

## Does God Care How We Worship? Part 1 of 5

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**1.** Does God care how we worship Him? and if we do come to the conclusion that God does care about how we are to worship him then where are we going to find the instructions?  
Are we worshipping in a way that is acceptable to God?  
Are we worshipping in accordance with the instructions that He has given us?  
Does the worship in our services in our churches Sunday after Sunday accurately reflect God's design for worship?  
How do we know?  
Do we understand why we do the things we do in church or do we just do things out of tradition and habit?

Now the focus this week is going to be primarily on corporate worship, by corporate worship what I mean is the worship of God's people as they gather together in an assembly (comments regarding personal health issues) but corporate worship is going to be our focus this week, we are not going to be dealing so much with worship of individuals as we go throughout our week and as we worship God on our own, that would be an important study as well but that is not going to be a focus and I hope that as we go through this you will understand why the distinction.

The worship of God's people as they gathered together in worship is something different than the worship that we exercise on our own, there are different dynamics, there are different purposes even in God's commands to us in that regard to us a different.

So I'm not going to unpack that more now we will do that tomorrow night at least we will get started on it but that's just so you know that's our focus the corporate worship of God's people as they gathered together.

Now my sense of what is happening or what has happened in the Conservative Anabaptist world in this area of corporate worship is that most of what we do on Sunday mornings and other times of the week most of what we do in worship together happens out of a sense of tradition rather than out of hearts that really understand what we should be doing and why.

Do you track with that?

**2.** Most of what happens on Sunday mornings in our churches happens because that's the way we have done it and we have let tradition carry the load for us.

Now please hear me carefully, I highly value tradition but I do not believe that tradition should ever be the primary motivation for Christian life and worship, human tradition as valuable as it is must never be held as the final authority, human tradition must always be held in such a way that it can be tested and examined in light of what this book (the Bible) teaches and if our traditions fail that test and examination then they must be changed or replaced.

Now if our traditions of worship have served the church well for decades and even centuries then certainly we should not be quick to toss them out in favour of something new. You know we have this thing called chronological snobbery where what is new is better than what is old, our world tells us this repeatedly day in and day out, that's not true. Not everything that is new is better than what is old. There are some things that I knew that are good and they might be better but the test hasn't happened yet the test will come when they become old and then we will find out if they were true or not, okay.

So traditions are not something we just toss out quickly or easily but that doesn't mean that we cease to evaluate those traditions in light of what God's word teaches and this also means that every generation

must come to understand why and how our traditions have been developed and Brother Chester is helping us with that this week and telling us of some of the stories about how we or our cousins got here. Every generation though must wrestle with these things and come to an understanding, my concern is that we have relied on tradition to carry us along so long that now many of our people do not even know why we worship in ways that we do beyond the lame reason of well that's just the way we have always done it!

Now in the age in which we live that answer will not be adequate to prevent us from moving into worship and into traditions that might be unacceptable to God, our traditions will certainly not be enough to protect and guide us in making right and good changes by design rather changes will end up happening due to popular pressure or fads, in fact this is already happening in many churches, it's happened by and large in many evangelical churches, new forms and sometimes even new elements of worship have been brought into previously conservative and traditional churches and most of the time these changes have been made with only token consideration to what God desires, most of the time these changes are made with view to what we desire or makes us feel spiritual or what makes us feel inspired or what makes us feel like we have some kind of experience or what might attract certain people to our church, we will change our worship practices so that those people will feel at home and welcome and will attract them in.

There is all kinds of motivations for changing our worship practices but many times those motivations are not primarily what does God think and what does God want and what does God say.

And we as modern day Anabaptists are not alone in our need for this exercise, as I have suggested other faith traditions have wrestled with these things and are wrestling with these things, and furthermore God's people have a long history in dealing with these issue this is not something new.

As a matter of fact you can go back to the first couple of chapters of Genesis and you can find a problem with worship practices, it happened with Cain and Abel, and we will look at that some more later this week.

This has been a divisive issue and indeed in many cases the modern day disagreements over worship are referred to as the worship wars, churches have split and splintered and people have been lost to the faith because of these kinds of disagreements about how we are going to worship.

How tragic, how ironic that the primary activity of the Christian life should be talked about in terms of war.

**3.** So let's define some terms before we further tonight we are going to look at what are we talking about when we talk about worship.

The English word worship comes from the old English worth – ship, the worth of something or someone, it literally means to ascribe value, and when relating to God we acknowledge that God is of ultimate worth, we talk about God being worthy of our praise and Psalm 96 says it very well;

Psalm 96:7-9 Ascribe (or give value) to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! <sup>8</sup> Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!

<sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!

We are called to value or ascribe value to the Lord because of who He is, we give honour to him, we declare is worth or his worthiness.

But that does not completely describe what the Bible talks about when it is talking about worship.

The idea of worship is bigger than a simple declaration of value, so when we say that we value we like a certain kind of pizza, we ascribe value to it, we ascribe its taste and its texture and all these things, that is not necessarily worship although we could probably worship pizza if we had a mind to but worship is bigger than that.

There is another word in the Bible that should help us to understand worship and that is the word glory.

The words glory or glorify are often used interchangeably with worship when speaking about our response to God and they are similar in meaning. The Greek word from which we get our word glory is a word transliterated doxah, and doxah originally meant in the verb form to appear or to seem and the noun came to mean an opinion or a belief, the way something seemed to an observer.

So from this word we get words like orthodox meaning the correct opinion or the correct belief.

We have words like heterodox which means a different or conflicting incorrect kind of opinion.

And we have paradox which means two seemingly intractable opinions we cannot make sense of.

In general usage the word doxah came to mean a right and good opinion about some great person and so in this way kings were said to possess glory, they were said to possess doxah and they were to be glorified.

This is why Psalm 24 speaks of God as the King of glory meaning that He is the most He is the most right, He seems He appears to be the best, He has more doxah He has more glory, He has more bright and good opinions than any other person or any other king.

Listen to Psalm 24:7-10:

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. <sup>8</sup> Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! <sup>9</sup> Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. <sup>10</sup> Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah

You can see how this concept of glory relates to worship, we glorify that is we give the right opinion about God as we worship, this is something similar to ascribing value but it is more complex it has a different emphasis, the emphasis here is more on a right or correct value, not just that He has value but glory has this idea of the correct opinion, the correct value of God.

So if we falsely represent God, if we ascribe value to him but that value is not correct we are not really worshipping him we are not glorifying him and this is very key to our understanding of worship because you see we can do all kinds of things in worship and say that we are worshipping God but unless we are ascribing the correct value to God, unless we are giving the right opinion of God we are not worshipping God.

The true worship of God is that which gives the right opinion about God.

It is about ascribing value but it is about ascribing the correct value.

But biblically speaking worship is more than just about ascribing value to God or having or demonstrating the right opinion about God biblical worship involves us, it changes us.

**4.** Now there's a couple of basic ways that the worship of God involves us and changes us and this is not exhaustive there are other ways but here are a couple of basic ones:

One of the primary aspects of worship that we find repeatedly in the Old and New Testaments is the aspect of surrender, the words used in the Bible for worship often literally have some idea of falling down on our faces before God, to bow down to prostrate ourselves before a holy God and often when the Bible describes God's people in acts of worship it includes this matter of bowing down. In Nehemiah chapter 8 it says and Ezra blessed the Lord, the Great God, and all the people answered amen, amen, lifting up their hands and they bowed their heads and worship the Lord with their faces toward the ground.

Now here is an action of worship.

By humbling ourselves and by bowing down we acknowledge that God is superior to us, when we do this we are demonstrating, physically demonstrating, not only that God is superior to us but also that we are willing to hear and obey.

The words of the boy Samuel say it well, Speak Lord for your servant is listening.

Would that be our response of worship, Speak Lord, your servant is listening.

When we worship God we come, we must come with an attitude of surrender and a realisation that He is the Master and we are the servants.

In our corporate worship experience when we come together as God's people we should be doing this, we should be experiencing this, we should be having this posture of worship, when we hear the Word of God

proclaimed through preaching and teaching we should be surrendering ourselves to God and listening, expectantly listening for his instructions to us – this is worship.

Another aspect of worship along with the bowing down often came a spoken proclamation of God is worth, of God's value, we ascribe glory to God through our speaking to him and about him to others. The Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 we bless God.

When is the last time you blessed God?

The Greek word their translated bless is the same word from which we get our English word eulogy or to eulogise, or to say good things about. You know when you go to funeral and there is a eulogy what are they doing? They are talking about the person who has gone on and they are saying all the good stuff about them.

We are to bless God we are to eulogise God and say these things about God that are good and true, we are to make him look good.

Again this goes back to that doxah word to glorify him is to make him look good, to give the right impression of who God is.

In the book of Revelation we see this exercise of bowing down and we see this followed immediately by a proclamation of God's glory, listen to Revelation chapter 7 verses 9 to 12.

Revelation 7:9-12

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"<sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,<sup>12</sup> saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

They fell on their faces and said.

There is this matter of proclamation, proclaiming God's glory and greatness, we are called to do this in our worship on this side of heaven as well, we are in Psalm 96 called to declare his glory to the nations, his salvation to all the world.

This should be happening in our everyday lives obviously as well is in our corporate lives as a church, and when you sing together with the congregation on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night, when you give testimony, when you teach a class, you must be about the business about proclaiming the goodness and worthiness and glory of God, when you are involved in missions and evangelism you are to be declaring the glory of God and telling of his salvation – this is worship.

**5.** But the worship of God is not complete until it results in actions and deeds.

Surely the bowing down and the proclaiming are actions of worship but the Bible shows us time and time again that true worship results in a life that serves and gives.

Romans 12:1, you know it very well, I appeal to you brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

In fact our bodies themselves are to be used to worship or glorify God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,<sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Now we as Mennonites and Amish Mennonites we don't do too well with this. You go visit some churches where the people have darker skin you will understand what it means to glorify God in your body. It's a beautiful thing, it is part of their DNA.

No I'm serious, I have a niece who is adopted and she was adopted at birth by my sister and she was not even two years old and when the music would start to play she would start to dance, nobody had to teach her,, nobody ever modelled that for her, nobody ever instructed her she did it okay.

There is something there I'm telling you it is biological.

Now the characteristic of our life as followers of God is to be that of service and of sacrifice so that God receives the glory due his name and the examples in Scripture of bowing down in the examples of proclamation are often quickly followed by offering and sacrifice, here is one example, Matthew chapter 2 verse 11: And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. And then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

In the earlier text of already reference from Psalm 96 where we ascribe to the Lord this glory due his name we bring an offering and we come into his courts, we worship the Lord in the splendour of holiness, tremble before him all the earth.

The responsibility that came with coming before a king was to bring gifts to bring offerings for the King, it would be unheard of for you to approach the King, the throne of the King, without bringing something of value in recognition of him and his glory.

Now in worship we are to be putting into action what we have been saying by our posture at least the posture of our hearts in bowing down in surrender and proclaiming and this means that in our worship we need to give God of our time and resources, by doing this we ascribe value to him, we demonstrate how much we value God by how much we are willing to give. When you give in the offering at church you are worshipping, you should be putting into action what you have been saying about God, what you have been proclaiming about God. As the old saying goes put your money where your mouth is.

Is God really trustworthy? Is God really sovereign? Does He really provide for you?

If He does, if He is, then you should be able to freely give and not worry about where the next dollar comes from.

But why do we cling so tightly to our stuff, why is there this little thread that runs from our wallets to our hearts, from our pocketbook to our heart? It is because we don't really trust God, we don't really trust him, we say we do but talk is cheap the offering tells the real story.

So is God worth everything to you? Then give accordingly as a demonstration of that reality.

You know the offering is probably one of the most important aspects of our corporate worship because it tends to reveal the reality of our hearts in ways that other aspects of worship do not, it really does get to us and it gets right down to the heart of us.

You see talk is cheap, singing can be done mechanically with no real worship taking place, but when it comes time to give our money this is not something that comes as easy and yet sadly we typically pay very little attention to this exercise of worship in our churches – unless we need more money and then we will get up and beg and plead and cajole and make all kinds of threats and promises whatever it takes. But most times it seems like the offering becomes something we try to do and get it out of the way so we can get on with the real worship it is a necessary evil to us but that is not the way the Bible sees it, the Bible sees it as necessary to worship.

But worship through service and sacrifice doesn't always mean money.

In our Sunday morning services in our church services the ushers worship God by serving the congregation, the Sunday school teachers, the pastors, the song leaders, they serve God they worship God by serving us this too is worship. When we serve others out of a heart that understands and values God and ascribe value to God and his goodness then we are worshipping God.

Now the danger here is that sometimes we serve and give out of a desire to be recognised, some of us have been talking about that this afternoon already, sometimes our motives are not pure, if this is the case, if we serve, if we give out of a desire to be recognised then we are still worshipping, we are still worshipping only problem is we are worshipping the wrong person.

We will look at that problem as we conclude here tonight.

We see that true biblical worship consists of a heart of surrender to God, a willingness to listen to what He says, a willingness to obey, it also includes a declaration of praise to God and about God and finally it must result in a changed life that is evident through acts of sacrificial giving and service.

That is the summation of what worship is.

Let me read it again: We see that true biblical worship consists of a heart of surrender to God and a willingness to listen to what He says, it also includes a declaration of praise to God and about God and finally it must result in a change life that is evident through acts of sacrificial giving and service.

6. But let's back up just a minute and examine how worship interacts with us.

We were created to be worshippers, Isaiah 43, I will say to the north give up and to the south do not withhold, bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by my name whom I created for my glory whom I formed and made.

God made us to be worshippers, that's who we are, that is who we have been designed to be, God created us for the purpose of his glory and in one way or the other we will respond to the Creator's revelation.

Worship whether true or false is the natural instinct of the human heart, we were made to worship, it is something that we all do, all people do, this is not optional, this is an instinctive part of what it means to be you and, worship is our natural response to that which is good and that which is right or that which we enjoy.

When your wife or your mother brings a fresh pan of brownies out of the oven and you walk into the room and smell that and you reach over there and grab one of those succulent morsels and you take a bite what happens? There is an expression of delight, okay. It's just a natural response, wow, this is some good brownies!

When we have an experience, when we have an experience that brings us joy and delight we respond. Well some of us respond in more measured ways than others but we respond it is a part of who we are as humans.

When we come into contact with the God of all the universe what should our response be?  
Who or what are we worshipping?

You see because in our natural state we are fallen sinners and we have tended to corrupt this God given purpose of worship and we have turned ourselves into the objects of worship many times, we tend to worship something or someone other than God it is a part of our rebellion against God, Romans one describes this very well, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For word can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown to them. And then it has a list of all his good deeds, it says so they are without excuse for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became false and exchange the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Romans 1:18-23.

One of the saddest, saddest passages of Scripture.

God has revealed himself and man has wilfully rebelliously worship something else, something lesser, something infinitely lesser.

God has revealed himself so that men are without excuse but even though fallen mankind and those about God he refuses to worship him, instead mankind is continually given to exchanging the glory of the immortal God for lesser gods most notably ourselves, mortal man.

The glory of immortal God exchanging that for the glory of mortal man and even beasts and birds and creeping things.

As John Calvin famously described the problem he said that the human heart is a perpetual factory of idols.

Everyone of us from his mother's womb is an expert in inventing idols because we are worshippers.

Let me illustrate this by asking you some personal questions as we close the night, I want you to be honest with yourself.

What compels you to come to church to worship?

Why are you here on Sunday mornings? Now be honest, why are you here?

What are you thinking about when you come to church, on your way to church?

What are you hoping to achieve by coming to church?

Are you coming because you are expected to because if you don't people will notice and then they will make phone calls and ask you questions.

Do you come because it looks better if you do?

Do you come because it's a habit it's just what you do on Sunday mornings?

Do you come because you want to get a little bit of an emotional pick me up, a kind of weekly shot of feel good?

Do you come to see your friends and enjoy some stimulating conversation?

I think if we are honest with ourselves most of us probably come to church for some of those reasons, at least some of the time.

Are those the right motivations for coming to church?

Doesn't that seem pretty self-centred, where is God in all of this? Who is the God in all of this?

The problem is we find it very difficult to truly worship God, there is something in us it is called sin that would rather we be the ones on the throne, submitting ourselves to the will of another just doesn't come very naturally we like to be self-sufficient, we like to be in control, we want to be free to do what we want but God calls us to something different, God calls us to be dependent on him to be under his control to be ready to do whatever He calls us to do.

Now we often find a little bit of this attitude when people complain about worship when people say things like that worship service didn't do anything for me or I didn't get much out of that sermon.

What they may be revealing is the fact that they might be focused on the benefits that they receive from worship, and trust me there are benefits, but they are focused on those benefits rather than focusing on God's and what He expects and requires.

In the very ultimate sense worship is not about us, yes it does affect us, yes we are involved, yes we participate, yes we act and react but ultimately worship is about God – it must all be about God.

In order to worship the way God expects it is important that we get this right, if we are going to bow before the Lord we must deal with this question of who sits on the throne, we must confess our attempts to be our own little god, we must surrender the throne of our hearts to the One who alone is worthy of our worship.

A quote yet from Loui Giglio, "Everybody has an altar, everybody has an altar and every altar has a throne. So how do you know where and what you worship? It is easy, you simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money and your loyalty. At the end of that trail you will find a throne and whatever or whomever is on the throne is what is of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship."<sup>1</sup>

I have a good friend of mine who says if you give me your calendar and your cheque-book I will tell you who you worship.

So who do you worship?

Let's pray.

Father in heaven we thank you for our time together here this evening, we thank you that you are a God worthy of all our praise, you are God worthy of all our devotion and we want to give you the honour due your name, we want to give you the glory due your name.

Help us as we go through this week help us to be freshly reminded of who you are and of our need and yes even your demand to be worshipped rightly.

Father we confess this is not something that comes easy for us it is not something that comes naturally for us and so we need your power, we need your grace, we need the presence of your Holy Spirit to move among us and to move in us to motivate us to right worship of you.

Guide us to that end we pray in Jesus name, amen.

*Transcriber's Notes:*

**1]** *Louie Giglio is the pastor of Passion City Church, located in Atlanta, Georgia. He is also a public speaker, author, and the founder of the Passion Movement.*

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