (Heb. 10)
 - e. Our worship is no longer about ceremonies, festivals, and rituals, but the unity that we have in God through Christ and the Holy Spirit
 - f. We now enter into God’s presence with confidence (Heb. 4:16)
- VI.** The Scriptures must inform our worship
- a. Jesus says the Jews “worshipped what we know” and that we must worship in truth
 - b. The Jews could worship correctly because God had revealed to them how he wanted them to worship
 - c. Our worship should be guided and informed by the Word of God

- d. We should hesitate to worship in any way that is questionable if we desire to glorify God
- VII.** To worship in spirit and truth is also to worship with sincerity of heart and reverence
 - a. “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.” – Hebrews 12:28-29, ESV.
 - b. Our worship begins with our obedience (Rom. 12:1-2)
 - c. We do not come before God casually
 - i. “We have acted as if casualness is the height of intimacy with God.” – Mark Dever²
 - ii. Present yourself before the King of Kings in a manner worthy of his presence
 - d. Sincere worship is not directed by our emotions
 - i. We sometimes think that to worship God we must feel some kind of way for it to be genuine
 - ii. Emotions are not a stable source and do not guide us
 - iii. Emotions are an important part of worship when they are produced by truth
 - e. Sincere worship is not only targeted at the intellect
 - i. While instruction is an appropriate part of worship, we are not to turn worship into a time of lecture
 - ii. Emotions and our spirit are just as much a part of being human as the mind
 - f. Sincere, reverent worship can be both premeditated and spontaneous
 - i. “Reverence is not the same thing as dead formalism, and spontaneity is not the same thing as sincerity.” – Mark Dever³
 - ii. A corporately read prayer can be just as meaningful as a spontaneous prayer
 - g. Sincere worship is not always happy worship
 - i. Joy is always a part of our worship
 - ii. Lamentation is also a part of human worship (James 4:9-11)
- VIII.** Worship that is not in spirit and truth is not worship
 - a. Unbelievers cannot worship God with us (Rom. 8:6-8)

² Mark Dever, “Mark Dever: Worship in Spirit and Truth,” Ligonier Ministries, April 9, 2015, YouTube video, 39:19, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dy8ZEA4Tgbk>.

³ Dever, “Worship in Spirit and Truth,” 38:00.

- i. The gathering of the people of God should be centered around the worship of God and not evangelism
 - ii. Designing our worship in a way that is focused on the unbeliever and drawing them in is to cease to worship God
- b. If our worship is shaped to the things of the world and culture, we are ceasing to look to God to understand what pleases him
 - i. This does not mean there will not be cultural elements in our worship
 - ii. We are people living in a time and a culture, we cannot avoid culture completely
 - iii. However, we are not to be conformed to the world, but transformed by God (Rom. 12:1-2)
- c. Sincere worship will draw in the unbeliever
 - i. People are looking for truth and if our services are full of truth and genuine, that attracts people
 - ii. We are to be an aroma to the world, whether pleasing or offensive (2 Cor. 2:14-17)