

What Does the Christian Church Believe About Worship?

The Balloon Salesman

A man was selling balloons at the county fair. As he held his big hand full of balloons, all filled with helium, once in awhile he would release one of the balloons and it would sail off over the heads of the people on the fairgrounds. It would attract the attention of all the children and then, of course, they would start begging their parents to buy them a balloon. It would increase his business each time that he would release one of the balloons.

A little black boy was at the fair and started searching for the man that was selling the balloons. When he found him, he said, "Sir, do you have a black balloon?" "Sure I do, Sonny. Why?" said the balloon salesman. "I would like for you to turn loose one of your black balloons and I would like to see how high it will go." The man cut loose one of the black balloons and it shot straight up into the air. The little boy stood there clapping his hands for joy as he watched that black balloon go higher and higher. He said, "Just look at that black one go." The balloon seller said, "Son, it is not the color of the balloon that makes it go up high, it is what is on the inside."

Externals are Unimportant

That is the way it is with true worship. The building could be a barn, a house, or a cathedral. It could be made out of stone or wood or it could be a mud hut with a thatched roof in Africa. Neither are we concerned about the clothing the worshippers wear. Worshipers might come dressed in blue jeans or overalls or a cotton dress or they might wear silk and satins. Dress makes no difference. It is what is on the inside that really counts.

The Woman at the Well

John 4:1-26. Jesus approached this well. He was thirsty. There was a woman of Samaria who had come there to draw water for her own needs. Jesus spoke to this Samaritan woman and said, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman was startled because Jews and Samaritans had nothing to do with each other. She spoke to Jesus very boldly and said, "Why are you asking me for a drink when Jews don't even speak to Samaritans?" Jesus answered by saying, "If you knew the gift of God and if you knew who had asked you for a drink, why you would have in turn asked Me for the Living Water." The woman was very puzzled by what Jesus had said and she said, "You don't have anything to draw water with and the well is very deep. What are you talking about, Living Water? Are you greater than our father, Jacob, that gave us this well and who even drank of this water himself and gave water to drink to his cattle and to his children?"

Jesus answered this woman by saying, "Whoever drinks of this water from Jacob's well is going to get thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give will never be thirsty again and there will spring up within him a well of water into everlasting life." The woman was extremely curious by now and she said to Jesus, "Please give me some of this water so I will never be thirsty again and will never have to come to this well and draw water

again.” Jesus said, “Go call your husband.” We can almost see this woman growing red in the face; filled with embarrassment and shame. She said, “I have no husband.” And Jesus said, “Yes, you have told the truth. Because you have had five husbands and the man that you are living with right now is not your husband.”

She Changed the Subject

Immediately the woman realized that Jesus was a prophet of God and so she changed the subject. This is what people always do when they don't want to live like Jesus taught. Have you ever called on someone and tried to win them to Christ? What happens the moment you talk to them about repenting of their sins and turning their life over to Jesus? They change the subject. Jesus was talking about her sins. She started talking about worship.

She said, “Where is the right place to worship? The Samaritans say that we are supposed to worship on this mountain. You Jews say that we are supposed to worship in Jerusalem. Just where is the right place for worship?” Then Jesus pointed out to the woman that place is not important because God is a spirit and we must worship the Father in spirit and truth.

What is Worship?

That leads me to pose the question right now, what is worship? A simple answer is “*going to church.*” That could be and it might not be worship. It is possible for someone to go to church for 50 years and never really worship God.

I. The place is not important. The fundamental thought of worship is bowing down. Worship would be seeking God's blessings upon God's terms. The Samaritan woman said it is very important to worship on that mountain. Jews teach that it is

extremely important to worship in Jerusalem. But, true worship can be practiced in Bomili, Africa; Catlin, Illinois; London, England; or Chattanooga, Tennessee. The place is unimportant because God is everywhere.

Worship in a Beer Hall

I have had some very unusual experiences. For example, I had the experience of preaching a revival meeting in a beer hall. That was the only place that was available. It was in Guyana, South America, and the owner of the beer hall closed down his business and allowed us to meet there for one full week. We had a successful revival meeting and many people were led to Jesus Christ and the church grew in that community even though we met in such an unlikely place. In the Philippine islands on one occasion we had an evangelistic meeting in the front yard of a house of ill repute. The results were tremendously great. The inhabitants of that house of ill repute accepted Christ and the place closed down. We Americans find that it is very difficult to worship when the place is not very attractive, but in God's sight the place is really unimportant.

II. People are very important. Private devotions are necessary for spiritual growth, but many times people want to use private devotions to substitute for public worship. We must emphasize that we are talking about Lord's Day worship and Lord's Day worship necessitates more than one person. How many times have you heard someone say, "I can worship God on the river bank while I am fishing or I can worship God out on the golf course while I am golfing or I can worship God out in the woods on a picnic"? It is true that you can worship God on a river bank, or on the golf course, or anyplace else. But, the sad thing is that people will use this argument to excuse themselves from worshipping on the Lord's Day. They want to go fishing, hunting, or golfing instead of worshipping God.

WHAT DOES THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH BELIEVE ABOUT WORSHIP?

In Lord's Day worship, people are important. We are to gather together. In fact, the Bible prohibits the neglect of the assembly in Hebrews 10:25.

III. In the third place, worship must be regular. When God gave His Ten Commandments to the people in the olden days, the fourth of the Ten Commandments was "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." We are a New Testament church and we do not worship on the Sabbath Day, because the Sabbath is the 7th day of the week. The Sabbath Day was given to the Jews as the day of worship. Christians who live under the New Testament have been given a new day to worship God. It is the Lord's Day; the first day of the week. Not Saturday, but Sunday. The Lord's Day, the first day of the week, should be kept regularly. Every Sunday is the Lord's Day and we are to assemble in the Lord's house around the Lord's Table. Some worshippers only attend church occasionally and that robs them of many spiritual benefits that are available.

Suppose you went to the doctor because of an illness and the doctor gave you a prescription. You would be instructed to take the medicine regularly at stated intervals in order to get well. Some people disregard the doctor's orders and they rob themselves of the benefit that they would otherwise derive from the prescription. Regular worship is just as necessary to spiritual health as the regular partaking of prescriptions is to regular health.

If we are going to maintain strong, physical bodies we must eat our food at regular stated intervals, and people who do not eat their food regularly impair their physical health. It is necessary, regularly, weekly, on the first day of the week that we gather together to worship God so that we might be receiving spiritual strength he has for us.

IV. In the fourth place, worship is something that is taught. You should start bringing the children to church the moment they are born. I was brought to church the first time when I was eight days old. I have never missed since, except on a few rare occasions

when I have been ill. My parents believed that children are a gift from God not to keep us away from church, but that we might bring the children to church and teach them the ways of the Lord. Start teaching the children from the time they are babies. Each Lord's Day bring the babies to church and they will grow up believing, by example, that it is the right thing to be in church to worship God. We need to teach the babies to fold their hands and bow their heads when we pray. We need to teach them when they go to worship service or the Sunday School that they are to listen attentively to the teacher or preacher or to the one who reads God's Word at scripture time. We need to do our very best to teach the children to take care of God's house just like we take care of our own home. We would not allow our children to scratch on the walls of our home and we should not allow them to scratch on the walls of the church, or in any way mar or disfigure the house of God.

V. In the fifth place, worship must be prepared for. Long before Sunday morning arrives we should be prepared for that morning of worship in God's house. Serious preparations should begin on Saturday evening. I always recommend to people that they not be out late on Saturday night. Don't work hard on Saturday. Spend Saturday as a day of preparation. Take it easy, be calm, and go to bed early so that you will arise Sunday morning refreshed in body and mind. Lay out your clothes on Saturday so that there won't be any upset getting dressed on Sunday morning. Take your bath on Saturday night so that if you sleep a little bit late on Sunday morning, you won't have to rush. I know from many bad experiences how wrong it is to be out late on Saturday night, how wrong it is to get up grumpy on Sunday morning, how wrong it is to get up late Sunday morning and bring the children to church crying all because you have been selfish and stayed out late on Saturday night and because you haven't properly prepared for the worship service on Sunday morning.

VI. In the sixth place, worship does need the right atmo-

sphere. I have experienced worship services in Africa when there would be 500 or 600 babies in the audience. That is real competition to try to lead people in worship when you have children crawling, fighting, and fussing and about 10 or 15 at a time running back and forth to the restroom. It is difficult to worship in a mud wall, thatched roof hut where all of the curious neighbors can come and peek in the doors and windows and make their comments that are heard just as loudly as if on the inside. If the building is dirty and uninviting and dark and gloomy, no one feels like worshipping God.

I remember a church in England where I preached one time. The building must have been 500 years old and I think it had not been painted once in the 500 years since it had been built. It was black, dirty, dark, and dingy on the inside and as you entered, a feeling of gloom and depression came upon you. It was difficult to worship God. What a difference it would have made if they were to have brightened up that building by just putting on a coat of paint.

Equipment and comfortable surroundings are important as well as friendly people. What a difference it makes if you walk in and everybody smiles and they shake hands and greet you as if they were really glad to see you.

A church building located by a railroad yard where the trains whistle and groan and grunt is terribly distracting. A church building built by an airport where jets zoom in and out every minute of the time that you are trying to worship shaking the building with their roar, is tremendously distracting.

It is important to have ushers to watch the temperature of the building and not let it get too hot or cold. Ushers need to be available so if someone gets ill in the service they can quickly assist them to make an exit without disrupting the service. If someone arrives late, the usher is right there knowing where the available seats are so they can help that latecomer to be seated quietly, without disrupting anybody.

VII. Worship itself consists of many elements. *First of all,*

we must not overlook the element of quietness. We are reminded in Habakkuk 2:20, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." How wonderful it is to have a quiet sanctuary; a place where you can come and there are no noises and people don't make noise and you can just quietly think about God and worship him and bow your head for prayer and know that you are not going to be distracted by somebody whispering or by loud, unusual noises going on.

Second, music is certainly a tremendously important part of the worship hour. How beautiful to hear the tones of the organ calling us to the hour of worship. How wonderful to lift our voices in joyful hymns of praise to Almighty God and then to listen quietly to the beautiful message of the choir or the soloist.

Third, prayer is so important for prayer offers us a time to confess our sins. It is a time of thanksgiving when we can really thank God for the many ways that He has blessed us and the many answers He has given to previous prayers. It is a time of intercession when we can pray on the behalf of others who need help; spiritual help, mental help, or physical help.

Fourth, stewardship is also a great part of worship. As we bring God's holy tithes into the storehouse, whether it be the widow's mite or a large amount of money, the reward for the worshipper is the same.

Fifth, there is the time of communion. We come around the Lord's Table as His invited guests to remember His death upon the cross with love. The sacrifice of His body and blood so that we might have life everlasting.

Sixth, there is the preaching of God's Holy Word. I Corinthians 1:18 says, "The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God." The world on the outside can laugh and say that it is ridiculous that we meet here every Sunday and listen to a half hour of preaching, but we who are saved know that the preaching of God's Word is the power of God. I Corinthians 1:21, "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it

pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Those of us who are Christians, who have surrendered our past sins to Jesus and have allowed Him to wash them all away with His cleansing blood, have reached the point that we realize that we are saved now by preaching. It is tremendously important to all Christians that they assemble around the Word of God every Lord's day to hear God's message. The Word of God is important to lost sinners. That is the way that lost sinners are brought to conviction and are brought to the point of decision that they will surrender themselves to Christ, but we must never forget, those of us who have been saved, that it is the preaching of the Word of God that keeps us in a continually saved condition. Doubtless there is much in every sermon that is of no interest or help to you, but just remember that there are many people around you that are being helped and then part of the time, once in a while, there may be something in the sermon that will help you.

VII. Finally, I will make this observation, true worship can only be practiced when one has chosen the One whom he worships as his Father. If you are not converted, if you have never confessed the Savior's Name, if you have never been baptized, then you see, really you are not worshipping God fully as you could and as you should because in order to truly worship you must choose the one that you desire to worship as your Heavenly Father. The only way that you can choose Him, that the Bible has revealed, is to make that public confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and to submit yourself fully to Him by being buried in Christian baptism so that your past sins might be forgiven that you might receive the Holy Spirit.

Margaret Higgins won the Pulitzer Prize in literature for one line. During the Korean War she visited the battlefield where there were 18,000 marines of the 5th company on one side of the mountain and 100,000 Chinese Communists on the other. It was 42 degrees below zero. Margaret Higgins interviewed a sergeant who had been there for 14 days. He'd endured cold, eaten out of cans,

MY FAVORITE MISSIONARY SERMONS

and been unable to bathe. She asked that sergeant a question and with his one line answer she won the Pulitzer Prize. She asked, "If I were God and would give you anything you asked for, what would be your request?" He thought long and hard, and simply said, "I'd ask for tomorrow."

Man can live over a month without food, two days without water, over a minute without air, but man cannot live without hope.