

# TOO HOT TO HANDLE

## 16 Let Us Join Together In Worship

### Scripture Reading

Psalms 95:1 – 7. I Corinthians 11:17 – 34

### Worship? What Way?

A good deal of the controversy in the church at Corinth was to do with what happened when they came together for worship. It is hard to imagine what their "services" must have been like. There was division and no doubt arguing that went with it, their behaviour was disorderly and selfish with some indulging themselves and putting themselves and their own views forward without regard to others.

Worship still causes controversy. In fact few subjects have caused more heated debate in recent years than the subject of worship and how we ought to do it. A lot of that debate is fuelled by the variety of styles and practices available these days and much of it, if we are honest, is sustained by deeply ingrained preferences and prejudices. But what really raises the temperature is the fact that we all believe that our way is more biblical.

Over the next few weeks we are going to look at the guidance Paul gave the believers in Corinth and, drawing on other passages of God's Word, see if we can learn what constitutes acceptable worship.

### What Is Worship?

It is inevitable that we want to begin with a definition but that is not so easy to come up with as you might think. Nowhere does the Bible give us a concise definition of worship. We are given many examples of worship, both good and bad, that shape our understanding but the fact that those examples are so numerous and widely dispersed makes it easy to pick out what we want to find. Those who love liturgical forms begin with the choirs and antiphonal psalms of the temple, others of a Charismatic bent turn first to 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 and so it goes. But many things are clear and it is with them that we will begin.

### Worship is God Centred

Worship always begins with who and what God is. Everything that is done must somehow be a proper response to Him: its purpose must be to please Him and to give Him glory. Our needs and interests only matter in so far as they provide opportunities for more glory to be given to Him. If, at any point, you are not thinking about God, describing Him or responding to Him, whatever you are doing you are not engaged in worship.

### Worship is A Proper Response

The only proper response to God is to do no less than to honour Him in the fullest possible way and obey Him in complete submission, and that response, in order to be proper, must be a sincere response of the whole being.

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

John 4: 24

"Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honours Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me.'"

Mark 7:6 – 7

To sing dutifully and recite words, however well crafted those words may be, is not worship. Worship can only be given when spontaneous affections arise in the heart. Listen to what John Piper has to say about this.

Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of his worth. This cannot be done by mere acts of duty. It can be done only when spontaneous affections arise in the heart.

Suppose on my wedding anniversary I bring home a dozen long-stemmed red roses for my wife. When she meets me at the door I hold out the roses, and she says, "They're beautiful,

thank you,” and gives me a big hug. Then suppose I hold up my hand and say matter-of-factly, “Don’t mention it; it’s my duty.”

What happens? Is not the exercise of duty a noble thing? Do not we honour those we dutifully serve? Not much. Not if there’s no heart in it. Dutiful roses are a contradiction in terms. If I’m not moved by a spontaneous affection for her as a person, the roses don’t honour her. In fact they belittle her. They are a very thin covering for the fact that she does not have the worth or beauty in my eyes to kindle affection. All I can muster is a calculated expression of marital duty...

”Delight yourself in the Lord!” (Psalm 37:4). “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice!” (Psalm 32:11). This honours God, while the empty performance of ritual does not. If I take my wife out for the evening on our anniversary and she asks me, “Why do you do this?” the answer that honours her most is, “Because nothing makes me happier tonight than to be with you.” “It’s my duty,” is a dishonour to her. “It’s my joy,” is an honour.

[Desiring God]

### **Worship Is For every Day And For Special Days**

Worship is an everyday activity. Our whole lives ought to be lived out in honour of God and in obedient submission to Him. Every act should be an act of worship but the Bible also highlights the importance of corporate worship: those times when God’s people assemble specifically to worship Him together. Various activities are included.

- Prayer — an important element of worship gatherings in both Old and New Testaments. In prayer we not only honour God by giving praise and thanks to Him we also acknowledge our utter dependence upon Him.
- Singing — to God and to one another.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Colossians 3:16

- Giving.
- Learning from God’s Word — if we are to respond, we must know what we are responding to. God must reveal Himself and He does that through the reading and exposition of His word. Preaching, therefore, is an integral part of worship and so is listening.

You should be able to see too that if corporate worship is to be true worship a certain amount of preparation is needed. It must be holy people who gather to worship; sins must be repented of and forgiveness sought. Those who join together must join in unity and harmony; damaged relationships must be repaired. Those who listen must listen intently; distractions must be set aside, the mind must be settled and the body rested and refreshed. Coming dependent as we are upon the Lord to enable us, prayer must be made in advance pleading for His help.

### **Worship Matters**

There are many controversies surrounding how we ought to worship but the things we have considered this evening are clear and are largely agreed by all the Lord’s people. That is why I have not gone to great lengths to give proof for every statement — you should be satisfied that these principles are clearly taught in God’s word.

You can see how, in dealing with the problem over behaviour at the Lord’s Supper in Corinth, Paul put these principles to work and if we applied them today many of our difficulties and differences would melt away. That is why, I want us, in our discussion this evening, to concentrate on their implications before we go on to consider some specific issues of contention.