

"Worship"

by *Michael S. Cole, M.D.*

"You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve." -- Matthew 4:10

The following text does not constitute any kind of an authority or creed for settling questions or disputes.

Rather, look to the Bible and allow God to speak the final word. To worship anything or anyone besides the one God, our Father in Heaven, would obviously be wrong.

Please consider these two important questions:

1. ***Is it possible to offer sincere, but unacceptable, worship to God?***
2. ***What does the Bible tell us about how to worship?***

Early in the Bible we learn that men worshipped God with sacrifice. Cain brought an offering for which God had no regard or respect (Gen. 4:5). King Saul unlawfully offered a sacrifice in I Samuel 13. Later, he was told that "to obey is better than sacrifice" (I Sam. 15:22). God had given instructions about how He was to be worshipped. He was pleased only with those people who did "all" that was commanded (Josh. 1:7, I Kings 11:38, Jer. 7:23). Jesus talked about how God did not accept the prayers of the Pharisees (Matt. 6:5, Luke 18:10-14).

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The opposite of true worship is *vain worship*. Any worship not ordained by God is vain worship because it originates with man.

"And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Our only assurance of practicing acceptable Christian worship is to disregard man-made creeds and turn to God's Word as our only authoritative guide to worship. The early church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). If we pattern our worship after the instructions given to the first century church, we can be confident that God will approve of our worship in the twenty-first century.

CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Men under the Law of Moses were to worship God on the Sabbath,

Saturday (Ex. 20:8). In the New Testament we find that the church assembled on the first day of the week, Sunday, to worship God (Acts 20:7, I Cor. 16:2).

Christians have been instructed not to neglect assembling together because this is also an important time for fellowship and encouragement (Heb. 10:25).

In regards to the worship service, the apostle Paul said, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40).

PRAYER

After Christ established His church, the Bible contains no record of anyone being told to pray until after they obeyed the gospel and became Christians. Prayer is a privilege for those in the church, rather than a means of entrance into it.

Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God (Phil. 4:6).

God communicates with us through His written Word (Heb. 1:1-2).

Prayer is a daily essential in the personal life of every Christian (I Thes. 5:17). Prayer also plays a prominent role in worship assemblies (Acts 12:5, 12).

Christians are instructed to pray for:

1. **FORGIVENESS** for day to day sins which are committed through ignorance, weakness, or negligence (Acts 8:18-24, I John 1:9).
2. **ADORATION** and **PRAISE** of God (Matt. 6:9).
3. **THANKSGIVING** for all God's innumerable blessings (Eph. 5:20).
4. **WISDOM** for better understanding (James 1:5).
5. **OTHERS**, including Christians (Eph. 6:18), rulers (I Tim. 2:1-2), and even our enemies (Matt. 5:44).
6. **DELIVERANCE FROM TEMPTATION**. God allows us to be tempted (Matt. 26:41), but He does not tempt us (James 1:13, I Cor. 10:13).
7. **UNITY** of all who believe in God (John 17:20-21).
8. **PERSONAL NEEDS** in our daily living (Matt. 6:11).

When we pray in faith and according to God's will, He will hear us and will answer our prayers (Matt. 7:7-11, Matt. 21:22, I John 5:14).

Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5). We do not need to pray through any other person, whether saint, prophet, or priest. We pray to our Father in Heaven "in Jesus' name," through the One that God has appointed (Heb. 4:14-16, Col. 3:17, John 14:6, 14).

SINGING

We know that Jesus and the apostles sang hymns (Matt. 26:30, Acts 16:25).

Christians are instructed to sing to one another and to the Lord. We are to sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). No

Christian is excused from this command, whether a talented singer or not (Psm. 100:1-2).

Singing serves two purposes:

1. Just as we are to praise God in prayer, we are also to praise Him with our singing (Psm. 66:1-2). It is a medium of expressing our cheerfulness to God (James 5:13).
2. Our singing is to teach and give friendly earnest encouragement (admonishment) to fellow Christians (Col. 3:16).

A choir cannot serve as substitutes for the command that ALL Christians are to sing. Therefore, a choir serves no purpose, being merely an addition by man to God's plan for worship. The New Testament has no references to church choirs, since they were not introduced until centuries after the days of the apostles. The music of congregational singing in the first century church was vocal only. "*A cappella*," which means singing without instrumental accompaniment, comes from Latin for "at church." Though we find musical instruments mentioned in the Old Testament, there is not a single New Testament reference to anything but vocal music in worship. Historical sources indicate that instrumental music did not appear in worship until about the sixth century.

Since mechanical instruments of music cannot speak, teach, or admonish (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16), they do not accomplish anything God wishes when we sing in worship. We should not permit the use of instrumental music as a form of worship, because this practice was not found in the early church nor has it been authorized by God. Unless we pattern our worship after the instructions given to the first century church, we can have no assurance that God approves of our worship.

GIVING

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Christians in the first century were commanded to contribute to the church every Sunday (I Cor. 16:2). All things belong to the Lord (Psm. 24:1). As God has prospered us, we are to return a portion of our wealth to Him for the work of the church. (I Cor. 16:1-2). God showed us how to give by the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16).

While men were to tithe (give 10%) under the Law of Moses, the early Christians were expected to give liberally and sacrificially without any mention of a specific percentage (II Cor. 8:1-5). We are to give willingly and cheerfully (II Cor. 9:7). When we give we will be blessed by God (Luke 6:38). The money collected is to be used wisely to help the needy and to spread the gospel (Acts 2:45, Rom. 10:14-15, I Cor. 9:14).

COMMUNION

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the night before His crucifixion (Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20, I Cor. 11:23-26).

The Lord's Supper is the Christian's memorial of what it cost God to deliver him from the slavery of sin. As Christians remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross they become conscious of their past need (they were sinners without hope), and their present responsibility (to live a life of purity and devotion to God).

To partake in a worthy manner, each participant is to examine his life in light of the terms of the New Testament (I Cor. 11:27-29). When observed in a worthy manner, the Christian leaves the Lord's Supper with renewed spiritual strength gained by (1) his reflection on why Jesus had to die and by (2) his renewed determination to live out the terms of the New Covenant.

The Lord's Supper is made up of two elements -- the bread and the cup (I Cor. 11:26).

The unleavened bread is symbolic of Christ's body (Luke 22:19). The bread is without leaven (yeast), even as Christ is without corruption or sin (Heb. 7:26).

The cup or the "fruit of the vine" is symbolic of Christ's shed blood (Matt. 26:28). The word "wine" is never used in the Bible to refer to the Lord's Supper.

Christians in the first century observed the Lord's Supper on a weekly basis (Acts 20:7).

The Lord's Supper is a memorial of the Lord's death, and is to be observed by every Christian, only on the Lord's day (every Sunday) -- the day Jesus arose from the dead.

PREACHING

Public reading of scripture, preaching, and teaching were part of the worship service in the first century (I Tim. 4:13, Acts 20:7). These things were not limited to Sunday. Preaching was limited to male speakers (I Cor. 14:34).

The only kind of preaching that pleases God is preaching the things He bids us to preach (Jonah 3:2). The apostles and other first century preachers were only concerned with pleasing God, not men (Acts 4:19-20, Gal. 1:10, I Thess. 2:4).

The attitude of preachers today should be patterned from the example of New Testament preachers. They diligently studied the Word of God. (I Tim. 4:13, II Tim. 2:15) They used references from the Bible to support their preaching. (Acts 2:16, 25, 34; Acts 7; Acts 8:35; Acts 18:28). They believed the Scriptures alone were sufficient (II Tim. 3:16-17, I Cor. 4:6). They condemned the creeds and doctrines of men (Gal. 1:6-9, I Tim. 1:6-7, I Tim. 4:1-3, II Tim. 2:16-18, II Tim. 3:5-9, Titus 1:9-

11).

The power of their preaching was derived from the Scriptures.

Jesus clearly condemned the use of religious titles (Matt. 23:8-12). One does not earn a high place before God by appropriating an impressive religious title. In God's sight the greatest person is the most faithful servant, not one who has assumed an elevated position (Matt. 20:25-28).

According to the Bible, pastors (elders, bishops) are to pastor (shepherd) the flock (Acts 20:28). And preachers (evangelists) are to preach (II Tim. 4:1-2). When the evangelist is doing the pastoring, God's divine plan is being ignored.

Faithful New Testament evangelists preached the gospel in this manner:

1. Fully (Rom. 15:19)
2. Forcefully (Acts 18:28)
3. Simply (II Cor. 11:3)
4. Urgently (I Cor. 9:16)
5. Boldly (Eph. 6:19-20)
6. In Love (Eph. 4:15)

Preachers are to labor in the word, preaching, teaching, exhorting. Preaching strives for these results:

1. converting the lost to Christ,
2. restoring the wayward Christian,
3. keeping the saved saved.

CONCLUSION

All that men need to believe, be, know, do, or teach to please God is written in the Bible.

We know that Christians in the early church were pleasing God with their worship. If we worship God as they did, we can be sure that God is pleased. *When we add to or take away things from the worship service that God ordained, we must fear that our worship is unacceptable, no matter how sincere.*

"Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe." -- Hebrews 12:28

If you wish to discuss this information with someone, please e-mail [West-Ark Church of Christ](#). Christians there are committed to following the Biblical pattern in worship. Our worship service is patterned after the first century church. You are encouraged to study your Bible so that your praying, singing, giving, communion, and preaching are acceptable to God.



Read a description of a [worship service](#) at West-Ark church

➔ Check out ["The Moods of Worship"](#), a sermon by David Chadwell

➔ Link to West-Ark's [Online Library](#)

