

Worship

A number of years ago I read a newspaper account of a christening party in a wealthy Boston suburb. The parents had opened their palatial home to friends and relatives, who had come to celebrate the wonderful event. As the party was moving along and the people were having a wonderful time eating, drinking, celebrating and enjoying one another, somebody said, "By the way; where is the baby?" The heart of the mother jumped and she instantly left the room and rushed into the master bedroom, where she had left the baby asleep in the middle of the massive bed.

The baby was dead smothered by the coats of the guests.

I've often thought about that in reference to how the Lord Jesus Christ is treated in His own Church. We think we are celebrating Him, while in reality we're preoccupied with fulfilling our own selfish desires, unconcerned and uncaring about the real reason we're here. One of the great tragedies of contemporary Christianity is that we have allowed the concept of worship to degenerate so that Christ can be neglected or even opposed by those who think they are worshipping Him.

What is Worship? Many are not certain what worship is. Some Christians think of worship as sitting quietly and piously, dreamily contemplating some abstract and ethereal noumenon. Other Christians see worship as liturgy-a structured system to be followed at a certain time, in a specified place with the proper atmosphere and just the right words and music. Still others equate worship with motion or emotion or even volume. To them, intense feelings, loud noise or frenzied activity are essential to fervent worship. Modern Christianity as a whole tends to view worship as an activity that takes place usually in Church on Sunday and perhaps occasionally in the prayer closet during devotions or with a Bible study group. Consequently the spate of books and articles recently published on the subject has focused largely on the forms of worship-style, order of service and ritual-often missing the real point that worship is a life-style, consuming the whole being. Worship is not just mystical, it is

intensely practical. It is not rigid, void of spontaneity, but neither is it mindless emotion and activity. Worship is nothing if it is not continuous, deliberate, purposeful, active and dynamic. It is all that we are, reacting rightly to all that God is.

In the Old Testament: The first mention of the word worship in the Old Testament is by Abraham. Speaking to his servants, Abraham said, we both will go up that mountain and worship God and come back to you. Genesis 22:5. Here, actually Abraham was going to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering to God, in obedience to His command. The burnt sacrifice was meant to please God as a sweet smelling savor. For Abraham it was worship. The meaning for worship, is offering sacrifice to please God, laying on the altar that which is close to your heart, which you love so much!

The Hebrew word for worship in OT is ‘shaw- khaw’, meaning to prostrate, bow down to royalty or God, humbly beseech, do reverence or worship. It is more to do with external expression of respect to a superior being, by bowing down, prostrating oneself before the royalty. Since God manifested through His glory in the temple, Israelites prostrate in towards the temple.

Psalms are full of worship expressions, beautifully describing worship using these same words and adding more expressions like music and singing, etc. E.g. Psalm 95:6-7, Oh, come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker...” Also Psalm 96 and other worship Psalms.

Similarly, when the Wise men came from the East to visit the Lord Jesus when He was born, they said, they came to worship Him. In Matthew 2:11, we notice that they fell down and worshipped Him and presented to Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. So the worship involved outward expression and giving costly gifts. Thus, we see that the worship in the OT was mostly concerned with external expressions and offerings and animal sacrifices in the temple. Now let us see what the NT teaches us about worship.

In the New Testament: According to **1 Corinthians 6:19**, every believer is a living, breathing temple in which God dwells. That means believers can worship anywhere, at any time-God goes with them in an abiding defense. A Christian can worship anywhere under any kind of circumstance or condition. The sphere of worship is unlimited and worship reaches its most sublime heights when the worshipper is living continuously in God's presence, in the glow of His glory, a life of worship. **Biblically, worship is simply honour and adoration directed to God.**

The New Testament uses several words for worship. Two of them particularly are noteworthy. The first is **proskuneo**, a commonly used term that literally means '**to kiss toward,**' to kiss the hand," or to bow down.' It is the word for worship used to signify humble adoration. The second word is **latreuo**, which suggests rendering **honour or paying homage**. The Anglo-Saxon word from which we get our English word **weorthscipe**, which is tied to the concept of **worthiness**. That's appropriate, for worship is ascribing to God His worth, stating and affirming His supreme value. All of those terms carry the idea of **giving** and worship is what we **give to God**.

Modern Christianity seems committed instead to the idea that God should be giving to us. God does give to us abundantly but we need to understand that a consuming, selfless desire to give to God is the essence and the heart of worship. It begins with the giving first of ourselves and then of our attitudes and then of our possessions-until worship is a way of life.

Three Dimensional Worship: A key adjective, often used in the New Testament to describe proper acts of worship, is the word acceptable. Every worshipper seeks to offer that which is acceptable and at least **three categories of acceptable worship** are specified in Scripture.

Sharing. First, worship can be reflected in how we behave toward others. **Romans 14: 18** says, 'For he who in this way serves (latreuo) Christ is acceptable to God.' What is this acceptable offering given to God?

The context reveals that it is being sensitive to a weaker brother. Verse 13 says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way." In other words, when we treat fellow Christians with the proper kind of sensitivity, that is an acceptable act of worship. It honours God, who created and loves that person and it reflects God's compassion and care.

Romans 15: 16 implies that evangelism is a form of acceptable worship. Paul writes that special grace was given to him "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that my offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable." The Gentiles who were won Jesus Christ by his ministry became an offering of worship to God.

In Philippians 4:18, Paul thanks the Church for a gift of money to help him in his ministry: "I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrificed well-pleasing to God. There, acceptable worship is described as giving to those in need. That glorifies God by demonstrating His love. So worship can be expressed by, showing love to fellow believers, sharing the gospel with unbelievers or meeting the needs of people on a very physical level. We can sum it up in a single word: acceptable worship is sharing. It is a love that gives.

Doing good. A second category of worship involves our personal behaviour. **Ephesians 5:8-10** says, "Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." The word '**pleasing**' is from a Greek word that means "acceptable." In this context, he is referring to goodness, righteousness and truth, saying clearly that to do good is an acceptable act of worship toward God. So sharing is an act of worship and that is the effect of worship on others.

Doing good is also an act of worship and that is its effect in our own lives. There is one other relationship that is affected by our worship-our relationship with God.

Pleasing God. This third category, which marvelously sums up worship, is described in **Hebrews 13:15-16**. Verse 15 says, "Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that give thanks to His name." As we look at worship in its Godward focus, we discover that it is thanksgiving and praise. With verse 16, the passage brings together all three categories of worship: 'And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.' Sharing with others, doing good and praising God-all are legitimate, scriptural acts of worship.

That draws into the concept of worship every activity and relationship of human living. The implication is that the believer should be dedicated in every aspect of life to the activity of worship, consumed with a desire to use every moment of his life to devote himself to doing good, sharing and praising God.

Not Style but Substance What is true in our individual lives is also true in the corporate assembly of believers: worship is not primarily an external, formal, ritualized activity. It is not form, but function; not style, but substance. Neither is worship stimulated by gimmicks. People have suggested to me that we should place signs around our Church building that say 'Quiet' or 'Keep Silence in the Place of Worship.' Some Churches insert a notice in the bulletin telling people not to talk when they come in, And I suppose some would have the Pastor wear a robe with little bells on it so that when he comes into the service like the priest of old and you hear the tinkle you know it's time to get holy. That has nothing to do with real worship.

Worship is not energized by artificial methods. If you feel you must have formalized ritual or a certain kind of mood music to worship, what you do isn't worship. Music and liturgy can assist or express a worshipping heart, but they cannot make a non-worshipping heart into a

worshipping one. The danger is that they can give a non-worshipping heart the false sense of having worshipped. So the crucial factor in worship in the Church is not the form of worship, but the state of the hearts of the saints. If our corporate worship isn't the expression of our individual worshipping lives, it is unacceptable. If you think you can live any way you want and then go to Church on Sunday morning and turn on worship with the saints, you're wrong. Worship does not occur in a vacuum. As believers, we are responsible to the rest of the Church to maintain a consistent life-style of genuine, acceptable worship. Our failure to do so will adversely affect the rest of the Body of Christ, just as Achan's sin had disastrous effects on the whole nation of Israel.

What we do throughout the week will affect the members of the Church with whom we worship on Sunday. It is not unusual to hear someone say, "I didn't get anything out of Church." My response is, "What did you give God? How was your heart prepared to give?" If you come away from Church only having scrutinized the soloist, analyzed the choir and criticized the message, you are missing the point of your being there. We've been conditioned too long to think that the Church is to entertain us. That is not the case. If you go to Church selfishly to seek a blessing, you have missed the point of worship. We go to 'give glory, not to get blessed. An understanding of that will affect how you critique the Church experience. The issue isn't, Did I get anything out of it? but, Did I from my heart give glory to God? Since blessing comes from God in response to worship, if you aren't blessed, it isn't usually because of poor music or preaching (though they may occasionally prove to be insurmountable obstacles), but because of a selfish heart that does not give God glory.

SYMBIOSIS: Although it is intensely personal, there is nothing self-centered about genuine worship. If believers are to maintain a consistent life-style of continuous worship, they need the fellowship and encouragement of other believers as they assemble for group worship. Individual worship and corporate worship feed each other. On the one hand, you need the fellowship of the saints. On the other hand, the

communities of saints needs your life of consistent worship. If you go to Church only when it is convenient, you will never be victorious and productive as a Christian. You can't succeed on your own; you need to have the spiritual stimulation of fellow believers. We live in such an easy-come, easy-go, casual, flippant society that people don't make consistent, faithful commitments and then they wonder why they fail. The answer is clear. Spiritual success requires commitment to others.

The Church is not the brick-and-mortar building in which the assembly meets; it is God's people in whom He dwells. We must bring into the Church a worshipping heart to stimulate others while being stimulated to love and good works (Heb. 10:23-25). As that stimulation affects our souls we do good and share. The cycle is complete when we live out the overflow of praise and a continual heart of thanksgiving. Then our worship is a way of life. How are we doing? The source of most of the problems people have in their Christian lives relates to two things: either they are not worshipping six days a week with their lives or they are not worshipping one day a week with the assembly of the saints. We need both.

Tragically, the element of true worship is largely missing amid all the activity that goes on in contemporary Christianity. We have many activities and little worship. We are big on ministry and small on adoration. We are disastrously self-centered and pragmatic. All we want to know about is what works to our benefit. We want formulas and gimmicks and somehow in the process, we leave out that to which God has called us. We are like Martha so deeply entrenched in activity that we miss the real priority. We are programmed and informed and planned and busy and we slight worship! We have our functionaries, our promotions, our objectives, our success-driven, numbers-conscious, traditionalistic, even faddish efforts. But too often acceptable, true, spiritual worship eludes us.

A distinguished explorer was making a trek in the Amazon jungle. Native tribesmen were bearing his great burdens and he was driving

them with great force to cover a lot of ground rapidly. At the end of the third day they rested and when morning came and it was time to embark again, the natives sat on the ground by their burdens. The explorer did everything he could to get them up and moving, but they wouldn't budge. Finally, the chief said to him, "My friend, they are resting until their souls catch up to their bodies." That's what Christians today need-a long rest to let their souls catch up.

The contemporary Church, having weathered stages of cold formalism, mindless emotionalism, sterile intellectualism and trendy faddism, is facing a long, dry spell. I am convinced that nothing less than a wholehearted return to the purity of biblical worship can provide relief from this spiritual draught. But I'm equally convinced that when the people of God are worshipping in the way He has called us, nothing can interrupt the blessing of God on their lives on the corporate fellowship. Amen!

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