

Some Thoughts on Worship

What is worship?

The Greek words for 'worship' define it as a prostration before God, a bowing down in reverence, fear and awe. 'Worship' today is often thought of as a time of singing to the Lord with music and song. But the definition of worship surely includes prayer, Bible study and indeed 'life' itself. The ultimate aim of 'worship' is to glorify God in *everything* we do. Recently, a Scripture that was impressed upon me is 1Corinthians 10:31: ***'Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God'***.

The Westminster Confession states: *'The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever'*. God's request is to be glorified. His goal is to bring about His own glorification. ***'...that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen'***, (1Pet.4:11). Therefore God surely commands our praise. When Jesus healed a blind man, He received praise and people thus ***'glorified God'***, (Lk.18:43).

God is glorified when we are satisfied in Him

God's request is to be glorified. But what about our part in this? If we are honest we might admit that most things we do in life are in search of pleasure, satisfaction or joy. As Christians, we are most fulfilled when we are *satisfied* in, and have *joy* in, the Lord. ***'Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be you sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength'***, (Neh.8:10); ***'...in your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore'***, (Ps.16:11). Indeed joy is part of the ***'fruit of the spirit'***, (Gal.5:18).

Satisfaction and Joy should be a part of worship

The problem with much of contemporary 'worship' is that it is often a manifested external joy. Yet we cannot consciously 'switch on' joy in worship. The longing and desire to worship must come from *within* and be fuelled by such things as fellowship, studying the Word of God, and ultimately from the Holy Spirit, who manifests the fruit of joy within us. Nevertheless, *joy and pleasure should be a part of worship*. ***'...Sing praises to His name; for it is pleasant'***, (Ps.135:3). Charles Spurgeon once challenged his local church: *'Sing up!...Out with such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God; if men's hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services? We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the prayer meeting be more than ever cheered by praise. The singing of God's people should be, and if they were more full of divine strength would be, more constant and universal. How sinners chant the praise of Baechus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall [those singing with] wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music; the days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seem to have gone by; we have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodist shout. Brethren,*

wake up your singing again. May the Lord give us again a singing-time, and make us all praise him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, 'The Lord hath done great things for them' and we shall reply, 'Ay, ye speak the truth; he hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad'.

The Psalmist, David, yearned for this 'satisfaction' when he wrote *'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me...Restore unto me the joy of your salvation; and uphold me with your free spirit'*, (Ps.51:10,12).

In some circles today it is not popular to seek to be joyous or to have pleasure in worship. Perhaps some would want to shy away from the Charismatic excesses that are rampant in modern Christianity. But true worship should be pleasurable and joyous. ***'Delight yourself also in the Lord; and he shall give you the desires of your heart'***, (Ps.37:4).

God's request is to be glorified and our quest is to be satisfied in Him. When the two meet, the goal of worship is accomplished and God is glorified. This is surely part of ***'worship in spirit and in truth'***, (Jn.4:24).

Worship must have both heart and head

The Charismatic/Pentecostal excesses in worship have no doubt shown us many examples of heart with little head. This is similar to 'zeal without knowledge', (Rom.10:2). Worship with heart and no head lacks truth, is shallow and often disorderly, lacking discipline. Many churches today are in danger of 'worshipping the worship'. 'Contemporary Christian music' today has arguably made an idol out of musical 'worship'. Churches now send people away to be trained at colleges to be 'worship leaders'. It is difficult to find scriptural warrant for this. One can understand having a 'song leader', but the term 'worship leader' is questionable. Whatever the role, it should be to motivate the people to express praise to the Lord in the songs they write and sing, as well as in the way they 'lead'.

A good 'song leader' should combine Biblical truth with music. The contemporary songs today show clearly the lack of Biblical knowledge of many song leaders and writers. Too many songs are simply devoid of sound doctrine.

Today there also appears to be the understanding that song leaders lead us into the 'presence' of God. The danger in contemporary 'song leading' is that we create the impression that the presence of God is increased through music. But music is at best only a tool. Music can never show us more of Christ and His substitutionary atonement. *Song leaders simply do not lead us into the 'presence of God'*! This at best is extra biblical and at worst occultic. Jesus has already done this at Calvary; the 'veil' between us and the presence of God was torn down and we now enter with boldness! (Matt.27:51; Heb.4:16)

What does it mean to worship 'in spirit'? It must surely mean that the Holy Spirit does what He is supposed to do - illuminating, helping, strengthening, comforting, leading, making us aware of God's presence within and especially revealing Christ and Him crucified.

Nevertheless, music is a powerful medium. Martin Luther knew the power of music: *'Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. It controls our thoughts, minds, hearts, and spirits...'* (1)

Therefore song leaders must teach their people the difference between being moved by music and being moved by who Jesus is and what He has done. Music can never 'transform by the renewing of the mind', (Rom.12:2). Only the Word of God can do this!

We reap what we sow. If we sow to musical experiences, we'll reap a desire for more fleshly sounds. If we sow to feelings, we'll reap meetings with emotional highs. If we sow a reverence in the need to glorify God, we sow to His glory and our true sanctification.

But what about the 'conservatives' who might swing to the other extreme - head and no heart? Some believe that we deny ourselves so we can worship better. Some even say it is sinful to enjoy oneself in praise. But this cuts the 'heart' out of worship and may well become legalistic. *Worship must engage head and heart with all its emotions.* (We are not here speaking of emotionalism, for if we are out of control, we are not God-controlled). But worship must engage both thoughts and emotions, both head and heart. May we never be satisfied with mere intellectual knowledge. The great revivalist, Jonathan Edwards, spoke of 'affections' as being the substance of worship. *Where feelings are dead, worship is dead!*

In seeking pleasure or joy in worship, the danger is that we would praise God to bring joy. But the pleasure or joy is not the chief end; but rather the glorification of God. We do not praise to bring joy; we praise God for who He is, and that brings joy!

One author speaks of worship being like a furnace which has fuel and heat. *'The fuel of worship is a true vision of the greatness of God; the fire that makes the fuel burn white hot is the quickening of the Holy Spirit; the furnace made alive and warm by the flame of truth is our renewed spirit; and the resulting heat of our affections is powerful worship, pushing its way out in confessions, longings...songs, bowed heads...and obedient lives'*. (2) And if we are not immersed in the Word of God, in prayer, and in fellowship, then where is the Spirit's power for this 'furnace' of worship?

'Helps' in worship:

The Sovereignty of God: The foundation of all worship is knowing who God is and what He has done for us. Worship surely hinges on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. This doctrine gives great comfort and assurance - that God is in total control of our lives and our circumstances. *'According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world...Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved...That we should be to the praise of his glory...you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory'*, (Eph.1:1-14)..

Salvation: A high view of and a consistent reminding ourselves of God's great salvation through Jesus Christ, is surely motivation to 'worship'! *'He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he has put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God...'*, (Ps.40:2,3). The Israelites well understood this motivation

for praising the Lord: *'...I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider has he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him a habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him'*, (Ex.15:1,2); *'O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods'*, (Ps.95:1-3).

Studying the Word of God: Becoming a 'workman' (2Tim.2:15) and digging further into the veins of truth found in the bottomless treasures of Scripture, will surely motivate us further to worship the One who first breathed out these nuggets of truth.

Fellowship: Close contact with other Spirit filled Christians gives us exhortation and encouragement to continue to live lives that glorify Christ, (Heb.10:25).

See God in everything and then worship Him in everything: Everything in life should glorify God. We must be careful of the error of 'dualism' where we divide the 'secular' from the 'sacred'. Added to this, today we too often 'compartmentalise' worship into singing at church ('Worship services'?). But *'whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God'*, (1Cor.10:31). Whether we are working, enjoying recreations or 'whatsoever' we do *'do all to the glory of God'*. *Everything we do in life should be a part of worship.* This was brought home to me recently when I took 'holidays' and a break from full time day to day 'ministry'. I decided to make a conscious effort to *'do all to the glory of God'*. My plan was to start by thanking and remembering Him more often throughout each day for the 'all' that we did, whatever it was. I can testify that there was a sense of increased joy and the presence of God in the simplest of things!

Pursue Him: Our praise is not complete until we express it. We must pursue Him in worship, for God seeks those who will worship Him. *'But the hour comes, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him'*, (Jn.4:23).

The ultimate aim of worship is to glorify God. We were created to worship him because that is what glorifies him. The Father is seeking true worshippers.

God is glorified when we are satisfied in Him and then worship become a joy. We are fulfilled when we are satisfied and have joy in the Lord. Joy must be a part of worship. His request is to be glorified and our quest is to be satisfied in Him.

What motivates you to worship? Is it salvation, the Scriptures, the sovereignty of God...? See God in everything and then worship Him in everything! Pursue Him in worship. *'Whether therefore you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God'*, (1Cor.10:31).

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- (1) A collection of chorale motets (1538) by Martin Luther.
- (2) Several ideas in this article have been extracted from some chapters in 'Desiring God' by John Piper.