

Arriving Late for Worship

The Greek Word *Proskuneo* is the word from which the English word “worship” is translated. It is defined as “to make obeisance, do reverence to,” and “is used of an act of homage or reverence,” **Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words**, by W. E. Vine. God is the proper Object of our worship; hence with respect to the worship of God this word occurs in such scriptures as Matt. 4:10; John 4:21-24; I Cor. 14:25; Rev. 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16, etc. In the first Scripture just cited, Matt. 4:10, we have the account of Jesus saying to Satan, “*it is written, You shall worship **the Lord your God**, and Him only you shall serve.*”

As just noted, God is the proper object of worship, and inasmuch as the word “worship” means “to make obeisance, do reverence to,” then to worship God involves making “obeisance” and “doing reverence” to God. Inasmuch as we were created in the “*image of God*,” Gen. 1:27; inasmuch as it is “*in Him*” that “*we live and move and have our being*,” Acts 17:28; inasmuch as “*every good gift and every perfect gift*” comes from God, Jas. 1:17; inasmuch as “*the first and great commandment*” demands that “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*,” Matt. 22:37, and inasmuch that “*each of us shall give account of himself to God*,” Rom. 14:12, **then** God is not only the object of our worship; He is also **worthy** of our worship!

A study of the New Testament reveals that early Christians, with regularity, came together to worship God, to observe certain biblically mandated “items of worship,” to study and read the Scriptures, to preach the word, etc. Acts 2:42; 20:7; I Cor. 16:1-2; I Thess. 5:27; Col. 4:16, etc. As Christians, we are forbidden to forsake “*the assembling of ourselves together*,” Heb. 10:25, and, contextually speaking, those who “*willfully*” and consistently forsake such assemblies are described as trampling “*the Son of God underfoot*,” counting “*the blood of the covenant... a common thing*,” and insulting “*the Spirit of grace*,” Heb. 10:29. Properly understood, to forsake “*the assembling of ourselves together*” to worship and serve God is a very, very serious offense!

Of course, **if** one really loves God with all his heart, soul, and mind, Matt. 22:37, **then** he will want to spend as much time as possible in worship, and will eagerly look forward to such opportunities. He will have the attitude of the Psalmist who said, “*I was **glad** when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord*,” Psalm 122:1. And, psychologically speaking, it is difficult to conceive of one who is “*glad*” for the opportunity to worship God, either forsaking the assemblies, or habitually arriving late for the worship assemblies!

I fully acknowledge that some might regard the thoughts expressed in the last paragraph as simply being the narrow-minded opinions of a modern day religionist who finds joy in complaining. So let us look at the subject from the perspective of one who doesn’t even believe there is a God! Specifically, I am referring to a book entitled “**I Sold My Soul on Ebay**,” a non-fiction book written by an atheist named Hemant Mehta. It is a book which “*views faith through an Atheist’s eyes*,” and in which he “*describes his visits to a variety of Christian churches*.” Herein he mentioned some of the things which bothered him about his experiences at the different churches he visited. With regards to

this item, please carefully ponder his exact remarks as cited in the following paragraph:

“Speaking of those who walk into church late, I want to know why they do so. Not everyone gets stuck in traffic. If church is so important, there is no reason to walk in late. In fact, if going somewhere to worship God is important, then people should arrive early. It seems completely disrespectful to me when people walk into the auditorium five or ten minutes into the service. And what’s worse is when parents come in with their children, who learn by example that walking in late is not a big deal. It’s just church, right! No need to get there on time. Is that what Christians want to teach their children?”

I recognize that we will be judged by the word of the Lord, John 12:48, not the words of an avowed atheist. However, when an **atheist** hears the declarations of faith and love on the part of professed Christians, and then observes the actions of some who habitually arrive late for worship, he has reason to question the sincerity of their claims!

Why do people habitually arrive late for Bible Study and Worship? There is no single answer to that question. The reason may vary from person to person. Admittedly, there are some people who arrive late for nearly every appointment; it is so common that being late is almost a part of their nature. Some have conjectured that people arrive late to worship because it enables them to avoid forming close relationships, and this conclusion seems especially valid with regards to those who consistently are the last ones to **arrive** and the first ones to **leave**! Others have concluded that people arrive late because, though they profess to be Christians, they don’t really enjoy studying the Bible and worshipping God.

Obviously this writer does not know all the reasons why people arrive late to worship. And, admittedly, regardless of our best efforts, there are times when one has no choice but to be late. The car can break down enroute to worship. Family members may suddenly become ill. Unexpected “traffic jams” are sometimes encountered — especially in large metropolitan areas. Some people’s work schedule forces them to be late. Many valid reasons can be cited as to why some are infrequently late.

But the plain truth remains that most examples of people being late derives from the fact that **they don’t plan to be early!** Some people are early, or at least “on time,” for most every other event — whether it be going to school, going to work, to a party, a ball game, an amusement park, etc., but for worship lateness has become such a habit that the rest of the members **expect** them to be late!

Genuine “*Christians*” are also “*disciples*” of Jesus Christ, Acts 11:26. Jesus taught that a “*disciple*” strives to be “*like his teacher*,” Luke 6:40; in other words, a “*disciple*” of Jesus strives to be “*like*” Jesus. Of Jesus, the disciples remembered that it was written, “***Zeal for your house has eaten Me up***,” John 2:17; cf. Ps. 69:9. In this age, the Lord’s “*house*” is His church,” I Tim. 3:15. Can you imagine a follower of Jesus Christ, who **really** has “*zeal*” for the Lord’s “*house*,” and the worship thereof, consistently being late for the regularly scheduled Bible study and worship assemblies of

the church? Beloved, let me kindly state that if you can “imagine” such, then there must be something wrong with your **imaginator!** —B. Witherington
