

Created for Worship

Why do we go to church each Sunday? To meet friends and relatives? To have fellowship with fellow believers? I am sure you would reply. "We go there to worship". We speak about attending worship services. Why? Because worship is the central task of the church. It is not an optional extra for Christians, a self indulgent religious activity. Worship is for God only. God alone matters. He must come first, before everything, even ourselves. The chief purpose of worship is to please God - whether by prayer and praise, offerings or sermons. But what is worship? This question is often debated. Hence, we must be clear what it means. The word is derived from "worth-ship", which signifies giving God all He's worth.

It should be understood that every act of worship is a sacrifice of praise, an offering to God. He is the awesome and majestic Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms who God is. We praise the name of God, the Father, we pray to Christ as God, and we invoke the Holy Spirit. The Triune God calls us together to worship Him. Worship is possible only when God's covenant people gather together "in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit".

In worship we seek ways to honour God that advance His worthiness, all the while recognizing that our attempts are inadequate, that we will never be able to worship in all perfection until we join the saints and angels in heaven. At this juncture, it is critical to think about the picture we have of God. What we think about God shapes the way we worship. A vivid early scene in "Brother Sun, sister Moon", a movie about Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), shows how, before he came to a genuine faith in Jesus Christ, he looked at the crucifix and the priest's trappings and saw only a God of cruelty and abusive power. Years ago I met a lady, who had made profession of faith in her church but had never partaken of the Lord's Supper. She believed that God hated her. She said that she could never be forgiven because her sins were too great. She saw God only as a vengeful God of wrath. She was afraid to live and scared of death. I have met others who viewed God as a kind and benevolent grand Fatherly heavenly being, winking at sin. The lady was frightened of God. The others did not have a healthy fear of Him. If we are either frightened of God or do not have a healthy fear of Him, we are not capable of proper worship.

In the worship services God meets with His people. The focus of the congregation is on Him, to meditate on His presence, His attributes, His greatness, His love, His power, glory, goodness, faithfulness, etc. God's people gather together each Lord's Day to give their all to their covenant God. He alone is worthy of all adoration. You are worthy. O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power", (Rev. 4:11). We worship God for His own sake. We do not worship Him for what we can get out of it. "Whoever seeks God as a means toward desired ends will not find God", wrote A. W. Tozer. "God will not be used".

Who is the God we worship? He is the Holy One. In worship we are in His holy presence. We cannot cozy up to Him. When Moses met God at the burning bush, he

was told to take off his sandals, for the place where he was standing was holy ground. After God had revealed to him a glimpse of His glory, Moses "hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God". (Exodus 3:5, 6). When the prophet Isaiah had a vision of God enthroned and exalted, he was overwhelmed by a deep sense of sin and unworthiness, (Isaiah 6:15). Someone wrote, "The more we encounter the holy God in our worship, the more we will recognize our sinfulness and be driven to repentance. This, too, is an essential part of our praise". And God centered worship includes the fear of God. In Scripture the fear of the Lord plays a vital role in spiritual life and worship. According to the New Testament teaching we must come to God with "fear and trembling". (2 Cor. 7:15; Eph. 6:5, Phil, 2:12). What does it mean to fear God? I have been asked. "Does fearing God mean that I must be afraid of God?" Christians are not frightened of God. He is their Father, Who looks after them with tender loving care, Who welcomes them home when their journey of life is over. To fear God means to humble yourself before Him. (Prov. 15:33). The believer is overwhelmed by His presence. He stands in awe before Him. He is reverent in worship. We can't treat God as an equal, or worse, as a servant. We may never succumb to familiarity. What the church needs is a restoration of a deep sense of awe. This will do more than anything else to restore the Biblical meaning of worship.

The God we worship is the One Whom we know through Christ. The God we believe in is not remote from the world or from our own experiences. He is there in the middle of pain and suffering here in this world. Without Jesus, the crucified Jesus, sharing and bearing the pain and sin and suffering of the world, our worship would be in vain. Through Christ we catch a glimpse of the beauty, compassion, and love of God. On the cross Jesus, in principle, won the victory over sin, violence, pride, and arrogance. The empty tomb testifies to the reality of Christ's resurrection. His triumph over death and the grave. This leads to the question: "Who can truly worship God?" The answer is plain. Not everyone is able to worship God. Only the redeemed of the Lord, the blood bought church, can worship God in spirit and in truth. Jesus made this plain when He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me". (John 14:16) A man who worships God without Jesus Christ assumes too much. He is like Cain, Adam's son, whose worship was rejected by God as he had an unregenerate heart. Cain may have had a religious experience, but God did not accept him. It is not religious experience that counts but truth. All kinds of people have spiritual experiences or good feelings, but these don't lead them into the very throne room of God. We can come into the presence of God only when we are saved by the blood of Christ. Therefore, if our worship is not focused on Christ, it is not acceptable unto God. We worship Him for whom He is and for what He has done for us through His ministry, death, and resurrection. The apostle Paul says that God the Father raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion. (Eph. 1:20f). We worship Him as the Lamb of God Who is at the center of heaven's worship. (Rev. 5).

Why do we focus in our worship on Christ? Is it primarily on account of the salvation from sin, death and hell He has provided for us? Is it because He is preparing a place for us in heaven? Of course, we want to praise Him for all what He has done for us. But

the ultimate purpose for Christ's coming to earth was not our salvation, although this was a key component of His ministry. "The purpose of God in sending His Son to die and rise and live and be at the right hand of God Father", said A. W. Tozer, "was that He might restore to us the missing jewel of worship... learn to do again what we were created to do in the first place-worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, to spend our time in awesome wonder and adoration of God".

When we give God all His worth in our church services, there will always be an element of wonder and mystery. The element of mystery is an intricate part of worship. And this is the way it should be.

No one can explain everything. No one can fully understand God and His ways. How can the creature figure out the mind of the Creator? The apostle Paul was intimately acquainted with Christ. Paul was a profound teacher of truth, but he did not grasp every doctrine. He certainly could not understand the ways and means of God's dealing with the world. Overawed by the majesty and greatness of God, he bowed down in worship and exclaimed:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Rom. 11:33-36).

Come, let us worship our covenant God in spirit and in truth, "for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care". (P.95:7).

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