

What Constitutes Worship?

Matthew 4:8-10

Introduction: The worship of God is not specifically defined anywhere in scriptures. Yet, we are specifically commanded to worship God (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 4:23-24; Acts 24:14; Rev. 14:7; 19:10; 22:9). We understand that worship is an act of homage or reverence. So then, what acts of reverence would constitute our worship to God?

I. Five acts associated with worship.

- A. The Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29; Luke 22:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:26-28).
- B. Prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:24-31; 12:12; 1 Cor. 14:15).
- C. Singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12).
- D. Preaching (Acts 15:30-32; 20:7-11; 2 Tim. 4:2-5).
- E. Giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

II. Discussion of the five acts.

A. None of these acts are defined in scripture as an act of worship. However, we are commanded to do each of these things.

- 1. Two of these acts are specifically referenced to occur on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).
- 2. All of these things were incorporated into the church assemblies (by command or example) on the first day of the week.
- 3. Therefore, we conclude these are the acts God would have us use in worship to Him.

B. Would it be wrong to participate in these acts of worship outside the assembly?

- 1. Paul and Silas prayed and sang in prison (Acts 16:25).
- 2. The Apostles preached daily (Acts 5:42).
- 3. When Peter was released from prison by an angel he found the brethren had gathered to pray (Acts 12:12).
 - a. There is no indication that this gathering was on the Lord's Day nor a formal gathering as Rhoda announced Peter's presence to the group (Acts 12:13-14).
 - b. Women's speaking in the assembly is a violation of scripture (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12).
- 4. James tells us to sing and pray whenever it is appropriate (Jas. 5:13).

C. Each act is an act of worship in and of itself. If we are to participate in an act of worship to be pleasing to God we must do it in the manner prescribed.

1. For example, if we gather at someone's home to pray for our sick brethren though everything else done during that informal gathering does not resemble a worship service in the least, will that prayer be heard? If the prayer itself is done according to His will it will be heard (John 9:31).

2. Likewise, if we gather to sing songs of praise to God, as long as the song is sung according to His will it will please God regardless if anything else done during that gathering resembles a worship service or not.

a. If we gather to play hymns of worship on instruments it would not please God nor would our singing along to "Christian music" on the radio be pleasing to God because they are not done according to His will.

b. I'm not saying people cannot play hymns on instruments nor sing along with some contemporary religious music. But if we did so with the intent of worshipping God by it we would be wrong because it is not done according to His will.

3. If we gathered for worship on Monday to "break bread," it would not be pleasing to God even if the whole service was done appropriately because communion is specifically commanded to be taken on the first day of the week.

4. If we gather on Wednesday for a Bible study and we pray, sing or preach a lesson in addition to it, the prayers, songs and preaching would be pleasing to God as long as we do them according to His will. Bible study is not an act of worship but of course should be encouraged whenever we can arrange it.

III. A structured worship gathering is only necessary when we gather as a church.

A. When Paul was giving the church in Corinth instructions on how they were to conduct themselves in church he concluded by saying, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

B. Just five verses earlier Paul had told the Corinthians not to let women speak in church (1 Cor. 14:35). Do we expect our women to be silent outside the church because that is decent and orderly in the church?

C. We do many things in life haphazardly but in the church we are to be structured in our worship to God.

a. If I'm in my car and I pray for my Double Whopper while I'm driving I'm sure that prayer will be heard regardless of what I'm doing.

b. However, if I brought that Double Whopper to eat it during church I'm sure I'll receive God's condemnation. It would not be done according to His will. In fact, it would be eaten in violation of His word (1 Cor. 11:22, 34).

Conclusion: Whether we worship God collectively together, as a church or individually, our worship will only benefit us if we are obedient to His will (Jas. 1:25-27). Even if we can't bridle our tongue, it would be all done in vain.