

Improving Our Worship

By: Keith Sharp

I have received suggestions from denominational friends from time to time on how to improve our worship. Some recommend we have instrumental accompaniment to our singing. Others criticize our worship as dull and boring and contend that we need some shouting, clapping and “hallelujahs.”

All these recommendations completely miss the point of acceptable worship. We do not assemble to please ourselves; we do so to please God. We are not here to be entertained; we are here to worship. We are not to be spectators seeking amusement; we are to be active participants seeking communion with God. Paul warned the Colossians about the danger of “*will worship*” (Col. 2:23), worship which springs from our own self-will, which one devises and prescribes for himself. The Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees thus: “*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matt. 15:9).

True worship is “*in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23-24), that is, with the proper attitude and according to truth, the doctrine of Christ.

So far as the acts of worship in which we engage, no improvement is possible. We are only authorized to engage in five items of worship in our assemblies. These are partaking of the Lord’s Supper and contributing to the church on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 11:17-26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2) and singing, praying, and preaching and teaching the Scriptures any day of the week (1 Cor. 14:23 [*“if the whole church comes together in one place”*], 15, 26).

But it behooves each of us to do a quality check on his own demeanor in worship. Certain attitudes are essential for proper worship. We must be reverent (Ps. 122:1; Matt. 6:1, 5), and enter completely, not half-heartedly, into worship (Ps. 111:1).

There are some things we can do that will contribute to worshipping God in spirit. Allow me to suggest a few.

Get a good night’s rest on Saturday night. A teenage boy where I once preached habitually stayed up late to watch TV Saturday night and fell asleep during the sermon Sunday morning. Filthy jokes on “Saturday Night Live” held more appeal to him than the preaching of God’s Word. When I was a child, my father saw to it that the whole family went to bed early Saturday night so we would be awake to worship Sunday morning.

Be here early. If you characteristically come in late or at the last second for work, your boss would correctly conclude you don’t take your job seriously enough. People who habitually come in late to worship assembly do so because they don’t attach enough importance to worship.

Be in a proper frame of mind. When we laugh and talk loudly until the song leader has to hush us to get started, we are not ready to turn our attention to God. Be here early enough and stay after long enough to visit everyone, but take a moment or two before time to start to sit quietly and to reflect on why we are here.

Sit as close to the front as possible. Some have good reasons to sit in the back. They may have small children to tend or health problems. But, the farther you are from the front, the harder it is to see and hear those who lead in worship and the more distractions there are. It is especially

important for teenagers to sit toward the front. They want to assert their independence from their parents, and they want to be with other teenagers. They are tempted to sit toward the back and whisper, pass notes and laugh. Not only is the one so acting not worshipping, he interferes with the worship of others. This distracts the preacher and hinders him from preaching well. Parents, please insist that your teenagers sit closer to the front.

Open your mouth and sing! If we worship the Lord with all our hearts, we will enter into singing, completely (Ps. 98:4). What a difference between the fervor with which many cheer for their team and the apathy with which they worship the Lord.

Don't play with the babies. We are here to worship. We can admire the babies afterward.

Don't wander in and out. Don't get up to go to the restroom or elsewhere unless absolutely essential. Take care of necessities before worship begins.

Don't use the nursery as a place to visit. If your small child needs attention or is disrupting worship, go to the nursery, take care of the problem, and return to the auditorium. If your child is misbehaving, spank him when you take him to the nursery. Don't reward misbehavior. (If you do not "spank" your children, then administer whatever punishment you do use. Children should not get the idea that causing a disturbance in the pew is a way to get taken to the nursery so they can play. As brother Connie W. Adams has said on many occasions; "Take them out. Wear them out. And bring them back in" – HR).

Think about the meaning of each part of worship. As we sing, think what the words mean. As we pray, follow with your mind. When we partake of the Lord's Supper, concentrate on the sacrifice Jesus made for us. During the sermon, look up the verses and take notes on what is said (Acts 17:10-12). As you give, joyfully consider how the money will be used to spread the gospel.

We should give our best in the worship of God. I hope these suggestions will help us improve our worship.