

Reformation  
& Revival



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**W**e must also reconsider what it means to be successful. Many pastors feel discouraged if they are not preaching to large audiences and crowded auditoriums. To these pastors, success is measured not by obedience, faithfulness, and quality, but by sheer numbers and the excitement they seem to be able to produce with their programs and new innovations in worship. Let us not forget that success is simply found in doing the will of God. If we are doing the will of God, we should not be in bondage to the numbers game that holds so many pastors and churches in bondage.

Not until the church is set free from the bondage of this unbiblical view of success will she be able to recapture true throne-room worship.

**Robert L. Dickie**  
*Throne-Room Worship* (1993)  
A highly recommended and  
useful booklet available from:  
Berean Baptist Church  
P.O. Box 7025  
Flint, MI 48507

**W**e cannot help but take notice of the shameful and exceedingly improper practice of coming in late to public worship. It manifests a state of lukewarmness; it is a breach of order and decency. It is a disturbance to both ministers and people. It is a slighting of the ordinances which God has appointed for our good, and it is an affront to God Himself! How can such be in a devotional frame themselves, when they so often spoil the devotions of others?

**Charles Buck (1830)**

## *The Sensitivity of True Worship*

Bill Izard

**W**e must ask our twentieth-century selves an intensely serious question: In our desire to pursue biblical essentials of church life, have we subtly lost our way by designing and using worship as a means for accomplishing the end of evangelism? Or, more truthfully, are we making worship the handmaiden of church growth, measuring all that is done, especially and including worship, by its almighty rule? For although repentance is often seen in Scripture as a by-product of true worship (e.g., Isa. 6:1-7; 1 Cor. 14:24-25), the act of purposefully designing worship to accomplish the goal of evangelism is without biblical precedent.

Evangelism is not an end in and of itself. The ultimate priority for the Christian is that God be glorified; evangelism must be seen as a means of worship—not vice versa. In other words, in all of his evangelizing, the Christian must be single-minded in his desire to please and honor God, just as he is in worship. We may worship through evangelism, but never are we instructed to evangelize through worship.

As sober-minded Christians of any age, but especially in this day of church-wide confusion, we would do well to examine the motives and methods that govern much of what we do in worship today. Let us look into the Scripture and ask some searching questions.

**Does our worship emphasize the way in which we appear to men, or is it solely concerned with how we appear to God?**

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full, but, when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you (Matt. 6:5-6).

Jesus describes the worshipful act of prayer as an action to be done in private, not paraded before men in order to impress them. This passage is not a prohibition on public prayer but instead teaches an important principle regarding worship. Interaction with the Father is meant for the Father, not to be a display that pleases men. Worship is an expression of love to be directed solely to the Beloved, and there should be no concern in the heart of the lover/worshiper about negative or positive impressions gained by onlookers. The worshiper should give as little thought to onlookers as David did as he worshiped before the ark in his linen ephod (2 Sam. 6:14-22).

In Galatians 1:10 Paul claims to do nothing in order to please men, for in so doing, he says, he would no longer be serving God but men. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6 he again makes this point and adds that his presentation of the gospel was clear and up front: no “flattering words,” no hidden agenda. In other words, he was not trying to look good in order to attract men to himself or to Christ. Does our worship reflect the same disinterestedness?

**Does our worship tend to secularize the sacred and to profane what is holy in an effort to bring God down to man’s level?**

In 1 Chronicles 13 and 15 (as well as 2 Samuel 6) is recorded the story of David’s moving the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. When David and the people attempted to use a common method (an ox-drawn cart) to transport that which was holy, God severely judged them by killing a man who reached out to steady the ark. Likewise, in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Paul says that some among the church’s number had died due to their turning the sacred ordinance of the Lord’s Supper into a free-for-all buffet that mirrored the pagan “love” feasts. Both of these passages teach the seriousness with which God desires us to set Him apart and to avoid secularizing worship. A church that seeks to look

more and more like the world is in danger of presenting a God who is no longer holy because He is hardly discernible from the world.

Often we react to those who express distaste for the things of God, or those who make a mockery of His worship, by apologizing and modifying (or even eliminating) that which offends. But worship was never meant to be made palatable to the masses. In fact Christ specifically instructs in Matthew 7:6, “Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs.” The illustration serves to prove a point: the true worshiper should expect the one who scoffs at Christ to reject his Spirit-motivated and biblically-oriented worship. How can one who has no appreciation for the things of God nor a relationship with God, one who has no desire for holiness, accurately assess such a holy service? His heart needs transforming—*not the worship service!* Worship is a holy expression before a holy God. To invite nonbelievers into such a holy process is a precarious thing, and to design worship to accommodate their secular mindset is not only ineffective evangelism but also severely compromised worship.

**Is our worship intended to soften nonbelievers into “liking” Christians and Christianity?**

The Author of Scripture uses strong language with unmistakable meaning in James 4:4: “Don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” Matthew 10:22; John 15:18-21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 1 John 2:15, and numerous other passages also teach this enmity. The world hates Christ and we will be hated if we are Christ’s. Moreover we are to have no affection for the world and the things of the world. If we are obsessed with making our Christian worship comfortable and nonoffensive to those who hate Him, we are in danger of denying Him and

His call to holy living. Are we justified in taking such a risk, only that we may not offend? Surely Christians are not to seek to offend, but Christ says those who follow Him will be offensive—it is unavoidable.

**Is our worship based on a philosophy that follows “human tradition” and “the basic principles of this world”? (See Col. 2:8, 10.)**

Man seeks to attract followers by putting on his best face, offering the world something it wants to buy, promising quick and easy solutions to life’s problems. Those who seek to implement these tactics in the church appeal to “wisdom.” But this is the wisdom of men referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:5, not the wisdom of God. This sort of wisdom teaches us to use whatever seems to work best—the most practical course according to our sensual observations. The true worshiper, however, will incessantly search the Scriptures for God’s ways to both worship and evangelize and pursue those ways, although they may seem as utter foolishness to the world. Indeed, true worship is always scripturally based and is in fact seen as impractical by the world.

Sadly, in our day most churches are addicted to pragmatism. But in Matthew 26 Jesus shows that practicality or pragmatism is not always the course to follow:

A woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table. When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor” (vv. 7-9).

It would have been far more practical to sell the perfume and use the proceeds to minister to the poor. After all, hadn’t Jesus just said in chapter 25 that the true disciple will

be about the business of feeding, clothing, and ministering to those in need? But Christ knew the extravagance displayed by the woman was an act of worship: “Why are you bothering this the woman? She has done a beautiful thing to Me. . . . When she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for My burial” (vv. 10, 12). The worship service that focuses on exalting God should not be seen as a wasted opportunity to evangelize. There is certainly a place for direct ministry to the “seeker,” but worship’s priority must be in pouring out our sacrifice of praise to the Father. (Note: The terms “seeker” and “seeker sensitive” are popular church growth terms, yet questions abound as to their advisability—see Romans 3:11.)

**Is our worship designed to make the nonbeliever feel comfortable, accepted, pleased, even entertained?**

As evidenced in such passages as Matthew 17:5-7; Luke 5:8-10; Isaiah 6:1-7; Acts 2:43; and Revelation 1:17, *fear* and *trembling* are more often the result of standing in the presence of a holy God, not comfort or pleasure. *Fear*, *respect*, and *worship* are often synonyms throughout Scripture (compare Luke 4:8 to Deuteronomy 6:13). Instead of seeking to make the nonbeliever comfortable in worship, we should be seeking to make him feel the awful weight of his condemned state without Christ. Not we but only the Savior has the right to comfort the sinner—to say, “Get up, and don’t be afraid” (Matt. 17:6-7).

**Does our worship seek the participation of those who neither know God nor love Him?**

Jesus’ classic statement on worship (John 4:23-24) says that we are to worship the Father “in spirit and in truth.” God wants true worshipers in His presence—those who come to worship Him only, in all honesty and from the depths of their being—not those who seek to be entertained

or lifted by emotions. The practicalities of our worship are important, but not nearly as important as the motivation behind our worship to One who looks on the heart and not the outward appearance (1 Sam. 6:7).

True worship can be performed only by those who sincerely know and love their Father. In Nehemiah 9:1-3 we are told that Israel, after the public reading of God's Word (chapter 8), realized they were to separate as they worshiped from those who had not entered into the covenant relationship with God.

Likewise, Christians are forbidden to be "yoked together" with unbelievers.

For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?  
Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? . . . What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? . . .  
Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord (2 Cor. 6:14-17a).

Though nonbelievers may be present with us in the worship setting, we should never feel or encourage "unity" of worship with them. We have a message of repentance and faith *for* them, but we do not worship *with* them. Such a unity communicates an acceptance of them by God that He has denied. Indeed their father is the devil (John 8:44).

"If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). The unrepentant who do not acknowledge and turn from their sin have no audience with the Lord; their prayers are in vain because He refuses to listen. (See also Matthew 15:8-9 and Isaiah 29:13.) Other Scriptures use stronger language: "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked" (Prov. 15:8), and "If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable" (Prov. 28:9). God finds the worship of the nonbeliever despicable, abhorrent. It turns His stomach—*He hates it*.

**Is our worship exclusively led by and does it exalt those whom the world considers successful, attractive, "together," happy?**

In the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20-26) Christ blesses those whom we often curse. "Blessed are you who are poor," He says, and "you who hunger, who weep—blessed are you when men hate you." We might say we love the poor, but are we willing to allow one who is poor, wearing clothing befitting the poor, reflecting an education belonging to the poor—do we allow such a one to lead us in worship or other public ministry? Or do we instead give place to the well-off (James 2:1-7), the "acceptable," so we will not offend or embarrass ourselves?

Christ blesses those who weep, but we demand every Christian leader wear a smile, be happy and excited. But as we lead worship, or as we live life, should we be forever smiling, as if happiness were holy and sorrow or sobriety were sinful? Christ Himself was sorrowful (Matt. 26:38), wept publicly (Luke 19:41; John 11:35), spoke in such a way that His audience became very grieved (Matt. 17:23; 19:22), and promised sorrow to His disciples (John 16:20). In fact, Ecclesiastes advises that "sorrow is better than laughter" and "a sad face is good for the heart" (Eccl. 7:2-4). Indeed, the Bible expressly indicates that repentance is accompanied by godly sorrow and that those who do not feel sorrow for their sin or the sins of others are still in danger of condemnation: "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death" (2 Cor. 7:10).

Certainly the Bible also teaches joy in the Lord, and we are happy in expectation as we look forward to that day when our joy will be complete in the presence of Christ. But our desire to make everyone happy and comfortable, or happy and excited, is unscriptural, leads us into hypocrisy, and deceives those we lead with a false view of Christianity.

Instead we should proclaim the warning of Luke 6:24-26 to those who are comfortable and satisfied: "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep."

And we should take special heed to the last warning ourselves: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." Are we seeking that all those who come to our worship speak well of us?

It is said by the church growth specialists that we should strive for "excellence" in worship. True. However, we must ask the question: "By whose standard are we to measure this excellence?" Are we to look to that which the outside world holds as honorable, acceptable, and praiseworthy, or rather to that with which Scripture declares God is most pleased?

Jesus Himself was not impressive or attractive, for He had "no beauty or majesty . . . nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. . . . He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. . . . We esteemed Him not" (Isa. 53:2-3). And yet Christ accomplished the will of God perfectly.

The disciples were also valued little by the society in which they lived, and were notably "unschooled, ordinary men" (Acts 4:13). But God used them; "These men . . . have caused trouble all over the world" (Acts 17:6). The apostle Paul was certainly not oratorically impressive nor physically attractive (2 Cor. 10:10). He appeared to the Christians of his day

. . . in weakness and fear and with much trembling. . . . My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

Indeed Paul learned of the Lord, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." He considered it a much greater thing to appear weak or infirm that all the glory might be Christ's (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

In fact, it is hard not to find a biblical example that follows this pattern. Moses was not a naturally gifted speaker and tried to argue that his deficiencies in communication excused him from leadership and service for God, and yet he alone was chosen to speak for God, as well as lead and organize the nation Israel (Ex. 4:10-14). Jeremiah also objected that his inexperience, youthfulness, and lack of speaking skills disqualified him from public service, but to no avail: God had called him and God would guide him, speak through him, and deliver him (Jer. 1:4-10).

First Corinthians 1:26-31 gives us God's perspective:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, Who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

Even our experience tells us that it is often those whom the world considers attractive and impressive according to their own value system who are steeped in their own pride and become disqualified for the Lord's service. Let us take our eyes off that which the world holds as excellent or acceptable, and ask instead how best we can please the

Lord, no matter what the impression it makes on the world. Our worship must be led by those in whom Christ is exalted though they may be rejected by the world.

**Is our worship truly Christ-like?**

Nobody loves the unbeliever more than Jesus (Rom. 5:8). He, the true *Seeker*, came to seek and to save the lost. But Jesus was not “seeker sensitive” as the term is used today. There were many who came to Jesus, only to be turned away because they had come for the wrong reasons.

An example is found in John 6. After the miracle of the loaves (the “feeding of the five thousand”), Jesus rebuked the masses who were “seeking” Him. He knew they were coming to be satisfied with more bread, not to acknowledge Him as their Messiah (v. 26). They came to Christ for what He could do for them temporally, not because they were sinners in desperate need of the eternal Living Bread. Yet we advertise for nonbelievers to come for the upbeat music, the encouraging word, the friendly atmosphere, the biblical principles that will make them a success—it doesn’t matter why they come, just so long as they come! This crowd persisted and persisted, but Christ only offered more and more difficult teaching to the point that not only was the public offended (vv. 60-61), but also some of His more faithful followers. (If anyone was a “seeker,” it was a disciple!) And yet Christ did not back down or plead for them to give Him another chance. Instead He let them go their own way; He knew that “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (vv. 65-66).

There were others who came. The rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-26 (with whom we would be quite satisfied if he were to just tithe now and then) was turned away after the first inquiry because he wouldn’t give up all he had to follow Christ. The men in Luke 9:57-62, invited by Christ Himself, would have been followers themselves, but each

had his conditions: one wanted comfort along the way; another wanted to wait until his father had died, presumably to make it easier to transfer his allegiance; and the third simply wanted to say goodbye. But all were sternly rebuked by the Master, especially the last, who was described as one “unfit for the kingdom of God.”

Today we come to Christ and say, “Yes, I’ll worship You, but I must do it with a certain type of music,” or “Yes, I’ll listen to your sermon, but don’t make it too long,” or “Yes, I’ll come to Christ, but don’t tell me I have to give up my worldly music, my worldly clothes, my worldly acquaintances.” When we add our own stipulations to worship, though they certainly may appear justifiable and reasonable to us, we usurp the authority of Christ who says, “Come! No holds barred! Come! No matter what!”

Some suggest that Jesus was “seeker sensitive” in that He worked His miracles in order to attract large crowds to which He could share the gospel. But in several passages it is plain this is not His motive: Mark 5:43; 7:36; 8:26, 30; and Luke 4:9-12 (and these are by no means exhaustive). Clearly, Christ did not intend these miraculous works for public exploitation. There is little to indicate Christ worked miracles in order to draw a crowd. He was opposed to selling the gospel by appealing to their love for the sensational. (See John 2: 23-25.) As seen above, He sharply rebuked the five thousand for seeking Him for merely physical satisfaction. Jesus did not teach us to draw people to Him by appealing to their senses. Instead He claimed full responsibility for drawing all to Himself by way of the cross (John 12:32); therefore, exalting Christ “and Him crucified” is to be the primary object in worship, as well as evangelism. (See Revelation 5:8.)

Neither can we say the disciples were “seeker sensitive.” In Luke 10:10-16 Christ gave seventy of His most faithful followers specific instructions to symbolically “shake the

dust from their feet” as a rebuke to those who do not accept the gospel. He doesn’t tell them to try a different method, revise their message, or buddy-up to the people in an effort to win them over. Instead they were to do exactly as Christ had commanded, preaching the gospel He had declared and ministering in His Name, no matter what *the result*. And what about Paul? Hear again Galatians 1:10: “Am I not trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Instead of seeking to be a people-pleaser, the true disciple, and thus the true worshiper, mirrors Christ’s uncompromising zeal to please the Father.

And so is our challenge. Can we hold ourselves accountable strictly to the Word of God in the areas of evangelism and worship rather than to charts of numerical growth and the response of the majority? Will we seek to please the true Object of our worship at the risk of losing our good standing with the “seeker”? Can we depend upon Christ to build His Church without abusing the purity of worship? Only those who know Christ can truly worship Him, and they will worship Him without the enticement of “seeker sensitive” tactics. To be sure, those who do not know Him need the attention of every believer as we attempt to earnestly persuade them to come to Christ. But let the focus of the saints be fully upon their holy God as they meet with Him in worship, so that when they take the gospel to the world, they will go empowered by the Seeker of men’s souls and in such a way that will please Him most.

### **Author**

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