

What is the worship that is pleasing to God?

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Of utmost importance is to understand what is meant by the word “worship.” The primary word translated “worship” in the New Testament is the Greek word *proskuneo*. Literally, it means “to kiss toward.” Practically, it means “to give reverence to, pay homage, make obeisance, prostrate oneself.” Therefore, all worship requires making God the focal point of all one’s actions and intentions. Worship is not designed to entertain men, neither is it designed to appeal to “the unchurched.” It is designed to honor and glorify God.

John 4:24 is a key verse in this study: “God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Let’s look at this verse more closely and identify its component parts.

“God” – the AUDIENCE of worship. Too many people think those sitting in the pews are the audience. When real worship is being done, every audience member is seeking to please God by their worship.

“They that worship him” – the ACTORS of worship. I use the

word “actors” not in the movie sense of someone playing a role different from who they are, but because worship requires action. Therefore, those who provide the actions of worship are the actors. Again, every member present is worshipping God, not seeking to be entertained by others. Too much of what is called worship today is nothing more than wholesome entertainment designed to appeal to man. While wholesome entertainment is good, it is not worship.

“Must worship him” – the ABSOLUTE of worship. The word “must” shows an absolute. That is, there is no room for change, bargaining, or such like. When I tell my children “you must ” that settles the matter. When God uses the word “must” in respect to worship, then whatever God says is to be followed without addition, subtraction, or alteration of any kind.

“In spirit” – the ATTITUDE of worship. The spirit here refers to the inner man – his thoughts, intentions, emotions, and desires. Worship must be heart-felt, else it is empty and vain. We should desire to worship God because of all He has done for us. David said, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘let us go into the house of the Lord’” (Psalm 122:1). **Psalm 100 indicates the state of mind we should have when entering into worship:**

“Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”

“In truth” – the ACTION of worship. As we noted

earlier, worship must be heartfelt, else it is in vain. However, sincerity and gladness of heart are not sufficient in and of themselves to validate worship. There must also be the proper action. God's word is truth (John 17:17). Thus, to worship in truth is to worship according to the word of God. All things are to be done in the name of (i.e., by the authority of), Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Jesus once condemned the worship of the Jews on two counts, saying, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:7-9). The two condemnations are (1) the failure to engage their hearts in worship. (2) worshipping according to the doctrine of man and not according to the word of God.

Note that "in spirit" is joined to "in truth" by a coordinating conjunction (John 4:24). Therefore, both aspects are subject to the absolute of worship. Worship "in spirit" (right attitude) but not "in truth" (right action) is vain. Likewise, worship in truth (right action) without the proper spirit (attitude) is also in vain. The absence of either one negates the entire effort.

There are five acts of worship found in the church of the New Testament. They are:

- 1) observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:18-34);
- 2) giving as prospered each first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7);
- 3) prayer to God the Father (Acts 2:42, 12:5);
- 4) preaching of the Word (Acts 20:7-12);

5) singing (Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:15).