

The Posture of Worship

Part 2

Series: Thoughts on Worship
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Call to Worship: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

Last time in our series on worship, we began a study on what the Bible says about posture in worship. We asked the question:

What about the body in worship?

Is worship in our day simply an issue of the heart—or—does Scripture have something to say concerning our outward expression and countenance?

We saw in our survey through the Bible that Scripture indeed has much to say about posture.

We looked at the two primary words in Scripture most often translated “worship” —*shacah* in the Old Testament and *proskuneo* in the New. The meaning of both words relates to posture and denotes bowing down or making yourself low.

We also discussed ten different postures found in Scripture in the context of worship: standing, sitting, being still, kneeling, bowing down, falling down on your face, lifting up your head, bowing down your head, lifting up your hands and clapping the hands.

There are many verses in the Bible that speak of posture in both the Old and New Testaments. We read over 60 together and there are still more.

So why is posture important? Why all the verses?

Why, in a day when we are called upon to worship God in Spirit and in truth, should we be concerned about our outward expressions of worship?

In our time together this evening I want to answer these questions.

We will first discuss the **importance of posture** and then conclude with a **right perspective on posture**.

I. The importance of posture in worship

1. God made us to be both body and soul.

Genesis 2:7 And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

God created our bodies, as well as our souls. He made us of dust and breathed life in us. He made us to enjoy Him, not only in our souls, but in our bodies as well. He demands our obedience, not only in our hearts, but lived out in our bodies as well.

Paul refers to our bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

God made our bodies to glorify Him. Paul exhorted the church:

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

He desired that Christ be exalted in his own life lived out to God's glory.

Philippians 1:19–20 For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

We cannot separate body and soul. God has created us and wired us to be complete beings. What we do with the body affects the soul. What goes on in the soul is made manifest and expresses itself in the body.

Corporate worship of necessity involves the body.

- We speak God's Word.
- We voice our prayers.
- We sing with our lips.
- We place our gifts and tithes in the offering plate.
- We eat and drink at the Lord's Table.

When we worship God, we worship Him in our bodies.

Oh, but some might say, "God is Spirit." And we are to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. God is concerned with my heart and so what I do with my body is of little or no consequence.

It is true that we are to worship God in Spirit and in truth. But God informs us in His Word that He has given His Spirit to make us alive—in our bodies. His indwelling presence has made our bodies temples of worship. We are living sacrifices, dead to sin but alive unto Christ.

We cannot escape our bodies if we are to participate in the elements of worship. We can get into trouble and become imbalanced we disengage our body and soul. This can happen two ways.

- 1) We become so withdrawn or introspective that we no longer value what is happening around us—or concern ourselves with how we are reacting to what is happening around us. We think that we can hold our faith on the inside—in the domain of the heart—without caring that it ever shows on the outside.
- 2) We become so extroverted that we content ourselves with just going through the bodily motions and we disengage the heart. We think God will be pleased with our outward show of faith without caring that we really mean it on the inside.

Both of these dangers lead us down the road of hypocrisy. When God truly pierces us with His Word, it affects body and soul!

Truth rightly understood in the heart—on the inside—will compel us to live out truth and rightly apply it—on the outside.

Worship begins in the heart—in the mind (focusing and directing our thoughts), then the will (determining our actions), and our emotions (flooding and spilling out into our feelings). As the truth of God's Word dawns in our thinking by the illuminating power of the Spirit, we are brought to sorrow and repentance over our sin—we are brought to joy and faith in the salvation and forgiveness of sin found in Christ. And we are spurred into action and obedience as the reality of God's work on the inside is expressed and lived out on the outside.

We need truth, but we need the Spirit to quicken us and make that truth alive and active in our hearts *and in our lives*. Truth is not just for the mind—it is for the whole of our being.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, **and of joints and marrow**, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Truth has implications and demands on our hands and feet as well as our minds and intellect.

Known truth must be practiced truth. Doctrine must find its way to devotion.

We must avoid error at two extremes.

Some churches emphasize objective truth to the point that they lose sight of the value of subjective experience and expression. There is much doctrinal knowledge—much supposedly taking place on the inside—but little evidence on the faces and in the acts of worship that the knowledge is deeply felt or believed.

And grievously, the hesitancy to visibly demonstrate one's faith, even in a church service, is sadly borne out in the lives of many throughout the week. There are many who attend church services, who, when you follow them home and watch how they react and make decisions and fill their time, you discover that it is not just in the worship service where they refrain from lifting their hands or bowing their knees.

Other churches emphasize subjective experience—the outward frenzy of activity—to the point where they live for induced excitement. They have the appearance of life and enthusiasm, but their moorings in truth are weak and they easily drift into error and superficiality.

We can look at the errors and excesses of others and, in a desire not to fall in with them or be identified with them, give up too much. Robert Rayburn, a Reformed Presbyterian pastor and author, gives the following example of kneeling:

It takes too long to tell, but the story of how kneeling fell out of use in Reformed worship is a cautionary tale. It is a perfect example of good men, with the best intentions, throwing the baby out with the bath-water. In the 16th and 17th centuries, a time of sharp conflict with Roman Catholicism, kneeling became controversial as a posture for receiving the elements at the Lord's Supper (some fearing that it encouraged the view, all too common in those days, that the elements were being venerated themselves as having physically become the body and blood of Christ). The result over time was the abandonment of kneeling altogether in Reformed worship. It had not been so from the beginning. Kneeling for the Lord's Supper and for prayer was common in the worship of Calvin's Geneva and Calvin himself advocated the raising of hands. Those later controversies shaped Reformed practice in surprising and perhaps unintended ways.

Once the habit of not kneeling and of not raising the hands was formed, it became difficult to break. This was all the more so because churches that continued these practices were often those with which Reformed Christians had substantial disagreement (for example: Roman Catholics knelt and Pentecostals raised their hands). It was easy to feel that kneeling or raising hands were acts that somehow were tainted by the errors Reformed Christians found in those other communions. (from "Using Our Hands and Knees in Worship")

Rayburn goes on to point out that it was a desire to be biblical—to allow Scripture to guide and regulate worship—that brought these postures back into the corporate worship services of the church where he is pastor.

God made us to be both body and soul. He created us as whole beings and He desires that we worship and serve and live as whole beings.

2. Body Language is a significant part of how we communicate.

Posture and expression serve important roles in how we communicate with others. God made us this way. You cannot express emotions such as sorrow or joy and express them well or clearly to those in your presence only by saying certain words. When I am speaking to someone near me, I look for visual clues in their countenance, gestures and expression to help me understand what they are saying. Even on the phone, I listen for voice inflection, not just words.

God has wired us to react outwardly—physically— to what affects us inwardly.

The more truly and deeply we are moved on the inside, the more likely it will show on the outside.

You know this to be true.

- When we get frustrated—we throw up our hands
- When we return home, after being away, and we see our loved ones—we throw open our arms
- When we grow impatient—we pace (so our spouse will understand we are in a hurry!)
- When we grow bored and uninterested—we cross our arms

Our posture and body language often speaks louder than our words, especially to those around us.

For example: Men, if you are sitting with your wife at breakfast and she tells you to please remember to stop by the store on your way home after work and pick up a few things—and you:

Look her at her and tell her: “Sure, I will.” [determined]

She knows you mean “Yes” and will try to remember.

But if you are still reading the paper and don’t look up and say: “Sure, I will”

She may wonder: Are you even listening?

We may be doing right things and saying or singing right things, and all the while our bodies (in our postures and gestures) are suggesting a different message to those around us:

- This isn’t really that important to me
- I’m not really interest in this
- I’m not really paying attention or getting what the pastor is saying
- I wish this would get over soon
- I don’t really want to be here
- Let’s get on with this so we can get to the good part of the service
- I’m just here to watch—I am not personally invested in this

Posture *communicates*—and what it communicates is *attitude*.

Scripture bears this out.

We see this with Cain:

Genesis 4:4–5 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

And with Laban:

Genesis 31:1–2 Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, “Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth.” And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before.

The NASB translates verse 2:

“And Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward him as formerly.”

We see the connection of posture to countenance and attitude in the Proverbs as well:

Proverbs 15:13 A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance,
But by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

Proverbs 25:23 The north wind brings forth rain,
And a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

Whether you like it or not your posture largely reflects the bent of your heart.

God has wired us this way. When your heart is filled with joy and excitement and praise—it can't help being expressed in your body.

That is why it is hard to believe the sincerity of someone who does not have physical limitations, who stands rigid and unmoved in a service or refuses to sing and yet claims that he has joy in his heart. It is hard to believe because, you go to that person's home and watch a baseball game and his favorite team scores a go-ahead run, and it becomes quite obvious that he really *is* wired to express joy with his body—he really *does* have a voice to express praise—all it takes is something that really matters to him for it to come out.

3. We are communicating not only to God, but to others around us.

You must remember that in corporate worship, you are worshipping with others around you. Others are near you. Others see you. You are making a statement about your love for God, a statement about your relationship to God—not just to God in your heart—but to those all around you who can see you and hear you.

There are some here in this room who do not know Christ. They are looking at you. Your children see you. [Cross arms and frown] Is this what you hope to communicate to them of your love for Christ?

Men, let's say for a moment that you have an opportunity to spend an evening with your wife. You go out dinner together—maybe see some friends while you are at a restaurant. What message would you communicate to your wife or your friends if you spent the evening cold, sullen and unmoved [yawn and look bored]?

Regardless of what feelings you might have going on inside—your witness and testimony would be “I'd rather not be here with you.”

We must consider what we communicating to those around us when we worship—not just what we are saying or singing—but what we are doing and how we are acting.

The last thing Satan wants an unbeliever to see is a Christian zealous and excited about Christ—especially in the church. So if he can make us uncomfortable or sedentary or unresponsive—all the better. If he can point to some of our brothers and sisters who have gone to excess and have strayed into theological errors, so that we become self-conscious and embarrassed and unwilling to do anything that might make us look like them—that is fine with him.

Let me close this evening with three applications:

II. A Right Perspective on Posture in Worship

1) Express your heart

We must begin with the heart. God is never impressed with us just going through the motions. This was happening in Isaiah's day. God warns the nation of Judah:

Isaiah 1:15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you;
Even though you make many prayers,
I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

In chapter 29 of Isaiah we read God's indictment against them:

Isaiah 29:13 Therefore the Lord said:
"Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths
And honor Me with their lips,
But have removed their hearts far from Me,
And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.

God is most concerned with the heart. But we are not to hide worship in our hearts. Especially when we come together to encourage one another and join together as the body of Christ in corporate worship in this place, we must worship God openly and be unashamed in expressing our need for Christ, showing our love for Christ, and bearing the name of Christ.

Worship does begin in the heart. But our posture can and should reflect the worship that is taking place in the heart. What we express on the outside should overflow from what is happening on the inside.

We must be careful to avoid the dangers of insincerity and pride. We can fall into danger when we:

- 1) Assume a physical posture only so others will see us and be impressed.
 - The Pharisee stood on the street corner to be seen. [Matthew 6:5]
 - Hypocrites changed their countenance to be seen [Matthew 6:16–18]
- 2) Assume (or refrain from assuming) a physical posture thinking that God will be more pleased with us if we do so.
- 3) Assume (or refrain from assuming) a physical posture because we are afraid of what others around us might think.

Let your outward actions reflect inward reality.

Be sincere and free in your outward expression of worship.

As your heart is moved in worship, informed and fed by truth, quickened and empowered by the Spirit, don't be hindered or afraid to outwardly express your worship in ways that Scripture encourages as appropriate for corporate worship.

Share your joy and praise, not just with God, but with others around you.

We are called upon to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength—not just our inner-being, but our whole being.

You should express your hearts, but—

2) Encourage your heart

We are not disembodied spirits in worship. What we do with our bodies has an effect on our hearts. Our physical posture can help or hinder our souls as we worship.

We should train our bodies to be alert and engaged in worship.

If you adopt a posture of disengagement or a posture that suggests that you are preoccupied with something else, you will set up your heart to falter and stumble, you will discourage your soul from getting involved and participating in worship.

Come ready and willing to participate. Pay attention. Follow what is going on.

- When it is time to listen—listen with intensity and concentration.
- When it is time for stillness and quietness—be still and quiet.
- When it is time to respond with joy and praise—as God moves your heart, be joyful!
- When it is time to sing—open your mouth and lift up your voice and sing.

Some of you might say, "I can't sing." And by the way you are standing, by the lack of expression on some faces, I would have to agree with you. Learning to sing and singing well is 90% posture and physical expression. Regardless of musical talent or ability—regardless of whether you think you sing well or sing poorly—you must engage your body and emotionally connect with the song or you will never be able to sing it well. If you can't see it on your face, you will never hear it in your voice.

Sometimes it is hard to participate. We may not feel like singing. We may struggle to pay attention. But we should encourage our hearts and our bodies to honor God in worship.

We should certainly join in and actively engage in worship because our participation encourages our hearts.

But we should also join in and actively engage in worship because God is worthy.

We can kneel or bow down, because we feel our great need of God or because we are overwhelmed with a sense of His greatness and splendor.

And we can kneel or bow down because God *is* sovereign and He *is* our King.

We can lift our hands as we pray or sing because we sense our desire and delight of being in God's presence in worship.

And we can lift our hands simply because we need Him and because He is worthy.

I worship God—day by day and week by week—not because I always feel like worshipping Him. I worship because He deserves all my worship all the time. He owns all my being—not just my mind, not just my will, not just my emotions, not just what is happening on the inside—He owns all of me. He is worthy of my worship.

This is something that I must work at as I lead in worship. I have an introverted personality. I spend a great deal of time and energy pondering things and analyzing in the heart. Worshiping in the heart comes easy. But I want my worship to encourage others to worship—I want my joy in Christ to be a known and visible joy—so I must pray and exhort myself to worship outwardly and openly. I cannot be content to hide my worship. I want to bear witness to those around me that I belong to God—unashamedly.

Parents, teach your children to participate in the service. Encourage them with your own participation. Think about what we are teaching and modeling for our children and for our guests when we are physically disengaged from what is happening around us.

We do our children no good if we show them by our actions that worship isn't really that important to us. We can do that by allowing lesser important things to crowd worship times out of our schedules and by coming to church services only when it is convenient.

But we can do that even when we are here by allowing our children to be disengaged from the service—to color and draw pictures while God's Word is read—to go in and out for drinks of water during the preaching and praying and singing.

You might say, "But they're small. They can't follow what's going on. They can't pay attention that long."

Yes, they are small. And they are learning and absorbing what is around them every moment. They catch a lot more of what is going on around them than you might think.

I have seen many of them play video games and watch TV—I know how long they are able to pay attention and sit still when their heart is engaged. And they certainly won't pay attention if you do not expect them to. And they won't pay attention and join in worship when they see you not paying attention and not participating.

Our kids are not going to know how valuable and precious this time is that we spend together, until they see it in us.

Only God can break through the hearts of our children and bring them to Christ and make Himself precious to them. Only God can give our children hearts that desire to worship Him. But it is our responsibility to till the soil and ready it for the seeds of the gospel, and not fill it up with rocks and stones, week after week, by inadvertently teaching them it is acceptable to be disengaged and tuned out in worship.

When you come to worship, encourage your heart by entering fully into worship.

3) Instruct your heart

If what you communicating to others around you through your posture and expression and attentiveness and participation, does not accurately reflect the love of God in your heart—be humble and open to instruction from God’s Word.

This is why God’s Word speaks to our posture—to instruct and encourage us.

Be more intentional in your participation in worship.

Be more vigilant about what you are communicating to others around you as you worship.

Do not be restrained in doing what Scripture commands and sets before us as right ways of responding to God’s Word in corporate worship.

Worship God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

He worthy of all our worship.

Let us pray.

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