

The Purpose of Worship

The story is told of a Russian Czar who, upon exiting a building, approached a young sentry standing guard by a patch of weeds. The Czar asked the young soldier why he was standing guard by the weeds. The response of the soldier was simple: "I don't know; I was commanded to by my superior." The Czar found the captain of the guard and asked him why the soldier was standing guard. The guard responded, "Because it is in the regulations." Intrigued, and maybe a little confused, the Czar went into the archives, and after a great deal of searching, found the reason for the regulation. It seems that more than 100 years prior, Catherine the Great had planted a rose bush at the spot the weeds now occupied; to keep the bush safe the Empress had ordered a soldier to stand guard at all times. The soldier and captain, though with the noblest intentions, were wasting time and manpower guarding the weeds.

I wonder how many of us might have fallen into the same trap as the captain and the soldier, but with regard to worshipping God. Yes, we come together somewhat frequently, sing, pray, listen to God's word, and do things like that, but do we understand *why* we're doing all of that? What can we discover about worship and its purpose by examining the Scriptures?

Before progressing, we need to recognize that not everything done in obedience to God is rightly called "worship". The first time we find the word "worship" employed in our Bibles is in Genesis 22:5, when Abraham instructed his servants to stay behind while he and the lad "go yonder and worship". Had Abraham been obeying God thus far in his travels? Certainly. Was Abraham obeying God by continuing on to the mountain? Absolutely. But, notice that Abraham referred to the impending sacrifice as the worship which would occur. We would do well to recognize and appreciate that God sees a difference between obedience and worship, though admittedly, the two can and do overlap.

As we move on, let us consider try to understand the purpose of worship as defined by God's word. We do not have a direct statement as to the purpose of worship. We cannot open up our Bibles and see David relating to us "the purpose of worship is _____." Like so many subjects in the Bible, we understand the purpose of worship by examining what has been said about the subject and coming to any conclusion to which the text necessarily points us.

One purpose of worship is to “give unto the Lord the glory due to His name” (Psalm 29:2). The central figure in our worship is deity: the Creator and not the creature (Romans 1:25). When Jesus rebuffed Satan’s request to worship him, Jesus referenced from Deuteronomy 6, saying that “You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.” A point we need to understand from this is that God the Father is not the only One worthy of our worship. Deuteronomy 6, when referencing “God” and “the Lord”, addresses not only the Father, but also the other two members of the Godhead, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Deuteronomy 6:4 makes this clear in referencing the oneness of God. The oneness of God (and the Hebrew word *echad* [one] supports this) is not numerical singularity, but a united plurality. God is to be worshipped, yes, but not the Father alone (Matthew 14:33).

Another purpose of worship is to demonstrate the superiority of God to anybody or anything else. This should not be viewed as competing with the first reason we gave, but rather complimenting it. When we give God the glory due His name, we certainly demonstrate His superiority! The 95th Psalm repeatedly references the superiority of God as a reason and purpose for worship. At one place, the writer notes the Lord is worthy of songs and psalms because “... the Lord is the great God, and the great King above all gods.” And later, the psalmist records, “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God” (95:6,7a).

Worship is not only about who God is, but also about what God has done. John records for us an account of the twenty-four elders falling down before the Lamb, Jesus Christ, worshipping Him for dying and redeeming man by His blood (Revelation 5:8-14). To neglect to offer praise and worship for the salvation we receive through God is both prideful and thankless.

There are many other remarks we could make regarding the purpose of worship. We should not forget that our worship to God, if born out of a pure heart, will accomplish teaching, edification, and admonition for the sincere (Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:26). Worship will accomplish wonderful things for us, and will give God exactly what He wants (John 4:23), when we keep the focus of our worship upon the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 4:10).