

Freedom in Worship

What is Christian Worship? What is the Biblical definition of worship?

Christian worship is both an attitude and action of granting God the adoration, reverence and honor that He is due. Furthermore, worship expresses God's holiness, goodness, power, and love. Christian worship takes the form of many different practices. It is both individual and collective.

Worshiping God replaces the worship of all else. God is a jealous God who despises the worship of idols and other worthless things. To worship God truly, Christians must devote themselves only to God and serve Him as the only True God.

Worship is also a mindset and lifestyle. For example, a Christian can live with an attitude of worship no matter what he or she is doing. Believers can do all things (not contradicting scripture) as if they are doing them for the Lord, making all of those things an act of worship.

What Worship is Not

Christian worship is not a time of merely emotional excitement. True Christian worship is not emotionalism caused by the hype of large groups of people, clever lyrics, or talented musicians. Christian worship is not and should not be confined to a building. Furthermore, it should not only take place when music is playing. Additionally, Christian worship is not a show. Having a stage, bright lights, and people leading songs of worship does not automatically make that event an act of worship.

Freedom

A common verse used when talking about freedom in worship is:

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” - 2 Corinthians 3:17.

The noticeable sign of the Spirit’s presence is freedom. That means during worship, when the Spirit of the Lord is present, the worshiper should feel freedom to worship, not restriction from raising their hands or clapping or singing loudly or dancing, all of which are biblical marks of worship.

That also means we have a reason to question whether the Spirit is truly present if there is no freedom. That’s not to say that you’re truly worshiping just because you’re physically expressive, but it is to say that true worship is restricted where physical expression is restricted.

Spirit and Truth

Jesus said that His **true worshipers will worship in spirit and in truth** (John 4:23-24)

This includes both accurate (truth) and expressive (spirit) worship, including loving the Lord with all of a person's heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:28-34)

"Expressive" worship does not mean that worship must be loud nor does it indicate any particular physical posture. It simply means that worship comes from our spirits and involves our whole being (heart, soul, mind, and strength); it is something we express. **Worship is a lifestyle response to God, not just something done through music at church. Worship includes daily loving God according to His teachings found in Scripture (truth) as well as with our hearts and emotions focused on Him.**

You look at the expressiveness in a worldly concert and you see people raising their hands and shouting as an expression of their joyful experience of just being there. But shouldn't it challenge churches where the Lord of all the universe is being worshiped, yet hands aren't raised to the heavens but crossed on the chest? And shouldn't it push us as worshipers, that if we don't have such joy welling up in our hearts as we worship God, that there must be some sort of disconnect between our minds and our motions?

When we take seriously verses like Psalm 134:2, which says *"Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD," Psalm 149:3 "Let them praise His name with dancing" and Psalm 47:1, "O clap your hands, all you people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph,"* the worship experience at a local church will be one marked by freedom, not frozen hands in pockets.

Now not everyone worships in the same way. Some will naturally be more expressive, and others naturally be more reserved. Also, in the broken world we live in, life can be challenging. People will go through tragedies, and they'll go through seasons so dry that just showing up to church will be an act of faith. We don't want to minimize that but rather speak to what ought to be the common practice of worship when we gather.

Worship includes both a personal and communal aspect. Of the first church, we read, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). These believers praised God both personally and when together, doing so on a regular basis (also Hebrews 10:25).

Reverence and Honor

The word "worship" includes the idea of **giving reverence**. Many times in the Bible, believers bow down, pray, sing, and offer other acts of reverence as acts of worship. Though worship is more than a song or any particular act, worship can be expressed to God in many ways, including **words, actions, the arts, and in service**.

The goal of worship is to honor God. Philippians 2:9-11 says, "Therefore God has **highly exalted him** and bestowed on him **the name that is above every name**, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The goal of worship is not to feel better personally, though this is often the result. Instead, worship may include repentance of sins or other actions contrary to one's personal desires to give honor and glory to the Lord. In other words, **worship is to lift up the Lord rather than to lift up self**.

Christian worship should result in God-honoring actions. Right after James wrote about the importance of not showing favoritism during worship gatherings, he noted, "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17). Clearly, true worship will lead to actions that reflect a heart changed by God.

What Freedom in Worship Really Means

1. Freedom to Draw Near – Before Christ, we had no business approaching the throne of grace. In reality, it was impossible. Because of the cross, we now have freedom to approach a holy God without shame. Access is now possible. Check out Hebrews 10:19-22:

"Therefore, brothers and sisters, since **we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus**, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us draw near to God** with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings."

What does this understanding bring to our worship? We don't walk flippantly into a gathering. We don't take singing to Jesus for granted. We don't cast our cares on the Lord lightly. It's the highest honor and privilege that was only opened because of the shed blood of Jesus.

I love how Psalm 2 says it: "Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling."

So as children of God we come. We come with confidence. We come with boldness. But we also come with trembling, grateful hearts.

2. Freedom from Sin – When we worship, we don't need to be held back by our past sins. We aren't just free to draw near but are free from the power of sin, our previous ruler. We have been liberated by the King of Glory and can step into new life.

Consider Galatians 5:1 "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Christ set us free to walk in freedom. But this verse reveals that it's possible to be slaves again. We need to stand firm. Corporate worship is a means by which we stand firm – day after day, week after week. The songs we sing ignite our faith in the face of doubt. **We learn to sing in the midst of our suffering. We learn to trust in the midst of our trial.**

So when you worship, remember that you have been set free. It's not something you need to cry out for or ask for. It has already been done. You just need to receive it. We're fighting battles in a war that has already been won. Rise up in your identity.

3. Freedom to Gather – In many countries, freedom to gather as the body of Christ is not welcomed. It is outlawed, and punished. I've never been in such a situation, but I can only imagine after worshiping with the underground church you'd never approach any gathering the same. We take it for granted and argue over petty differences while believers in other parts of the world risk their lives coming together.

Hebrews 10:24-26 puts it like this: *"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **not giving up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* The gatherings we experience are a tremendous privilege. Let's not forget the one who gave His life to make it so.