

How God Evaluates Worship

by Jack Hayford

Jack Hayford emphasizes that true worship is rooted in the heart's desire for God rather than mere intellectual understanding.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17

Topics: "True Worship", "Heartfelt Devotion"

Description

Jack Hayford emphasizes the importance of worshiping God with both the mind and the heart, highlighting the need for a genuine, heartfelt connection with God rather than just intellectual understanding. He points out that true worship involves worshiping in spirit and truth, with the heart playing a crucial role in leading the intellect. Hayford stresses that God desires worship that comes from a broken and contrite heart, not just intellectual brilliance. He shares a personal transformation in corporate worship that led to experiencing God's glory and grace in profound ways.

Transcript

In my experience, theological discussions about worship tend to focus on the cerebral, not the visceral--on the mind, not the heart. "True" worship, we are often taught, is more about the mind thinking right about God (using theologically correct language and liturgy), rather than the heart's hunger for him.

But the words of our Savior resound the undeniable call to worship that transcends the intellect: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

We've been inclined to conclude that mind is the proper synonym for spirit here, but the Bible shows that heart is a better candidate. "In truth" certainly suggests participation of the intellect in worship, but it is inescapably second--and dependent upon the heart's fullest release first.

This priority is usually held suspect. The heart is said to be governed by affections and thus is more vulnerable to deception than is the intellect. But to base worship on the intellect is to entertain a dual delusion: first, that the mind is less subject to deception than is the heart; second, that the mind is the main means to "contact" God in worship (note verses like Job 11:7: "Can you fathom the mysteries of God?").

Yes, human intelligence contributes to worship, but God's Word indicates he is not looking for something brilliant but something broken: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart--these, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

The exercises of our enlightened minds may deduce God, but only our ignited hearts can delight him--and in turn experience his desire to delight us!

To be more specific, I believe that to please God, worship must do four things.

1. True worship treasures God's presence. God welcomes those into his presence who want him. The quest may be one of desperation or of delight, of frantic need or of a loving hunger for fellowship, but the motivation is clear--and so is his pleasure with it.

In Exodus 33 and 34, a tender and powerful exchange takes place between God and Moses, spanning the range from an intimate face-to-face encounter to a dramatic declaration by the Almighty. Central is the cry of Moses: "Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in your sight, show me now your way, that I may know you and that I may find grace in your sight."

To which God replies, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest" (Ex. 33:13-15). Shortly following this, God displays his glory to Moses--as sure a sign of his pleasure and presence as he ever gives (Ex. 40:33-38; 1 Kings 1:8-11).

I had been in pastoral leadership for nearly 15 years when my thinking about corporate worship was transformed. Rather than tightly regimented gatherings, concerned over aesthetics, mechanics, and academic theology, we began to provide an unpressured portion of the service for free-flowing songs of praise and adoration. Within two years, our church began to experience God's glory and grace in new and more profound ways, an experience that continues still.

We've been vigilant in seeking constant renewal of the practice because we know that even the finest spiritual habits are vulnerable to the arthritis of ritualism--when form loses its focus. But with gentleness, the Holy Spirit has a way of drawing us back to our "first love"--to a renewed hunger and thirst for the Living God.

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