

# Worship

By Mike Burnham

***The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. – Revelation 4:10-11.***

Many churches have not been very much concerned with worship even though one of the primary functions of the church to provide the opportunity for public worship. In many churches the Sunday morning event is considered a "preaching service" in spite of the fact that the official title in the bulletin reads "morning worship." think about the phrase "worship service." Is your reaction "Oh, that's Sunday morning at eleven. That's mainly for the lost when the preacher preaches a salvation message?" For some people the phrase "worship service" serves only as a means to distinguish the Sunday morning service from the Sunday evening and from the Wednesday evening services.

Viewing the preaching as significantly more important than the entire congregation's acts of adoration, praise, confession, thanksgiving, and dedication, is robbing many churches of the worship services spirituality. Actually, preaching as central to worship came with the reformation. What is central in Christian worship is the presence of the triune God, who through his word and by his Holy Spirit, enlivens, enlightens, and enables all who believe, in order that they may worship -- serve him in spirit and in truth. Churches have been negligent in giving their first, best love to God himself -- which is what worship is essentially about. A worship service does not happen merely because a certain time period in the church schedule is labeled that way. It is

not following traditions; it does take work and planning on the part of the church and individuals, which we'll get into at the end of the study.

Most believers everywhere are losing interest in merely going through the motions at church. They want to know God more deeply and to learn to worship him more fully and to enjoy the privilege of fellowship with him. Our worshipping relationship with God is of the highest priority, Psalms 29:2. Ordinarily we don't think of holiness as being "beautiful", but if we could fix in our minds God's holiness -- high, lifted up, exalted, and yet, precious, gracious, loving, kind, merciful, patient, tender, faithful, and just, we may begin to appreciate the "beauty of holiness." Are they not beautiful characteristics? God is beautiful because he is holy, (2 Chr. 20:21). When we come to God in worship having these things in our lives toward others, we are worshipping in the "beauty of holiness", because we are acknowledging his nature within us.

Our prime reason for attendance at the house of God should be to worship and glorify God -- to show our love, our devotion, our honor and respect to him, his work, and his word. Our songs, our prayers, and our presence should be primarily for his worship and praise. Ephesians 3:21 tells us that the church is to give glory to God throughout all ages. Though God receives glory in the church in many ways, worship brings him the most glory. Worship is also indicated as our primary activity in the heavenly ages to come Rev. 7:9-12. I pray that God will use this study to help you and me more completely to love God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind as we learn to worship God in spirit and truth.

The object of worship is not to gain favor, which is unnecessary, nor to satisfy God, which has been done "once for all", nor in any way "serving" the

God who "needeth not to be worshipped with men's hands (Acts 17:25), but it is the loving attempt to pay our unpayable debt of love. But love is not the primary reason we are motivated to worship God. It is his holiness. Because God is holy he is worthy, Rev. 4:8-11.

"Worship" is derived from an old English term "weorthscipe". It was latter written "worschipe", then "worthship", and now "worship". It means "to attribute worth". When we worship God, we are declaring his supreme worthiness, Rev. 5:9-12. We can see from these verses that worship is an active response to God whereby we declare his worth. Worship is not passive, but is participative. Worship is not simply a mood; it is a response. Worship is not just a feeling; it is a declaration. To know his worth requires knowledge so the shortest route to deeper and richer worship is a clearer and fuller knowledge of God. This is what theology is, the study of God. So, the better our theology; the better our worship.

Because of the transcendence of God, who he is and how great he is, we attribute to him the glory that is due his name, Psalms 96:1-9. "Glory" is his greatness revealed in a display of his attributes. "Glory to his name" is the revelation of who he is, given to us through the revelation of his word. Glory in verse 3 refers to his greatness revealed in his works -- verses 3,4 & 5. Glory in v. 7 & 8 refer to who God is as revealed in both the living and written word -- v. 6-9. True worship reflects this knowledge back to him in love, fear or awe, adoration, praise and thanksgiving. Glory is what God essentially is and does, as exhibited or displayed in whatever way he reveals himself, in creation, in his written word, and particularly in the person of his son, in whom his glory has shown forth unto us, Heb. 1:2,3. There is also a glory that we are to give to God -- 1 Cor. 6:20. When the attributes of God that are communicated to us by the Holy Spirit are revealed in our lives and attributed

to him, he is glorified, Paul said; "by the grace of God, I am what I am."  
"Beauty of holiness" means -- "in spirit and in truth" with a pure heart and a holy life. A life that is not only morally pure but different in a special way and higher than natural man.

## **Celebrate Him**

What is the essence or the most important element of worship? It is the celebration of God! We exalt him, we sound his praises, we boast in him. We celebrate the fourth of July, thanksgiving, birthdays, etc., in worship we celebrate God, who he is and what he has done, is doing, and will do. One of the grand calls for celebrative worship is found in Psalms 100.

Worship is not the mumbling of prayers or the mouthing of hymns with little thought and less heart. We celebrate God when we join together earnestly in prayer and intensely in song. Worship is not grudging gifts or compulsory service; we celebrate God when we give to him hilariously and serve him with honesty and willingness. Worship is not a distracted endurance of the sermon; we celebrate God as we hear his word gladly and seek to be conformed by it more and more to the image of our savior. As a thoughtful gift is a celebration of a birthday, as a special evening out is a celebration of an anniversary, as a loving embrace is a celebration of a marriage -- so a worship service is a celebration of God. It's a special occasion.

The worship services of the Jews were anything but dull. The Hebrew people were not afraid of exuberance, of outward expressions of what they felt within. They looked forward to their religious gathering with eager anticipation, as the following Psalms demonstrate; Psalms 100:1,2,4; 150:3-5; 122:1; 95:1-7

Words of adoration (honor highly, love greatly), praise, thanksgiving ought to flow God ward in our church services. They should come forth in our singing and our praying as the natural expression of our high regard, of our respect, of our reverence for our God. Joyous praise and adoration played a predominate role in the worship services of the Hebrews, and it ought to do so today. The psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what we all do when we speak of what we care about or value most. Like a virtuous wife (Prov.31) or a new sports car. "Praise" means: to "rave about," "to boast of," "to applaud," "to celebrate". Praising God should be a priority in our lives. Why? We glorify him when we praise him, Psalms 50:23; he is worthy to be praised, 2 Sam. 22:4; it is good, pleasant, suitable, and beautiful. The early church did and we should follow their example, Acts 2:46,47. It is one of the reasons we were chosen, 1 Peter 2:9; Heb. 13:15; Psalms 146:1-2. We should not be afraid to express the depths of our feelings as we worship God. How often should we praise him? Psalms 113:3. What do we say when we praise him? Psalms 105:1-5; 106:1.

## **John 4:23,24**

There are three great "**musts**" in John's gospel -- 3:7, 14; 4:23,24. These three great "musts" are -- the necessity for the new birth, the necessity of Christ's death, and the necessity of true worship belong together.

John 4 is the major passage in which John deals with the nature and necessity of worship, for of the thirteen uses of the words "worship" or "worshipper" in John's gospel, ten of them occur in this section, and it is only here that worship is actually defined. Jesus said; "those who acknowledge God's true worth must do so in spirit and in truth." they must do so "in truth"

because truth has to do with what his nature is. We are to approach God truthfully, that is, honestly. This is what Jesus is talking about in Matt. 15:8,9. No worship is acceptable unless it comes honestly from the heart, not hypocritically.

Second, we must worship him on the basis of his word. John 17:17 says "thy word is truth." it is through his word that we have revealed to us his worth. It's in his word, both the living and the written, that we are given a true perspective of God.

Third, we are to approach and worship God "in Christ," Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the truth." The necessity of the new birth, which is spiritual, and the necessity of looking to Christ on the cross, are both essential before one can worship in spirit and in truth. Only the spirit of man possesses the capacity of honoring, praising, thanking, and loving the living God, 1 Cor. 2:11-14; our spirit is our link to God, Rom. 1:9; 8:16. It is the seat of intelligence and reason in the things of God, Job 32:8. Only the spirit of man can commune with God who is spirit, Prov.20:27. Only in the spirit can we understand and move from forms and shadows to realities; from the sensuous to the spiritual; from the outward to the inward; from the earthly to the heavenly. Col. 3:1,2; 2 Cor. 4:17,18. The spirit and the soul are not the same, 1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12. It is the spirit that lifts man above all else in God's creation, Zech. 12:1, the formation of the human spirit is as great a work as stretching forth the heavens and the creation of the earth.

Truth is reality as perceived by God. Reality is the difference between that which is temporal and that which is eternal, that which the natural man thinks is good for him and that which in truth is good for him, that which the natural man deems important, profitable or valuable and that which is in reality

important, profitable or valuable, that which natural man thinks is right or true and that which is really right or true. Only the spirit can discern between these things, 1 Cor. 2:14,15; Prov. 14:12; 16:2,8,16,25; 21:2.

Verse 21 . . . Jesus is teaching that in the age he is bringing in by his death and resurrection the place of worship would not matter, for a man or a woman would not worship merely by being in the right place and doing the right things at a certain time. He or she would worship in his spirit, which "must" be born again, which could be anywhere.

Many people still worship with the body. They consider themselves to have worshipped if they go to a building (the right place) and sing songs and listen to the preaching (doing the right things at a certain time). There have been devised by men's ingenuity and superstition many methods by which it has been thought worship might be acceptably offered, like body posture, rites, ceremonies, painful pilgrimages, and cruel sacrifices. But these things are brought about by superstition and/or emotions. Worship is spiritual, not physical, though it leads to physical expression.

Worship is not feeling, for worship does not originate in the soul or the body. The soul is the seat of our soulish emotions and they may be stirred in real worship but it is possible to be moved by a song or a story and yet not come to a genuine awareness of God and a fuller praise of his ways and nature. Sometimes we come up with real tear-jerkers because we want a response from those listening. But these tear-jerkers are man-made responses and are often times generated in the soul not by the spirit of God and are not genuine. True worship begins in the spirit, influences the soul and then expresses or releases itself in emotion, voice and bodily posture, in love, awe, praise, and kneeling or bowing down before him. We worship God, not

because we feel like it, but because he is God and worship is due Him and is our necessity.

C. R. Lewis wrote; "as long as you notice, and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance." A good shoe is a shoe you don't notice. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of, where time stood still or seemed to pass without being noticed, because our attention would have been on God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

God actively seeks those who relate to him from the inner man, from the heart. Look at Exodus 4:31 . . . why did the people worship God? They "believed." Worship in the Old Testament means to "bow down." It is the outward expression of inward adoration, reverence, and thanksgiving.

## **Who comes to worship?**

The lack of worship in our churches is a symptom. The lack of true worshippers is the root of the problem. One of the problems is ignorance, the church is not taught about worship, its importance to and in their lives, and how to worship. But the main problem is the individual church member. It needs to be realized that heart worship is a style of life. It is not for Sunday morning only, but should be a part of our everyday lives. We need to renew our relationship to God and to each other. If we could develop in our churches - (1. A renewed reverence for God, Psalms 89:6,7; (2. A practice of the presence of God, Prov. 15:3; Psalms 46:1 and, (3, a deepened sense of fellowship with God, 1 Jn. 1:3; worship would be greatly improved.



Making changes in the structure of the service itself is just an attempt at dealing with the symptom and not with the heart. It is we who need the changes.

In our day we have become better at hearing than doing the word. To hear the word is to receive it, to do the word is to respond to that which we have heard! Worship means to respond to God. If we fail to respond, worship has probably not occurred.

In the worship service we give him our attention as he speaks to us, we give him our praise and adoration, we give him our offerings and also of our service in ministry and then we carry this out and incorporate it in our everyday lives still giving to him because he is worthy. Also, worship is becoming like God in our body, emotions, mind, and will. The worship service allows us to exercise every part of ourselves, in order that our bodies might be God's temple, that our spirit might be moved by his spirit, that our mind might be the mind of Christ, and that our will might be one with the will of God.

## **Glory in his name**

Who comes to worship God? One who has listened to the words of the poets and prophets concerning the indescribable glory, majesty, and wonder of our God. Look at these Psalms on respect, reverence, and awe for the holy name of God. Psalms 8:9; 29:1,2; 47:2; 104:1; 111:9; 96:8; Exo. 20:7; Deut. 5:11; Rev..15:4;

Attitudes of reverence for God are difficult to find today. Young people speak of parents as "the old man" or "the old lady;" police are "the fuzz," "pigs;" -- and God is the "good buddy" or "the man upstairs." Saturday night

on TV, I heard God called "big guy." Worship will only happen when a people gather together and recapture, as the principal element in worship, the overwhelming sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God.

## **Heaven came down**

The Old and New Testament passages of theophany (an appearance of God) and epiphany (a coming down of God) can be used to reshape and redirect our sometimes belittling views of God. A theophany is seen in Joshua 5:13-15. God presented himself as an irresistible warrior immediately preceding the conquest of Jericho. (These appearances of God in human or angelic form are occasionally called "Christophanies" since no man has seen God the father at any time, John 1:18). Psalms 18 gives a vivid example of the majesty and might of God in epiphany. Verses 7-15 describe God's wrathful descent to this earth. The words poets use in such contexts as this often include "clouds, thunder, and darkness."

Verses 7,8 . . . these words of terror and devastation are occasioned as responds to the prayer of a believer that is truly overcome! It is in response to David's prayer, verse 6.

Verses 9-16 . . . the awesome majesty and terrifying wrath of God described in Psalms 18 in poetic language exists to demonstrate that God will turn the earth upside down, if need be, to meet the needs of his people.

Then we have visions that certainly give an awe inspiring picture of God that indicate that he is not one to be trifled with: Daniel 7:9,10; Ezekiel 1:26-28.

Who will come and worship God? Those who know God as revealed in his word and no longer wish to be cheap or silly or trivial in their responses to him, but respond with the respect, awe, reverence due his name. Heb. 12:28,29 . . . "serve" = "worship, "reverence" = shame, modesty, "Godly fear" = with extreme caution. Why? Verse 29. *"For our God is a consuming fire."*

## **Practice His presence**

Who is that person who comes to worship God? (It is) that man or woman who holds him in reverence and practices the presence of God in private moments. They know him in daily living. Proverbs 3:5,6 . . . the verb translated "acknowledge" is a word that speaks of knowing actively the presence of God. We are to be conscious of God's presence no matter where we are or what we are doing, Proverbs 15:3. By stressing individual worship, I am not implying that congregational worship is thereby unnecessary. The fact that some believers do not come to church to worship God is not a new problem. In the early church there were already some who believed they could be sufficient before God in and of themselves. To such ones then and now is Hebrews 10:25 addressed. We need each other as we worship God. It is in the flow of people interacting that worship will be broadened. We are responsible to God as individuals, but we worship him best together. When we come together to worship God, we do so as a family. We come as brothers and sisters, mutually to stimulate one another, Heb. 10:24.

## **Renewing the worship service**

A meeting called a worship service ought to draw primary attention to the person and praise of God. Well-planned congregational involvement, 1 Tim. 4:13; and all music should be God-ward, Col.3:16.

There are four fundamental principles basic to dynamic worship.

1. Will this worship service glorify God?
2. Will this worship service be Christ-centered?
3. Will this worship service edify believers?
4. Will this worship service appeal to visitors?

A good example of dynamic worship is in 1 Chronicles 16. There, King David is bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem. David wanted to establish Jerusalem as the center of civil and spiritual life for the Israelites. To accomplish this, he decided to locate the palace and the Ark of the Covenant in that city. The ark served as a focal point of faith for the Israelites. It was a symbol of God's presence in their midst.

A great celebration took place as the ark arrived in Jerusalem. It was a festive time. There was a great procession, marked by choirs, instrumental music and an excited king dancing before the Lord. To Asaph, the choir director, David gave a song of praise to God that was to be part of the worship celebration. It is clear that David's goal that day was to glorify God. Look particularly at verses 8-11, 23-25, 28-29.

David wanted everyone present to know that God was powerful, wonderful, and marvelous. He sang of his mighty acts and glorious deeds. He declared the Lord's strength and ascribed glory to his name. David desired all nations and people to know that "the lord is great and most worthy of praise." The focal point of the entire worship celebration was "bringing glory to Almighty God." All worship services should seek to bring glory to God.

Hymns of praise should be an important part of the worship service. Songs and choruses need to be carefully selected, focusing on the nature and glory of God. Our singing, should not only be *about* God but *to* God. When believers lift their voices to God in sincere adoration, it seems to unleash power and excitement. Such singing should characterize the first moments of the service, setting the tone for the people as they gather in Christ's name. The Hebrew people were often quite loud in their praise of God. In Psalms 66:1, the words "joyful noise" means "to split the ears with sound," to shout, also see Psalms 47:1,2. "Triumph" means "loudness." In Psalms 89:15, "joyful sound" is a festal shout or battle cry" we get our word "jubilation" from the Latin translation of these Hebrew words.

Earlier I mentioned kneeling. Worshipping God with our bodies is important. Our whole being should be involved in our worship of God. In many churches we are not ready to use our bodies in worship. Fearing "charismania", believers are encouraged to remain as reserved as possible in their expressions of praise. Clapping, lifting hands, or body motion of any kind is almost taboo. This is unfortunate. Why? First, because body language is recognized as a powerful means of communication. Second, restricting bodily responses can be stifling to some worshippers, just as demanding outward expressions of praise would be threatening to others. Third, and most

important, closing the door to clapping, lifting hands or other types of body movement is not consistent with scriptural practices of worship.

One way scripture talks about using our bodies in worship is through lifting hands in praise; Psalms 141:1,2; 63:2-5; 28:2; 134:1,2; Neh. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:8. The lifting of the hands symbolizes "surrender."

Another way scripture talks about using our bodies is the word "worship" itself. In the Old Testament the word means "to make oneself prostrate, to make yourselves to lie prostrate," before the Lord. The act of bowing, kneeling, or prostrating oneself is an outward expression of an inward attitude of gratitude, submission, and humility.

Psalms 95:6 . . . worship is an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty and supremacy; bowing down is an humble attitude and acknowledgment of him as Lord or master in all things, including our lives; to kneel shows submission to his will. Other scriptures; Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5; Dan. 6:10; Ezra 9:5; 2 Chronicles 6:13,14.

Philippians 2:10-11 . . . one day, all people everywhere shall kneel before the Lord of glory. See Rom. 10:11. The question really is not "shall we kneel or not in our worship of God and of his Christ?" We shall one day all kneel. The question is, "shall we who will kneel in the future, kneel now as well?"

## **Worship must be sensible**

Worship services should maintain a balance between solemnity and celebration. There are times of praise and rejoicing and loud voices and there are times of repentance, confession, commitment, forgiveness, and thinking

about the needs of others. We are **not** trying to generate an emotional high, but a genuine heartfelt joy and gladness; while maintaining genuine reverence and awe of our great and majestic God who loves us. Such gives God glory and edifies the body of Christ. Worship that is generated from hearts surrendered to Jesus Christ will always be sensible and glorifying. The heart is important, Deut. 6:5-6; 1 Sam. 16:7; Psalms 51:10;73:26; Prov. 4:23. Jesus referred to the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs, appearing clean and attractive, yet inwardly lifeless and decaying. He made it clear that God neither accepted nor condoned outward piety absent of inner purity.

It is helpful to the congregation to regularly include time for confession in the worship service, a time for quiet confrontation before God. Believers often approach worship with sin in their hearts and sin will block the Spirit's flow, hindering genuine worship; preferably early in the service.

## **Worship must be Spirit-filled**

If the Holy Spirit withdrew from your worship service, would people notice? Or would the service go on much the same? If our worship services are to glorify God, they must be Spirit-led, Spirit-empowered, and Spirit-filled. It is the Holy Spirit who will ultimately work in worship to convince, convict, confirm, and commit people before Almighty God. Pastors and church leaders must seek the Spirit's anointing on their planning and preparation of worship services. The Spirit of God is like the wind, we don't see him move, we don't know who he is moving upon, but we can see the effects of his work as we can see the trees bend in the breeze. A Spirit-filled worship service will be known by its fruit.

I wish I could give you a one-two-three formula for spirit-filled worship or a spirit-filled life, but I can't. If there is one I haven't found it. But there are some steps we can take.

1. Worship leaders and pastors must diligently pray for God to fill their services with the Spirit's power, Luke 11:9-13. A Saturday evening prayer meeting is a good start.

2. Take Paul's admonition in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 seriously. In theory, every believer wants to be Spirit-filled and Spirit led. But practically, we are not so inclined. Most people want to worship within their own comfort zone. Also, we want to control what is happening in worship. Whatever is uncomfortable or out of our hands is generally unwelcome. This limits the work of the Holy Spirit. Grounded in the word and backed by prayer we need to be more open to the spirit's moving even if it takes us out of our comfort zones and out of our control.

3. Ephesians 4:30 . . . Paul follows this instruction with the various types of sin that must be eliminated from our lives -- sins that break our relationship with God and with others and causes us to miss the Holy Spirit's fullness and power.

Leaders need to constantly emphasize repentance, righteousness, and unity. Worshippers should be called to self-examination, understanding that sin affects not only their lives but the entire church body.

## **Christ-centered**



The worship service must glorify the father but it must also be Christ-centered. Every service must intentionally highlight the person and work of Jesus. He is at the heart of everything it means to be a Christian. His work is central to the Christian faith. He too must be celebrated. After all, Jesus has provided our only access to the Father. Without him, worship is un-acceptable and worshipers undeserving. Through him, believers are called sons and daughters. What we are as God's people and what we offer him in life and worship is centered in Jesus Christ, 1 Peter 2:5. The life, death, and resurrection must be included in every worship service and that through him we are able to receive forgiveness, cleansing, adoption, victory, strength, help, and eternal life in union with God the father.

## **Will this worship service edify believers?**

Paul spoke about this in Ephesians 4:11-13. Church leaders must be concerned about the spiritual development of their people. It's up to them to give the church the nourishment it needs from the word of God and by example. The people need to grow to maturity and become more like Jesus. Preaching, teaching, discipline, counseling, and prayer each become the tools for building believers. But with many the worship service is the only opportunity the pastor has to build. Though the worship service is primarily focused upon God, the service needs to include challenges directed to the worshiper.

Worship services should be inspiring. To inspire means "to breathe life." Worship services should cause people to come alive, to be uplifted as words and music affirm the message of our great God and his Christ the victor and redeemer. Worship service is a good place to remind people that, since God is sovereign and Christ is victor we are not a defeated people, but are

conquerors through him. Our message is of hope, forgiveness, joy, and eternal life.

Congregational involvement is also edifying to the body, which we discussed previously.

## **Will this worship service appeal to visitors?**

First impressions count! For most people, their first impressions of a local church are shaped by the worship service. It's the first place visitors are exposed to a congregation. What they see, hear, and feel in this service sends a message about the life and vitality of the congregation. That experience helps people to decide if they will return or stay away. The worship service has a direct effect on local church growth. A dynamic worship service can help draw an unbelieving visitor to Christ. It can convince them that there is something genuine and exciting behind the message. While being dynamic the worship service also must be comfortable and non-threatening to visitors. Someone should sit close by in case the visitors need help during the service or need something explained. They should be made welcomed but not spotlighted.

## **Public reading of scripture**

Public reading of scripture should be part of the worship service. When the word of God is read well and is received with understanding and gladness, it is an act of worship. Let's look at the revival led by Ezra, in Nehemiah 8. Notice in verse 5; "when he opened it, all the people stood up." In verse 6, Ezra blessed the Lord and the congregation responded with a double "amen" and then bowed their heads and prostrated themselves on the ground in adoration

of Jehovah. In verse 8 not only were the scriptures read to an intensely attentive congregation, they were interpreted and made understandable to the people. What was the response of the people to the reading? Verse 9: Weeping, why? It's possible that the words presented a strong conviction of sin and of unworthiness before the Lord, who is good, and merciful towards them. They were encouraged not to weep or mourn, but to rejoice in, and exalt their holy God. Verses 10-12.

In Luke 4:16-22 there is an account of public reading which turned out quite extraordinarily. Jesus began reading and then in the middle of the verse he ceased reading! Can you picture everyone's surprise when he rewound the scroll and then just sat down? Every eye was upon him as they waited for the explanation they knew was coming. Then in verse 21, he explained to them the meaning of the verses he had read. If ever the reading of the scripture were a time for worship, this was certainly the time. The one who was the fulfillment of the promises of the Messiah had just read words describing his own person and the age he now set into process. The king had arrived! But they didn't worship him; neither did they worship God. In fact, they became enraged and sought to kill him, verses 28-30. This was neither the time nor the manner of our Lord's death. He was in complete control: "he passed through them and went his way."

Public reading was a part of Christian worship too. 1 Tim 4:13; Col. 4:16. Responsive readings are as old as Moses. In Deut. 27:12-13 Moses was instructed by the Lord to have his successor lead the people in a memorable confrontation with the words of the covenant. Six tribes were to stand upon mount Gerizim to read words of God's blessing to the people, and six tribes were to stand upon mount Ebal to read words of cursing to the people should they not obey God. The topography of the region of Shechem is such that

mount Gerizim is lush and green, but mount Ebal is usually barren and brown. The curses were read from the mountain that suggests a lack of blessing by its very appearance. The blessings were to be recited from the mountain that pictured the hand of the lord in blessing. What an experience that must have been!

Instead of alternate saying of the verses, as is usually done, divide the reading among various readers. For instance: Psalms 103.

Leader: Bless the lord, O my soul;

Congregation: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Leader: Bless the lord, O my soul,

Congregation: and forget none of his benefits;

Congregation left: who pardons all your iniquities;

Congregation right: who redeems your life from the pit;

Congregation left; and so on.

Psalm 118 is another good one.

## **Singing**

Again and again in scripture we are commanded and admonished to *sing to the Lord*. Music and singing were an important part of the worship of the Old Testament, 1 Chronicles 16:7-14, 23-29 in 1 Cor. 14:15, Paul says that we are to sing with the spirit and with understanding or the mind. Singing with the spirit is singing in concert with the Holy Spirit whose task is focusing on Christ. The purpose of singing is to glorify God, not with just the spirit but with the mind (understanding) also. We need to think about what we are singing. God gave us this gift of music that we might develop it and use it to express

ourselves in praise, prayer and worship, Psalms 92:1-3. God knows the power of song for the believer and he has recorded several instances of songs and singing in the bible. Some include: Job 38:7; Exo. 15:1-21; the songs of praise throughout Psalms; Neh. 12:40; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9,10,12,13.

Satan also knows the power of music. Have you noticed how he frequently takes good things God has made for us to enjoy and develops, then perverts and pollutes them for his purposes? One of his most effective "tools" has been music. He has made such use of music that a person could almost come to the conclusion that it is the music which is evil. The fact is, that it is the heart which is deceived and the mind polluted. The devil simply knows what God has always known, that music is a powerful way to get his ideas implanted and affect the behavior of mankind. God gave music to his people; to extol his worth, to know him, and to retain fresh fellowship with him. It is an important part of the church's' ministry and the worship service.

Music is one of the best ways of exalting God for who he is and what he has done, to teach biblical truth, and to spread the message of the gospel.

The reformation's emphasis on the word as central to worship led to the protestant emphasis on preaching as the highest reason of corporate worship. Though the reformation made music less ritualistic, in time, music, and singing became less important and became a way to get people in the "mood" to hear the preaching instead of a way of worshipping God and an important part of the worship service. With the constant trouble over doctrine the first few centuries after the reformation the Baptists too seemed to fall into the same rut.

**How can we grow?**

One suggestion for creating growth in the worship life of a church is to involve as many as possible in the learning-planning process.

Another is that the church should be encouraged to study worship in the bible.

Another is to rid ourselves of our tendency toward spectatorism and traditionalism and become involved in the planning of meaningful, creative worship, and the worship service itself.

Those who first see the light of meaningful change in their church's worship life must be sensitive to those for whom change is disturbing. To some there is great security in sameness. It has been said that the seven last words of the church are "we never did it this way before!"

While change is often indicated and necessary, wholesale, insensitive change can be devastating. There needs to be a lot of communication and the spirit of love. Always be committed to unity (Eph. 4:3). If your church has been very staid and unemotional, do not force a great physical display, it has to come naturally from the heart. If the same order of service has been followed for decades, make small but well-explained changes with real meaning and gentleness.

We need to ask ourselves, "are our services effective in turning the attention of the worshiper away from the service itself to God?" If not, why not? Do the hymns? The prayers? The preaching? The teaching? If not, why not?

How can we withhold from God that which he desires and seeks from us?

2 Sam. 22:4