



How the Fear of the Lord is expressed in corporate worship

"... so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe ...".

Hebrews 12:18



Why is it important to develop a genuine reverential fear of the Lord?
Because true worship cannot be offered without it.

Today we will look at how reverential worship
is expressed in corporate worship.

We'll learn that worship that is acceptable to God, stems from a
heart that is vitally united with the Spirit of God, and seeks to
approach God on His terms, rather than allowing our personal
preferences to dominate.



Intro |

So, as most of you know I have an Amazon eco device that allows me to speak and it will play me any music I like or tells me the weather or other such important news.

The most frequent request I make to 'Alexa' is to play Christian worship music. Then Alexa answers, "OK, playing a bespoke mixture of Christian music."

Now, because I don't pay for a subscription, every few songs Alexa will interrupt my music with an advertisement.

For just \$6 a month I can select which music I prefer to listen to.

But, because I don't really want to pay anything, I just listen to whatever Alexa happens to choose.

So, for weeks everything was well. Then, I noticed a change. The song selections started to get quite weird – from traditional hymns to culturally-expressive African worship.

One day it suddenly dawned on me! The reason Amazon was choosing songs from a broad range of styles, including some that were quite 'eclectic', was because they hoped I wouldn't like their selection, so I would choose to subscribe with them!

We all have our personal preferences when it comes to worship, don't we? We like certain songs, and others ... not so much.

We like to know how the service is going to progress, what's coming up ... and for some – what time it is going to end!

We'll see today, however, that it is only when our heart is filled with a reverential fear of the Lord that we are empowered to lay aside our preferences and become the kind of worshipper God is seeking.

Point 1 | God is seeking true worshippers who worship God in spirit and in truth. Worship 'in spirit' means from a heart empowered by the Spirit of God, while 'in truth' means reverencing the true God who is revealed by Jesus and His Word.

Remember, a few weeks ago we watched Jesus' conversation with a woman at the well in Samaria.

The woman, we saw, was confused about worship, questioning her own ability to offer true worship, as well as questioning where and how worship should be offered.

Jesus told her that God the Father is seeking worshippers who will worship Him 'in spirit and in truth'.

We discussed what Jesus meant by this a few weeks ago. Worship 'in spirit' means that our adoration of our Heavenly Father flows from the Holy Spirit's union with our human spirit in our heart.

It is through our spirit's vital union with the Holy Spirit that we commune with God, whether in prayer or in worship.

Jesus also shared that true worship must be 'in truth,' that is, properly formed and founded on a true knowledge of God the Father.

Unless we have personal and relational knowledge of God the Father, there can be no worship 'in truth'.

If worship is offered without truth, it means worth is being ascribed to a form or image of a god that is not the God of the Bible, nor the god who Jesus revealed.

That's why our Heavenly Father seeks worshippers who reverence and honour him from their heart, and in the truth of who He is.

Point 2 | There is worship that is acceptable to God, and also worship that is not acceptable. Worship that is acceptable to God, is worship offered on His terms, being shaped by how God has revealed worship to be expressed.

So, with hearts filled with the Spirit of God, and minds fixed on knowing God as He revealed Himself through Jesus and His Word, we approach God in worship.

But when we read what the author of Hebrews says about worship, we realise there is more for us to be mindful of.

In chapter 12 verse 28 and 29 we read,

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28-29)

This verse clearly speaks of worship that is acceptable to God and by implication, worship that is not acceptable to Him.

So, how are we to differentiate between what is acceptable worship and what is not?

Putting together Jesus' instruction about the kind of worshippers the Father is seeking, and what we learnt just last week about how God's eyes probe deep into our inward parts, we know that reverential worship will always spring from a person who loves God, with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength.

But how is this reverential worship expressed when we gather corporately?

Thankfully, woven through the entire story of God, are glistening jewels that sparkle and shine how God desires worship to be offered.

God's original inspired prayer, praise and worship book, which we call the Psalms, has colourful threads of expressive worship in almost every song. These were people who knew how to worship!

There's clapping of hands, shouts of praise, crying out, dancing, raising of hands, blowing horns, waving flags, words of prophecy spoken to the trees and the fields, and strumming of all manner of instruments from lyre, harps and drums.

And they worshipped during every season of life. There are glints of quietness, laments of anguish, tear-stained sheets, and speechless gazes of adoration - all expressed through body postures of kneeling, bowing of heads, moments of silence and lying prostrate before the Lord.

Yes, our creative God gave us His creative Spirit to inspire us to always worship Him creatively.

Then, after Jesus returned to heaven, He inspired the Apostle Paul to give guidance to Jesus' newly formed body, on how orderly worship should be celebrated.

He describes a gathering where everyone brings something from their private time of worship to share. One sings a song, one a message in tongues, another gives the interpretation, another teaches a revelation they have received (1 Corinthians 14:26).

I agree, these gatherings sound very different from how we normally worship.

This difference should cause us to ponder:

Do we give freedom to our hearts to express our love and adoration of our God?

Or have we allowed conventional culture and tradition to dampen and stifle our worship of the Lord?

We may need to remind ourselves of Paul's warning to not be conformed to the patterns, behaviours or customs of this world. (Romans 12:1)

Now, I know many of us have experienced worship in different styles, perhaps when travelling to other countries, or visiting services in other denominations.

When we find ourselves in these environments, we quickly identify how differently their style of worship is from what we are used to.

However, here lies the danger.

It is human nature to think the way we do things is 'right', thereby determining the way other Christians worship, not just 'different', but wrong.

We then become prone to judge these different worship styles, deeming them unbiblical, or distracting, or irreverent.

Now, please hear me.

We all have preferences in how we like to worship. The reason you are here is because you like the beauty and orderly arrangement of the Anglican liturgy.

Indeed, one of the strengths of Anglican worship is how we all participate and pray together in unison.

Yes! The Anglican way is 'good'. But a 'good' way of worship is not the only 'acceptable way' of worship.

I encourage you to own your preferences as YOUR preferences.

However, let us not step into the dangerous place of believing that our personal preferences, are the only acceptable way God is to be worshipped.

Point 3 | True worship (offered in spirit and in truth) will involve sacrificially laying down our own desires and preferences so that we approach God on His terms, with a true and genuine heart.

The very nature of reverent worship is that God remains the focus.

As followers of Jesus we are called to lay down our wills and desires in all aspects of our lives, resisting sin and temptation.

We are also called to lay down our will and desires when it comes to worship.

That's why we are told to offer a 'sacrifice of praise' – a sacrifice means laying down our own wants and desires, for the sake of obeying God.

That's why we should never come expecting to worship God in a manner that pleases us – for we are not the focus of worship, God is.

So, let us endeavour to worship God with hearts full of gratitude and eyes fixed on Jesus, knowing this is the only appropriate and reverential way to worship our great, majestic God.