

Subject: *Guidelines for Acceptable Worship*

Scripture: *John 4:1-26*

I have been thinking a lot about worship since our time at the G3 Conference in Atlanta. The theme of this year's conference was worship, and that is something we should think about. We should think about worship carefully and often. We are going to consider the Biblical teaching on worship for the next few weeks and specifically what the Bible says about the corporate worship of God's people.

Nothing is more important than corporate worship. It is the time when we focus on God to honor and glorify Him as our God. Nothing should ever take the place of worship, even our service or ministry. Worship is the one activity that we do on earth now that we will also be doing forever in heaven. That fact should remind us just how important worship is. Our text is one of the foundational passages in Scripture on worship. In this text we learn what is not essential in worship and what is essential.

- *A specific place IS NOT essential to worship (vs. 20-21)*

This woman was a Samaritan and she had been taught that the right place to worship was in Mt. Gerizim. The Jews worshiped in Jerusalem where the temple was located. Jesus told her that the place of worship was not important and it was only a matter of time that the argument about the location of worship would be irrelevant because Jerusalem and its temple would soon be destroyed by the Romans in 70 A. D. Although worship is not limited to any one place, the Bible clearly teaches that Christians are to come together for corporate worship.

- *A specific person IS essential to worship (vs. 22-26)*

Jesus plainly told the woman that the worship of her people, the Samaritans, was unacceptable because it was based on ignorance (vs. 22). The Jews understood the truth and therefore their worship was right. They worshiped God the Father and their worship was connected to salvation and ultimately to the Scriptures. Jesus went on to teach her that true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth, and the Father is seeking people to offer true worship or acceptable worship. So clearly there is unacceptable worship based on ignorance and acceptable worship based on truth.

The place of worship is not essential, but the person of worship is essential and foundational. What about the principles of worship? What are the guidelines for acceptable worship?

1. Worship should be SIMPLE

The purpose of our worship is not to impress God, but to come before Him in simple faith, repentance, love, and obedience. Worship was never intended to be for show. Worship is not a production that is designed to impress people. Worship is not based on fancy buildings or elaborate rituals.

2. Worship should be SINCERE

Jesus said we must worship "in spirit and in truth." This can mean the Holy Spirit, but it probably refers to the human spirit. We are to worship from the heart or as we say, "have our heart in it." Mrs. Ruby Russell would always tell me when she was going to miss a worship service and she would say, "You'll have to preach to my spirit." Sometimes we say, "I can't

be there, but I'll be there in spirit." It's strange how that works. Some people are absent in body, but present in spirit, and others are present in body, but absent in spirit. We should be present in body and spirit.

3. Worship should be SERIOUS

When we come to worship, it is not a time to be flippant or silly, but serious. I'm not preaching this part of the sermon because I have an axe to grind. I'm preaching it because I have a light to shine. That light is the Word of God and it shows us the attitude we should have when we worship God. The Book of Ecclesiastes tells us there is an appropriate time for all things.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*

If we search the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation we see that acceptable worship is a serious matter and those who worship properly come to God with a serious attitude. This is true from the blood sacrifice of Abel and the altars of Noah and Abraham. The act of worship was always serious and solemn. For hundreds of years, God's people worshiped at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple. Can you imagine the priests trying to entertain the people as they brought their sacrifices and offered their prayers? Can you imagine anything being done in a silly or light-hearted way?

Being serious is not the same as being sad. In worship there should always be an attitude of joy, but certainly not silliness or irreverence.

Psalms 16:11 *Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

In God's presence there is fullness of joy. That's true for God's people in heaven and it's true for God's people on earth.

4. Worship should be SCRIPTURAL

We must worship in truth. The Jews worshiped God in truth because they had the Scriptures. They knew the one true God and they knew how to approach God. Worship is important to God. There is more Scripture pertaining to the OT Tabernacle than any other single subject, and yet God describes the creation of the sun, moon, and stars in one verse.

Genesis 1:16 *And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.*

What are the elements of acceptable worship that we find in Scripture?

- A. Worship includes prayer (silent prayer, corporate prayer, pastoral prayer, prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication "ACTS").

Matthew 21:13 *And (Jesus) said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

- B. Worship includes praise

Colossians 3:16 *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.*

C. Worship includes Bible teaching

When Jesus went into the synagogue He took the Scripture and read it. This was his normal practice.

Luke 4:16 *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.*

The early church met for instruction, fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer.

Acts 2:42 *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

Wherever he went Paul went to the local synagogue and taught from the Scriptures.

Acts 17:2 *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.*

Paul wrote to young Timothy.

1 Timothy 5:17 *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.*

2 Timothy 4:2 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

D. Worship includes sacrifice

We no longer bring blood sacrifices to worship because Jesus laid down His life as the Lamb of God and we don't need to atone for sin. His sacrifice is final and all-sufficient. But there are other sacrifices we offer to God.

1 Peter 2:5 *Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

What are the spiritual sacrifices we offer? One type of sacrifice is giving thanks to God (gratitude).

Hebrews 13:15 *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*

Another type of sacrifice is helping and sharing with others (generosity).

Hebrews 13:16 *But to do good and to communicate (share) forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

Another type of sacrifice is obedience.

1 Samuel 15:22 *And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*

Another type of sacrifice is personal dedication to God.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

Another type of sacrifice is our giving.

2 Corinthians 9:7 *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Many people in the modern church would say, “Prayer, praise, Bible teaching, and sacrifice is not exciting enough. That’s boring to people and they want something more.” That may be boring to the world, but it’s not boring to God’s people.

Acceptable worship is offered to God by His people, and so the important issue is always this: What does God want, expect, and deserve? The issue is not what we want, or even worse, what do unbelievers want. The only thing that matters is what God wants and what is acceptable to Him. Worship is for an audience of ONE.