

Worship Or “Playing Church”

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What an exalted privilege it is to worship God – to know who He is, to understand what He expects, to be confident that our heart-felt and humble devotion, our reverence and veneration, come before His majestic presence as an honor to Him. It’s almost too wonderful to contemplate.

I fear that far too many people are not as impressed with this great privilege as they ought to be. That fact is often shown by the inconsistency with which some participate in the worship services. They only come when it’s convenient to do so, and then only for as little time as they feel they can spare. I fear, too, that with some, participation is little more than a ceremonial observance, a scant observance devoid of any heart-felt spiritual commitment. Somehow they have decided that their mere presence is all that is necessary for acceptable worship.

There is great benefit to be derived from the public worship. But there is a danger, too – a danger that ritualism will replace sincere, heart-felt worship. A danger that the mere observance of the various ordinances is all that is due Him. In Ecclesiastes 5:1, the wise man says, *“Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.”* The meaning is clear: to lack the involvement of the heart when we come to worship is sin.

True worship is a desire to reach out to our Father and accord to Him the filial devotion He so rightfully deserves. It seems to me that proper preparation for those acts of worship that accomplish that is essential, and sometimes neglected, if we’re not very careful. Just as any good thing to be done requires forethought and planning, so it is with worship. In fact, especially is that so regarding worship, mainly because of its supreme importance and high privilege. I want to cite a few things I believe will improve our personal participation in the public worship services.

Begin early. Sometimes we are so involved in filling our weekends with pleasures of various sorts, we have only scant time to prepare our thoughts and minds for the worship of our Father on the Lord’s Day. We plan activities on Saturday that reach far into Saturday night and then sleep as late as we possibly can on Sunday morning. When we do get up we are dull, listless, unprepared to offer praise to God. If we get a good night’s sleep on Saturday, we’re much more apt to be refreshed on Sunday morning, then ready to make our plans for the grand privileges we are to enjoy at the worship services. *“O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.”* (Psalm 63:1).

Participate. I don’t mean just be there (although you can’t very well participate if you’re not even there), but get involved mentally at the start of the services. That means you have to take control of your mind and drive it in the direction of God. After all, that’s what worship is. Only when you get your mind involved can there be true worship. And I don’t mean a casual thought of Jesus or a passing amen to the prayer, but a full-fledged effort to extol and praise him from the innermost part of your being. *“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 4:24). That means you reach down to the vital part of who and what you are and give yourself to God for a period of adulation and praise-giving.

Look past the leader. All public worship services require a leader to be effective. That may present a distraction, if we’re not careful. Sometime we become so fascinated with the leader, or, on the other

hand, so distracted by him that we actually find our minds wandering away from the purpose for being there. Even if the leader hasn't chosen the songs you like, even if the one chosen to lead can't do as well as you'd like, even if the prayer is longer than you would like, don't let that have an adverse effect on your personal worship. And even if the leader is so good that his work borders on the artistic, it should not be allowed to cause you to lose sight of why you're here and what you're to do while you're here.

Take it home with you. If you bring a big enough container to the public worship, there's no reason why you can't take a goodly portion of those services home with you. For one thing, they can supply you with fuel for meditation and spiritual reflections when you get home. Meditation is a vital part of public worship and the fodder gained from such meditation is invaluable to your private worship after you leave the building. After you have participated in the worship services you should have feelings of warmth, new devotion for your Father, and even deeper care for those brethren with whom you have shared a time of praise and adulation. Worship – public or personal – is intended to bring glory and honor to God Almighty and to strengthen the one offering such praise to Him. And if you really care for Him as you should, you cannot leave your praise and devotion for Him at the building when you leave.