

Lesson  
6

# Guidelines to Worship

Why does the rain fall down and not up? Why does the sun rise in the east and set in the west? Why do we breathe air and not water? These are not silly questions. Scientists have spent many years looking for the answers. They have found that our universe and everything in it is governed by laws that keep it in order. Without this order there would be no rainfall, no sunsets, no life. These are the “laws of nature.” As Christians we know that these are the “laws of God.” Our Creator established these laws to govern the universe.

Just as the universe would be in absolute chaos without God’s laws and government, our inner lives cannot be in order if His guidelines are not followed. These inner guidelines are called God’s moral government. They involve spiritual steps or conditions that must be fulfilled in order for us to please Him. For example, there can be no salvation of a soul if the person does not personally repent and accept Jesus Christ as his or her Savior.

God has also set guidelines in His Word for our worship. We have already studied some of these. Do you remember the three inner qualities a worshiper should have? We studied these in Lesson 1 and learned that they are humility, obedience, and love. We’ve also studied ways to express our worship—through prayer, service, and music. In this lesson we’ll study how we can prepare ourselves for effective Christian worship.



**In this lesson you will study . . .**

Inner Preparation

Outward Expression

**This lesson will help you . . .**

- Describe the preparation necessary to meet scriptural conditions for effective worship.
- Explain which outward expressions of worship are based on biblical principles.
- Evaluate your own worship in the light of biblical guidelines for true worship.

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## INNER PREPARATION

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**Objective 1.** *Identify the inner conditions the Lord requires for worship.*

The right preparation for worship involves being clean, clear, and uncluttered in our inner lives. We will discuss these in that order although there will always be an overlapping of these conditions when they concern our thoughts and attitudes.

### Being Clean

To be clean before God is to stand before Him without sin. Of course that is possible only as God Himself forgives and washes our sins away.

Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins! Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin (Psalm 51:1-2).

A woman went to church with a bad headache. When the pastor suggested that she be prayed for, she answered, “No, I cannot be prayed for because I was unkind to my children today, scolding them needlessly.”

Her pastor gently reminded her that she could ask for God’s forgiveness, accept it, and stand righteous before Him. The woman did so and was instantly healed. Perhaps even greater than her physical healing was the understanding that she could be clean before God just for the asking.

Does that mean we can go our own way, doing whatever we please, since forgiveness comes just for the asking? Let 1 John 3:9 answer it. “Whoever is a child of God does not continue to sin, for God’s very nature is in him; and because God is his Father, he cannot continue to sin.”

John reminds us that a Christian cannot willfully sin without affecting his or her standing with God. When this happens, there must be prayerful repentance. But—more than that—when we love Jesus and realize the price He paid for our salvation, we want to keep clean and, as the Bible says, not be spotted with sin.



### For You To Do

**1** Circle the letter in front of the correct completion to the sentence. To be clean before God means that we have

- a) never sinned.
- b) tried very hard to be good.
- c) prayed and God has forgiven us.

### Being Clear

After the Lord has cleansed us we want to keep clean, and that means to keep everything clear between us and God. An old hymn put it this way:

Nothing between my soul and the Savior,  
So that His blessed face may be seen;  
Nothing preventing the least of His favor,  
Keep the way clear! Let nothing between.

The apostle Paul said that he was doing his best to reach what lay ahead. “So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God’s calling through Christ Jesus to live above” (Philippians 3:14).

In Acts 24:16 he said, “I do my best always to have a clear conscience before God and man.” But how can we always have a clear conscience? Some Christians have asked this and then been so afraid of displeasing the Lord that they lived in fear all the time. They have made the mistake of trying to search their own hearts. It’s like trying to clean house by the glimmer from a weak flashlight. It may not show up what really needs cleaning and at the same time may cast shadows on a spotless area. Psalm 139:23-24 tells us a better way.

Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me and guide me in the everlasting way.



When we let the Lord examine our hearts, He will do it without condemning us. He understands our human weaknesses. Nevertheless, He is holy and righteous and He cannot tolerate sin. So we can be sure He will let us know if we have let anything come between Him and us. Furthermore, He will tell us what to do about it. That is why He has given His Word—to guide and instruct us, to lead us in a plain path.

Happy are those who wash their robes clean and so have the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and to go through the gates into the city. But outside the city are the perverts and those who practice magic, the immoral and the murderers, those who worship idols and those who are liars both in words and deeds (Revelation 22:14).

Most of the sins mentioned are plainly seen, easily identified. Practicing magic and worshiping idols, however, can take on forms not so quickly recognized. It can even look like a party game, something to do just for fun. Deuteronomy 18:9-13 names practices that resemble some that we see in our day, such as reading cards or tea leaves, consulting spirits, or studying horoscopes. If you have books or anything that you used in this kind of practice in the past, you should burn them. Even if you never used them at all, you should get rid of them, as the devil will try to use them to ensnare you later on.

Many sins, like lying, are so obvious that even a little child knows what they are. But the enemy, the devil, tries to get the believer to trip over these as well. The temptation arises when only a shade of untruth would get us out of difficulty, or help us to earn money.

But we don’t need to let these things frighten us. God has given us His promises, and He said that He is able to keep us from falling, to bring us “faultless and joyful” into His presence (Jude 24).



**For You To Do**

2 Who is responsible for seeing that I have a clear conscience before God?

**Being Uncluttered**

We talked about being clean and having things clear between us and God. We’re using the word *uncluttered* to describe the little things that are not wrong if put in a proper place and time, but they can keep us from a close walk with the Lord.

As an example, a Christian lady used her ability to knit as a way to help others. She made warm sweaters for children, heavy winter socks for fishermen, and did mending that few other women knew how to do. Sometimes on stormy nights she read her Bible and then knitted by lamplight until late. Then she stopped going to church because she wanted to knit. The Holy Spirit, however, was faithful to let her see the danger signal before it was too late and once more she put God first in her life. She took time to go to church and still had time enough for knitting.

Many activities that are harmless in themselves could be allowed to steal our time and hinder our walk with God. There’s nothing wrong with going hunting, playing ball, sewing, reading, and a thousand other activities unless we allow them first place in our lives. Then they will clutter the background meant for wholehearted worship of God, who alone is worthy of first place in our lives.

So then, my brothers, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God—what is good and is pleasing to him and is perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

Did you notice the last part of that passage? When we purpose (make up our minds) to worship the Lord with all that is in us, we will know what is good and pleasing to Him. He will help us make a difference between the harmful, the basically harmless, and that which is truly good. Our part is to discipline ourselves—to keep ourselves in tune with God. When we do that everything else will take its rightful place.

In conclusion, my brothers, fill your minds with those things that are good and that deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable (Philippians 4:8).



**For You To Do**

3 Complete the following sentences.

a We must always give the Lord ..... place in our lives.

b To be able to worship the Lord as we ought we must keep our thoughts and attitudes

..... , .....

and .....

- 4 Which of the following activities could keep us from worshipping the Lord wholeheartedly?
- a) Reading good books
  - b) Writing letters
  - c) Playing games
  - d) Working
  - e) Traveling
  - f) Fishing
- 5 Why do you suppose Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8 that we should think only good thoughts?
- .....
- .....

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## OUTWARD EXPRESSION

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**Objective 2.** *Identify characteristics of New Testament worship.*

We have talked about the background of true worship—a heart that is right before God—and this of course results in right actions. If we love God and love others we won't hurt them; we will do what we can to help them.

There are, however, things in the foreground, outward expressions of worship that may raise questions in our minds. Do we need to make sacrifices like the Jews did in Old Testament times? Should we bow before images of the apostles or other saints? Is it irreverent to clap our hands in church?

Some of what we do in worship may relate to our culture—and certainly culture in itself is not wrong. Within every society there are certain accepted customs for worship which have become a part of church and life. Unless these contradict scriptural principles, they are not wrong. Nor, of course, are they necessary as far as God is concerned. But they will affect our approach to worship.

We also react in ways that are part of our personality. Think about your friends. You may have one friend who would jump up and down with excitement if you gave him a valuable gift. Another friend would be just as happy if you gave him a gift, but he might only smile and say "Thank you!" Why would they react differently? Simply because they are different in their personalities.

Aside from these factors, the Bible has given guidelines for worship. The Old Testament worshippers were also given specific rules to follow, especially in the offering of sacrifices. We do not follow those rules today because the sacrifices were symbols or "pictures" of things to come. The killing of a lamb and the sprinkling of the blood looked forward to Christ. He is the Lamb of God who shed His blood on Calvary for the sins of the world. We don't go through the ritual now because we don't need to. Because we know what it meant, we look back to Calvary to accept the complete and perfect sacrifice already made for us.

The first covenant had rules for worship and a man-made place for worship as well . . . But Christ has already come as the High Priest of the good things that are already here . . . For this reason Christ is the one who arranges a new covenant, so that those who have been called by God may receive the eternal blessings that God has promised (Hebrews 9:1, 11, 15).

The New Testament emphasized the point that only God should be worshiped. John the beloved tells how he fell down to worship a heavenly being, but was stopped with these words, "Don't do it! I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brothers, all those who hold to the truth that Jesus revealed. Worship God!" (Revelation 19:10).

When Jesus died on the cross He opened the way for us to have the same privileges as a priest. We can all go directly to God and worship Him.

He loves us, and by his death he has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father. To Jesus Christ be the glory and power forever and ever! Amen (Revelation 1:5-6).

We are free to worship God with all our hearts and that worship may be expressed in many ways. In earlier lessons we talked about prayer, music, singing, waiting, and worshiping by our actions. Are there yet other ways to express our love to the Lord? What about during our private devotions or when we are with other believers and praise wells up in our hearts?

The Holy Spirit helps us in our times of worship. When we are together as a group there will be occasions for singing and clapping our hands for joy. This is scriptural (Psalm 47:1). The Bible also tells us to lift up our hands.

“Come, praise the Lord, all his servants, all who serve in his Temple at night. Raise your hands in prayer in the Temple, and praise the Lord!” (Psalm 134:1-2).

The Bible says of David who danced as the ark of the covenant was being brought home to Jerusalem that he “danced with all his might to honor the Lord” (2 Samuel 6:14). No doubt his joy so overflowed that he just couldn’t keep still.

The Lord desires freedom in our worship and our sincere praise. The Holy Spirit wants to move through us to glorify the Father. He will also use our different personalities, for He sees and recognizes us as individuals.

We, too, must remember that not everyone is like us, that other people may respond to the Holy Spirit’s moving differently than we do. One person may not be as quick as another to express his or her feelings. The man who sits quietly may be listening to the Lord, his spirit lifted up to heavenly places with Christ. Someone questioned a woman whose feet often danced though she seldom moved out of her place. They learned that she came from a family of seven children—all born crippled. No wonder her praise took on the form of a dance! Those we have mentioned did not show the same outward expressions of worship, nevertheless each was involved in sincere, heartfelt worship.

Our praise will not be irreverent and will not cause offense if we follow the guideline given in Romans 12:10, “Love one another warmly as Christian brothers, and be eager to show respect for one another.” We will respect other people and their cultures, their personalities, and their walk with the Lord.

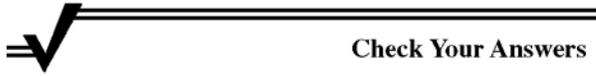


### For You To Do

- 6 Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement.
  - a The Old Testament sacrifices were symbols or “pictures” of things to come.
  - b Images and objects of worship help us keep our minds on the Lord.
  - c John the beloved was told not to bow down to a heavenly being, but to worship God.
  - d We can all go directly to God and worship Him.
  
- 7 Circle the letter in front of each correct completion to the sentence. In the Bible we read of people worshiping the Lord by
  - a) raising their hands.
  - b) dancing before Him.
  - c) screaming as loudly as possible.
  - d) waiting before Him.

8 Complete the statement. Our worship will not likely cause offense and turn people away if we ..... our Christian brothers and show them .....

9 Have you discovered any new ways to worship the Lord in this lesson? List them.  
.....  
.....



**Check Your Answers**

1 c) prayed and God has forgiven us

6 Statements **a**, **c**, and **d** are True.

2 I am.

- 7 a) raising their hands.
- b) dancing before Him.
- d) waiting before Him.

3 **a** first.

**b** clean, clear, uncluttered.

8 love, respect.

4 All of the activities could take first place and hinder our worship; they are good activities as long as they do not come between God and us.

9 Your answer.

5 Your answer. I would say that only good and clean thoughts keep our lives and minds prepared to enter into fellowship with God.