

Philosophy of Worship

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24 NAS)

John 4:23-24 is such a great text on the nature of worship. There are a few things worth noting about God-honoring worship in this passage. First, worship is important to God because it says that the Father seeks worship from true worshipers. This is something that God desires and expects of His people: "It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Luke 4:8). This also means that worship is supposed to be about God and not about man's preferences of music, or some other form of worship. Jesus says that true worshipers worship "the Father." D. A. Carson says, "You cannot find excellent corporate worship until you stop trying to find excellent corporate worship and pursue God Himself." God centered worship will retain God and His glory as its central focus, thereby avoiding man-centeredness in worship. Worship will emphasize both the transcendence and immanence of God (Isaiah 57:15, Psalm 113).

Secondly, this passage of Scripture teaches us that worship is an ongoing way of life for the believer. Jesus demonstrated this when He said, "Those who worship (*present tense participle*) Him must worship (*present tense verb*) in spirit and truth." Worship according to Jesus is not concerned with or regulated by a specific time or a place (John 4:20-21). This does not lessen the importance of corporate worship on Sunday (Hebrews 10:25). It means that corporate worship of the church is one aspect of worship that each individual Christian participates in as an expression of worship as a way of life.

Thirdly, Jesus teaches that there is a correct way to worship God. This is seen in His statement that there are "true worshipers" as opposed to false worshipers and that true worshippers "must" worship in spirit and truth. In other words, God expects this kind of worship from His true worshipers. Thus, God's people must evaluate their worship and take it seriously. Worshiping God in "spirit" means that true worshipers worship God with all their heart, mind, emotions, and will in the power of the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17; Philippians 3:3; Romans 1:9; Galatians 4:6). Also, worshiping God in "truth" is worship that is based on the Truth of God's Word. This is true worship unlike that seen in Mark 7:6-7: "This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men" (Mark 7:6-7). Israel's worship had degraded down to mere externals which were based on error, the precepts of men. Unfortunately, worship in the church can degrade in like manner where the external forms (i.e. music style) of worship become the focus of worship. Worship that is submitted to the authority of God's word will insure that all forms of corporate worship promote reverence and give praise to God.

Orderliness in Corporate Worship

When it comes to corporate worship, the gathering together of the saints for exaltation and edification, Scripture demonstrates that there are five basic aspects of corporate worship. These include: singing, praying, giving, preaching, and practicing of the ordinances (Acts 2:42; 20:7ff; 1Corinthians 11:17-34; 14; Romans 15:16; Acts 6:5; Hebrews 13:16). In those elements of corporate worship, God desires that the church practice all of them to the glory of His name (1Corinthians 10:31) and in a decent and orderly manner: "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (1Corinthians 14:40). The word "properly" speaks of doing things beautifully, decently, and harmoniously while "orderly" speaks of doing things in succession or one at a time. Thus, corporate worship should not be random, chaotic, or disorderly. The gathering of the saints should be planned so that the order of service is not confusing or difficult to follow. Musicians should play music in a way that enhances singing. Worship songs should be selected so that both the lyrics and music enhance worship. Worship leaders should be organized and prepared to lead God's people in worship. Preaching, teaching, and reading of Scripture needs to also be clear and understandable.

Moreover, corporate worship needs to be done in such a way that the saints are edified and built up in the faith. Corporate worship should "seek to abound for the edification of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:12). Since edification of the saints is an act of worship (Hebrews 13:16; Romans 12:1-8; Philippians 2:17), then the manner in which the church practices her worship must strive to build up others rather than self (1Corinthians 14:4; Hebrews 10:25). Since corporate worship inherently focuses on others rather than on self, worship should also help in maintaining unity in the body of Christ. Therefore, different forms of worship such as style of music should promote unity rather than cause division. Corporate worship that is well done and orderly will edify the saints, promote unity in the body of Christ, and exalt Jesus Christ.

Music in Worship

Although music is one aspect of the church's corporate worship, Scripture teaches that music is a means by which God is worshiped by His people (Revelation 5:9; 15:3). Scripture teaches that music can be played with a variety of instruments (1Chronicles 25:6; Psalm. 150) and in a variety of ways such as in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and new songs (Colossians 3:16; Revelation 14:3). Music can be either loud or quiet depending on the situation (Psalm 95:1; 98:4; 150:4). All music needs to be performed skillfully to the glory of God (1Corinthians 10:31; Psalm 33:3) so that it does not cause God's people to be distracted. Additionally, leaders of the musical aspect of corporate worship should be men (1Chronicles 15:27; Nehemiah 12:42, 46; 55 of the Psalms begin with "for the choir director"). Therefore, music in the corporate worship service needs to be intelligible, orderly, edifying, reverential, and unifying (1Corinthians 14:4, 19, 33, 40; Hebrews 12:28-29; Ephesians 4:3).