

Excellence in Worship

Part 1: We Worship with Our Bodies

When you hear the word “worship,” what is the first thing that comes to mind? Perhaps you imagine praying and singing praises to God, or you picture a congregation gathered at a church on Sunday morning. It is common to think of worship primarily as a matter of the mouth, but it is really a matter of the whole body.

Think about our postures as we take part in the worship service. We sit and stand. We fold our hands and bow our heads. We keep our eyes on the pastor and listen to what he says. We use our tongues and lips to speak and sing. We use our feet to walk to the front of the church and kneel or stand at the Communion rail. We open our mouths to receive the Lord’s body and blood.

These postures are not done randomly. They are done in response to God’s presence and work through His Word and Sacraments. The reason we attend a worship service is first of all to receive the gifts our Lord has promised to give. We receive forgiveness, peace, and strength because Jesus died to atone for the sins of all people and rose in victory over death. Praying and singing, folding our hands, bowing our heads, and attentively watching and listening are all done in response to these gifts.

We want to apply our whole body in His worship because Jesus redeemed our entire person – body and soul. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says, “*For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (NKJV). Romans 12:1 says, “*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*” (NKJV).

Martin Luther emphasized this whole-bodied worship: “It is to bow the head, bend the body, fall on the knees, prostrate one’s self, and so forth, and to do such things as a sign and acknowledgement of an authority and power; just as people bow in silence before secular princes and lords.... From this

understanding of outward worship you will also understand what Christ meant by true spiritual worship. It is the adoration or bowing of the heart, so that from the bottom of your heart you thereby show and confess yourself to be his subordinate creature” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 36, pp. 292, 293).

We worship with our bodies by responding outwardly to what God has done in redeeming us and planting faith in our hearts. With our bodies, we want to honor, glorify, and praise Him in all that we do and at all times.

We praise Thee, God, and Thee we bless;
We worship Thee in humbleness;
From day to day we glorify
Thee, everlasting God on high.
Of Thy great glory do we sing,
And e’er to Thee our thanks we bring.
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #36, v. 2)

Part 2: We Worship with Our Heads



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