

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

John 5:44 ... "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that come from the only God?"

Our topic, "praise and worship," is often expressed as a single, combined act. Most Protestant churches feature a time of singing in their services that they call "praise and worship." Though I have attended several Catholic masses, I do not know if they actually refer to their corporate singing as "praise and worship."

Let us define each of these terms. Praise is the act of testifying publicly about God's role in your life and your devotion to him. If I run into you in the hardware store and you tell me how good God has been to you lately, you are praising him. So, Christian song writers have composed thousands of songs that give us the opportunity to testify to God's goodness in our lives. When you sing a praise song, you are actually singing about God to the people around you. Worship, on the other hand, is the act of telling God how you feel about him. A worship song is equivalent to a musical prayer that you sing to God, expressing your love for and devotion to him. The fact that other people around you in church may be singing and expressing the same thing, just adds to the fragrance of love that is being lofted into the heavens to your heavenly Father.

In the American churches I attended and served in, we generally sang praise songs first, followed by worship songs. Why? Because praise songs open up our minds and hearts to the riches and truth of God's role in our lives and give us an opportunity to share those emotions and convictions with people around us. They sort of prime the pump in preparing us to worship; praise songs help us forget the trials and stress of our week and remind us that God is still in charge. We are then better prepared to honor God by singing our thanks to him through worship songs. There are no rules in how you organize a praise and worship service. God is not disappointed if you sing worship songs before praise songs, or if you bounce back and forth between praise and worship songs. In fact, many popular songs are written in such a way that their lyrics bounce back and forth between praise and worship. Perhaps the composers of those songs did not have had a clear understanding that praise is different than worship.

If you are a pastor or song leader in church, consider categorizing the songs you sing and then featuring praise songs ahead of worship songs in your services. Do this by studying the lyrics, which are either saying something about God (praise song), or saying something to God (worship song)? It is human nature to feel more thankful when you are reminded about how much you are blessed. That is accomplished in church when you sing praise songs before you sing worship songs. If you are using a modern song that includes both praise and worship sentiments, place such songs in the middle of your song service. Then, take this a step further and teach this principle to your congregation. Explain to them how praise songs differ from worship songs. When your congregation understands that they have the opportunity to testify about God through praise songs, and to pray to God musically through worship songs, the experience will be more meaningful for them and for you.