

WORSHIP by Max Frazier, Jr.

These are indeed perilous days for the Church of Jesus Christ. Satanic attacks upon the Church are occurring more often and the assaults are more intense. Furthermore, the content of the assaults has changed over the past decade or so. Often I receive word that a pastoral colleague of mine has left the ministry, or that a local church is going through a difficult time, with some even splitting. What gives me cause for grief is that, in many instances, the catalyst for the difficulty has been worship. That which is to be sacred and special to God has become the tool Satan has used to divide His Church.

A few years ago, as I was meeting with a local church and helping them to formulate a structure of priorities for their ministry, I was asked, "Max, what is worship? How can we do worship?" I had to honestly admit that I did not know exactly. In fact, I shared with these people that I needed to learn how to worship. God led me to a study of the Psalms and there I discovered some significant things about worship.

Since that time, I have had the opportunity of sharing with many others a biblical foundation for worship. In each of the next several issues of the Philogian, I would like to share with you some of those biblical foundational truths that God shared with me. Some are indeed old truths that need to be rediscovered, while others are new truths that need to be learned. It is my earnest hope that worship will become once again an opportunity for the expressions of unity and joy before our Lord rather than a cause for bringing pain to His Church.

WORSHIP: WHAT IS IT?

Worship. It is a word used frequently both in the Old Testament (104 times) and the New Testament (77 times). The word is used most often in the active tense, therefore, it is something that a person does. It is not something that is done for him by another. I cannot worship for you. It is not something that is done to you. I cannot compel you to worship. Worship is something that only you can do. Although it is often done within a corporate structure, worship is a private matter of one's heart.

Worship Defined

The English word "worship" comes from the Anglo-Saxon word "worthship" which meant, "to attribute supreme worth to someone or something." Here is how a few others have defined this term:

To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. (William Temple, late Archbishop of Canterbury).

A worship service is a dramatic event. When the Creator meets the creature, when the Infinite contacts the finite, when Immortal meets mortal, when God reveals and man responds, it is dramatic. If this encounter fails to occur, worship has not taken place even if the bulletin heading reads, "Worship Service." (Ron Allen, professor of Old Testament at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary).

Most people think of the church as a drama with the minister as the chief actor, God as the prompter, and the laity as the critic. What is actually the case is that the congregation is the chief actor, the minister is the prompter, and God is the critic. (Dr. D. James Kennedy, Senior Pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church).

Worship is a response of adoration in intelligent appreciation for who the Lord is and what he has done. (Dr. Stuart Briscoe, Senior Pastor of Elmbrook Church)

Worship: What Is It?

First of all, worship is the celebration of God. We extol Him. We sound His praises. We boast in Him. In his book titled, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, Ron Allen writes:

Worship is not the casual chatter that occasionally drowns out the organ prelude; we celebrate God when we allow the prelude to attune our hearts to the glory of God by the means of music.

Worship is not the mumbling of prayers or the mouthing of hymns with little thought and less heart; we celebrate God when we join together earnestly in prayer and intensely in song.

Worship is not self-aggrandizing words or boring clichés when one is asked to give a testimony; we celebrate God when we boast in His name to the good of His people.

Worship is not irrelevant thoughts or fragmented elements, silly asides or unconnected directions in purpose; we

celebrate God when all the parts of the service fit together and work to a common end.

Worship is not grudging gifts or compulsory service; we celebrate God when we give to Him hilariously and serve Him with integrity.

Worship is not haphazard music done poorly, not even great music done merely as a performance; we celebrate God when we enjoy and participate in music to His glory.

Worship is not a distracted endurance of the sermon that is poorly prepared and carelessly delivered; we celebrate God when we honor His Word with our words, by His Spirit.

Worship is not hurried motions or a "tacked-on" Lord's Table; we celebrate God pre-eminently when we fellowship gratefully at the ceremonial meal that speaks so centrally of our faith in the Christ Who died for us, Who rose again on our behalf, and Who is to return for our good. (pages 18-19).

Secondly, worship is a state of heart. It is who we are. It is not what we do. Ron Allen continued, When the heart is set upon God, true worship will not depend upon outward stimulus, it will be in constant progress. If our hearts are in tune with God, then all of life is a time of worship.

But the key to worship is, Where is my heart? Is my heart at the ball park? Is my heart on the golf course? Is my heart out in the middle of the lake fishing? Is my heart home relaxing? Is my heart wondering about the work that I need to accomplish tomorrow? Or, is my heart focusing upon God and God alone?

The following verses describe the important role the heart has in response to God:

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:26)

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)

So, what is worship? Worship is an active response from my heart to God whereby I declare how worthy God is. Worship is really hearing and doing, and until I respond to God I really have not worshipped.

Worship: Why Do We Fail?

First, our attitude of heart is missing. Worship is not something we just do on Sunday mornings. Worship is not a switch we turn off and on. Worship is not a text but a context; it is not an isolated experience in life, but a series of life experiences (Gary Gulbranson, as quoted in Quotable Quotes, by Lloyd Cory).

Because of this fact, we have form but no power. The power of worship comes when we truly give active expression to our love of God and make His love the center of our lives. I can't just love God at certain times of the day or at certain times of the week. I am either in love with God or not in love with Him. Furthermore, God wants all my love. Let us read once again Deuteronomy 6:5, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Let me see if I can illustrate it this way. I can't both love my wife and not love her. I can't say to her, "Honey, I will love you on Thursdays from 7-8 p.m. and on Saturdays from 1-10p.m. and on Sundays from 8 a.m. to noon. I either love her all the time or none of the time. Furthermore, she is desirous of all my love all the time. She does not want to share the love I have for her with anyone else.

To worship properly means that God's love is exclusive in our lives. We do have a form of worship but no power because we have forgotten how to really show priority love to God.

The second reason we fail in worship is that we spend our time changing the form but not correcting the heart. When our worship is not what we think it should be, we immediately begin to focus on what we do instead of what we are. We look at the outside instead of the heart.

Why do we do this? It is easier and less costly for me to change formats than to change my heart attitude. Putting another hymn or chorus into a service isn't costly. Removing a responsive reading selection isn't costly. Adding another special number isn't costly. Adding instruments or subtracting instruments isn't costly. To conduct ourselves this way is

like having a cancer, but instead of having the tumor removed, we merely change doctors. But it is not the format that causes our worship to fail. It is our heart toward God!

Worship: What Is Needed for a Renewal?

First, we need a renewed reverence or awe for God. Where is our sense of the awesomeness of God? Note the distinct heartbeat of the following verses from the Psalms:

Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

(Psalm 29:1-2)

How awesome is the Lord Most High, the great King over all the earth. (Psalm 47:2)

Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. (Psalm 104:1)

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:9)

Remember the third commandment which states that we are not to take the name of the Lord our God in vain. How many of us would never think of profaning God's name with our lips but do it with our hearts by not entering into His presence with a right attitude. In his book, *New Ways in Christian Worship*, Robert Bailey writes, We cannot worship rightly until we recapture, as the principal element in worship, the overwhelming sense of awe and reverence in the presence of God. Here's how the writer of Hebrews expressed that thought: Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:28-29). We need to be aware of God in everyday living, not just on Sunday mornings during our "worship service."

Secondly, we need a deepened sense of the community of God. Again, let's listen to the writer of the Hebrews: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25). We need each other as we worship. Empty pews don't worship - people worship. Empty pews don't sing hymns and songs of praise - people sing. Empty pews don't pray - people pray. It is in the community that the dynamics of worship are deepened.

REVERENCE IN WORSHIP

Worship, as we remember from our previous article, is defined as the expression of our love toward God for who He is and for what He has done in our lives. Karl Barth states that Christian worship is the most momentous, most urgent, most glorious action that can take place in human life. The questions we ask ourselves are these:

1. Is there a place where corporate worship is to take place?
2. What happens when we worship?
3. What should be our attitude during worship?

In this issue, we shall begin to understand the answers to each of the above questions.

A Place for Worship

In the book of Genesis there was no central location for worship. Following the exodus from the ark, Noah built an altar to the Lord (Genesis 8:20). Abraham, on numerous occasions, built altars of worship to the Lord (Genesis 12:7, 8; Genesis 13:18). Isaac built an altar at Beersheba (Genesis 26:25), while Jacob built altars at Bethel, Shechem, and Luz (Genesis 28:19; Genesis 33:20; Genesis 35:7). In Genesis, people created a sanctuary in those places where God had met them in a special way. (By the way, this is exactly what Peter wanted to do on the Mount of Transfiguration when he mentioned to Jesus about building three tabernacles or altars there - one each for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus. Read Matthew 17:4).

When Israel left Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai, God instructed them to build a sanctuary. We read these words in Exodus 25:8, Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. This was to be a place built by human hands where the people could meet God collectively. They were to no longer have individual sanctuaries. There

was to be one location where corporate worship was to be practiced.

Now the word sanctuary is derived from the Latin word *sanctus* which meant sacred. This defined its purpose as a holy place set aside for worship. Notice, God did not call it an auditorium, which comes from the Latin word *audire* which meant to hear, being a room where the audience would only sit and hear. Worship is a time for participation, not just sitting and listening.

What Occurs in the Sanctuary during Worship

First in importance, it is in the sanctuary that the corporate body of Jesus Christ meets for the purpose of praising God. Listen to this admonition from Psalm 150:1, Praise the Lord! (the Hebrew word is *hallelujah*) Praise God in his sanctuary.... It is in the sanctuary that we extol the virtues of God. It is there we proclaim His greatness and majesty. It is there we testify to the world of His faithfulness. We do not, or we should not, gather within the sanctuary to glorify ourselves. We gather to glorify God. We do not meet to boast of our accomplishments (we are not to get up and pat ourselves on the back); we meet to thank God for what He has done.

During my years in the pastorate, I was often convicted about the activities that I condoned which occurred within the sanctuary. Now I realize that many churches, including one I pastored, did not have a traditional sanctuary, but just a large room in which many events occurred. Yet, I often asked myself these questions: Was this the proper room in which to argue the business affairs of the church? Was this the proper room in which programs and films that might be less than glorifying to God would be presented? Had we, somehow, failed to grasp the significance of having a place totally dedicated to praising God?

There is a warning in Leviticus 20:3 about defiling the sanctuary. There we read, I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. I realize that churches no longer offer child sacrifices within their midst; but I wonder if at times we are not guilty of defiling our sanctuaries by what we do and say there? I believe that, just as God takes the receiving of praise very seriously, so He also takes very seriously the place where our worship is proclaimed. I am not advocating the elimination of multi-purpose rooms, but I am suggesting that we exercise care in what occurs within that room so that our worship of God is not impeded because of it.

Secondly, during our worship we receive help from God. David, in Psalm 20:2, proclaimed, May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. Many are the times we gather for worship with tremendous burdens upon our hearts. There can be sorrow, frustration, disappointment, and even loneliness. We gather like the prophet Isaiah, after the death of King Uzziah, with heavy hearts, but as we worship, our burdens are lifted.

Sometimes God sends help in the form of fellowship: the friendly handshake from the usher or greeter; the smile from the one sitting next to you; the hug you receive from someone in the congregation; or the word of encouragement. At other times, God sends help in the form of instruction: the message of a hymn or the choir anthem or the special number in music; or the message from the pastor's sermon. But, as we worship, God lightens our burdens!

Thirdly, it is while we are worshipping that we can gain perspective on life. Again, let us look at the words from the Psalmist: If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed this generation of your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny (Psalm 73:15-17). As we worship God all of life comes into perspective. God becomes important. Doing God's will becomes important. The problems of life become less important. We leave knowing that a great and almighty God is more than able to take care of our small problems.

Fourthly, worship within the sanctuary results in our giving back to God. Nehemiah describes what happens this way: The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and oil to the storerooms where the articles for the sanctuary are kept and where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the singers stay. "We will not neglect the house of our God." (Nehemiah 10:39). It is within the sanctuary that we return to God some of our money as an expression of our worship. The offering is not an intrusion into worship, but is a part of worship. The offering is not something we do to pay the bills; it is our expression of praise to God just as surely as is our singing and praying.

Finally, it is within the sanctuary that we witness God's power and glory. I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory (Psalm 63:2). As we worship together, we share, through testimonies and interaction with each other, how God has impacted our lives. God's power and glory is still manifested today in the changing of hearts and minds and lives of people.

Our Conduct within the Sanctuary

God demands that we reverence His sanctuary. These are His strong words of admonition in Leviticus 19:30 - Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord. Just in case we missed that thought, those exact

words are repeated in Leviticus 26:2. Now, as any faithful Village School student knows, when a word or phrase is repeated in the Hebrew language, it is for emphasis; it is a truth that we are not to overlook. Friends, we are not to overlook the fact that God demands an attitude of reverence within His sanctuary. Now, how can we attain this?

First, we need to enter into His sanctuary with the proper attitude. In Leviticus 10, there is the story of two men who did not enter God's sanctuary with the proper attitude. The following verses will refresh your memory of what happened to them:

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said: 'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'" Aaron remained silent. (Leviticus 10:1-3)

We are to gather, not to draw attention upon ourselves, but to call attention to God. If I am playing an instrument, I must ask myself, as I am playing, "Do I want people to notice me, or do I want them to notice God?" If I am singing or leading a worship group, I must ask myself, "Do I want to be noticed, or do I want God to be noticed?" If I am teaching a lesson or preaching a sermon, I must ask myself, "Do I want people to see me, or do I want them to see Jesus?" Candidly, I must confess that there were times I was as guilty as were Nadab and Abihu - I called attention to myself and to my ideas rather than causing people to focus upon God. How I need to be reminded to have the attitude of John the Baptist, where he proclaimed, He must become greater; I must become less (John 3:30). Someone has said, "I may be a somebody, but God is a someone!" I like that!

Secondly, I think we can show reverence to God within the sanctuary by keeping our place where we meet God in worship as clean and beautiful as we can make it. Think of how beautiful was that wilderness tabernacle: gold furnishing, fine embroidered curtains; beautiful colors on the walls. Think of how beautiful was that glorious temple Solomon built in Jerusalem: gold overlays and precious gems everywhere. God wants His sanctuary to be a place of beauty because it reflects that He is a God of beauty. So, let's keep the walls painted. Let's keep the carpets cleaned. Let's keep the furnishings there in good repair. To an unbeliever, their first sight of our place of worship will tell them much about our attitude toward God.

But, also, I think we can show reverence to God by respecting those items that have been dedicated for His use. In Numbers 4, we read how God instructed the people to show meticulous care for the articles of furniture within the tabernacle. And why was this to be done? Because these were holy to God. Daniel 5 records the story of a king who was overthrown, in part because he mistreated God's holy furnishings. Hymnals, communionware, pianos and other musical instruments, sound and video equipment - all should be treated with respect because they do not belong to us...they belong to God.

Conclusion

The psalmist reminds us that we are to worship God in the beauty of holiness. That attitude is manifest in the manner in which we approach our time of corporate worship. It is reflected in the way we conduct ourselves while in the presence of God. Let us be reminded once again of our definition of worship: It is the expression of our love toward God for who He is and for what He has done in our lives. This thought will cause us to approach God with reverence.

Many years ago, I clipped the following from a church bulletin. It is titled, Ten Commandments of Worship, and was first found in an old English church. I share it with you in closing.

1. Thou shalt not come to service late, Nor for the amen refuse to wait.
2. When speaks the organ's sweet refrain, The noisy tongue thou restrain.
3. But when the hymns are sounded out, Thou shalt lift thy voice and shout.
4. And when the anthem thou shalt hear, Thy sticky voice thou shalt not clear.
5. The endmost seat thou shalt leave free, For more must share the pew with thee.
6. The offering plate thou shalt not fear, But give thine utmost with cheer.
7. Thou shalt the minister give heed, Nor blame him when thou are disagreed.
8. Unto they neighbor thou shalt bend, And if a stranger, make a friend.
9. Thou shalt in every way be compassionate, kind, Considerate, and of tender mind.

10. And so be all thy spirit's grace, Thou shalt show God within this place.

THE MUSIC OF WORSHIP

Music...it is all around us. From the stirring anthem of the wind as it rustles through the trees, to the melody of the lark as it sings at sunrise. From the laughter of children at play to the quiet whispers of bedtime prayers. One ancient author declared, Music is a part of us, and either ennobles or degrades our behavior. Even the atheistic philosopher Nietzsche said that without music life would be a mistake.

Music...it is such an integral part of our worship. Just stop for a moment and consider the many hymns we sing that reflect music:

"O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise"

"All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing Alleluia!"

"Sing unto the Lord a new song, Sing unto the Lord all the earth."

"We worship You, Oh holy God, and lift our voice to sing Your praise."

"I sing praises to Your name, O Lord, for Your name is great and greatly to be praised."

Ever watch people sing? Some people sing with a glow of joy on their faces that say, "Hey, I really love the Lord!" Some people just go through the motions of singing but never focus on what they are singing. Others focus more attention on what is going on around them rather than focusing upon Christ. Some people only sing if they know the song.

What does the Bible tell us to do? Psalm 149:1 declares, Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. That is a command from God. God wants us to join together as a body of believers to sing and to worship Him.

How Are We to Worship?

We read these words in Psalm 95:1, Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. We are to sing joyfully. We are to be exuberant. We are to be enthusiastic. We are to be alive when we worship. When we gather in the sanctuary, we are to get involved with God in our worship. Ever go to a concert or attend a speech and never have been moved to applaud either the speaker or the musicians? Ever go to a ball game and not have shouted at either the referee or a coach? Probably not! We go to a game or a concert and we get involved...sometimes too involved! But when it comes to worship, we sit so placidly!

Why can't we be enthusiastic? First, I think it is because we are away from God. Listen to these words from the Psalmist: By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4). When Judah was in Babylon, they were out of fellowship with God because of sin. The result...no song. When you and I have been out of fellowship with God because of sin, the result is...no song. If I have had a dispute with my wife, it is very hard for me to be appreciative of the great evening meal she has prepared because I am out of touch with her. So it is with our music in worship...we are estranged from God. But obedience restores the song. We read in Isaiah 30:29, And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel.

There is a second reason why we often are not enthusiastic in our worship. It is because we don't want to change. We come so set in our minds that God cannot work in our lives. We might sing, "Sweet hour of prayer that calls me from a world of care", but be thinking in our hearts, "Lord, I am not going to that small group prayer meeting." We might sing, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus", but be saying, "Lord, I am going to do things my way!" With this attitude we cannot be joyful, exuberant, enthusiastic in our worship. We are already admitting to God that we are going to be disobedient.

There is also that attitude of "we have not done it that way before." Yes, change can be threatening. But change is also a condition for growth. As a baby grows into a toddler, it changes. And it continues to change as it progresses into the elementary and then teen years. When we don't recognize change in a child, we become alarmed. Change occurred at every phase of the history of worship. There was great antagonism to adding an organ into worship, until Bach made the organ the king of instruments, and then every church included an organ for worship. Feelings ran very high when pianos were first introduced into a church service because pianos had only been used in saloons and gambling parlors...it was an instrument of the world. Now we would not think of having a worship service without a piano, or at least an electric one. For many churches today the presence of drums and guitars is threatening, yet it should not be that way, for drums and guitars (stringed instruments) have been present in worship since the time of David. (Note: many have related that the presence of an orchestra or even a worship team reminds them of being at a concert rather than at a worship service. This can happen unless the musicians consciously point people, not to themselves and their musical abilities, but to the Lord Almighty.)

Secondly, we are to sing purposefully. I like the way the Psalmist addresses this issue in Psalm 33:3, Sing to him a new

song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. Friends, I believe God does not want our worship to be conducted in a sloppy manner. When I sing, I am to sing the very best that I can for the Lord. When I play an instrument, I am to play that instrument the very best that I know how because I am playing for the Lord. We are to worship God skillfully, that is, the very best that we are capable of doing.

I am reminded of the sobering truth presented in Psalm 95:3-5, For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. There is no one like God! Now do these verses present to us Someone who would be pleased with a careless presentation in worship, Someone who would accept inadequate preparation? Of course not! When you and I worship and sing in our private and corporate worship, we are singing before this great God. Can we afford to not give Him our very best? At times, while I am worshipping, I ask myself the following question: "If I could see God here this morning in His glory, would He be pleased with the method and manner in which I am worshipping Him, or would I be embarrassed to offer it to Him?"

What Is Worship to Accomplish?

The word of God states that our times of worship and celebration are to accomplish four significant things. First, the ministry of the Word of God is to be proclaimed. The Psalmist reminds us, Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge (Psalm 119:54). The music we share in our times of worship must communicate biblical truth.

Second, as we worship we are to give expressions of thanksgiving to God. Notice the instructions found in the following Psalms:

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song (Psalm 28:7)

I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me (Psalm 13:6)

Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp (Psalm 147:7)

Friends, we certainly have much for which to praise the Lord in our worship. God has saved us. God has forgiven us. God has been faithful to us. God has carried our burdens. Both the old hymns and the modern choruses help us to render praise unto our God.

Third, the Bible tells us that it is through our worship, our singing, that others can be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Remember the words from Psalm 40:3, He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. This is one aspect of worship that is often overlooked. If we are singing biblical truth in a joyful and purposeful way unto the Lord, others will hear and perhaps their hearts will also be drawn unto the Lord. I have often thought that perhaps more people will be in heaven because their hearts were drawn to the Savior because of a song they heard than through a sermon.

Finally, our worship is to provide opportunities to teach and to encourage one another. An important text is Colossians 3:16, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. As you worship, you minister to the hearts of those around you in the sanctuary.

What Music Is Best for Worship?

The conflict over musical styles is the number one problem facing the evangelical church today. It is not witnessing to the lost. It is not missions. It is not training and disciple-making. It is what kind of music to sing. I find that very sad.

I think we have a clue as to what music is acceptable to God when we worship. It is found in the Colossians 3:16, the verse cited above. We are to use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

There is a place for psalms. The early church had as its primary hymnbook the book of Psalms. Many of the psalms were set to music and sung within the church. Psalms today are those portions of the Word of God that have been set to music. So we must ask, as we select the music for worship, "Do any of the songs teach us the Word of God? Is their text based upon Scripture?" Many of the newer praise songs are really portions of Scripture that have been set to music. Let me just give you an example:

He who began a good work in you,

He who began a good work in you -

will be faithful to complete it,

He'll be faithful to complete it;

He who started the work will be faithful to complete it in you.

(Words by Jon Mohr, based upon the text of Philippians 1:6)

He is Lord, He is Lord! He is risen from the dead and He is Lord!

Ev'ry knee shall bow, ev'ry tongue con fess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

(Words based upon the text found in Philippians 2:10-11)

There is a place for hymns. Hymns have as their focus the majesty and greatness of God. They focus on the many attributes of God. Hymn writing has become a lost art within the evangelical community, therefore, we must rely upon those great hymns written in a by-gone era. Their words are timeless. Their messages still encourage our hearts. We must never let them disappear from our worship. Again, let me give you an example:

Crown Him with many crowns,

The Lamb upon His throne;

Hark! How the heav'nly anthem drowns All music but its own!

Awake, my soul, and sing

Of Him who died for thee;

And hail Him as thy matchless King thro' all eternity.

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!

God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!

There is a place for spiritual songs. These are testimonies to God's grace in our own personal lives. These songs are very relational and personal. The writers express experiences with God with which many of us can identify. These songs focus, not so much upon who God is, but offer thanksgiving for what God has done. The following are examples of just such spiritual songs:

I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship You.

O my soul rejoice! Take joy, my King, in what You hear:

May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear. (Words by Laurie Klein)

Because He lives I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives all fear is gone.

Because I know He holds the future,

And life is worth the living just because He lives.

(Words by William and Gloria Gaither)

The battle cry today is whether to be contemporary or traditional. Perhaps it is time for churches to become biblical. We need those songs that will help us learn God's Word, the psalms. We need those songs that allow us to rediscover the

greatness of God and the dynamic truths of our doctrine, the hymns. And we need those songs that allow us to celebrate God's faithfulness to us, the spiritual songs. Each is important if we are to teach and admonish one another.

So, now the question is, what instruments are proper for worship? The more I study worship in Scripture, the more I am convinced that there is no instrument that is not proper for worship. If each is played well, and if the heart of the one who plays is right with God and desires to play for God's glory, then no instrument should be excluded. In fact, the concept of an orchestra or band fits worship well. It takes all the instruments performing together to bring glory to God. Organs, pianos, flutes, guitars, violins, drums, trumpets, and trombones...each has its part in helping us to worship the great God of heaven.

Conclusion

Allow me to share in closing a group of questions entitled, "What If..." It was shared with me by Dick Augustine, one of the worship leaders at Wayzata Evangelical Free Church here in Minnesota. I believe that if we would take the time to address each question prior to leaving for worship, our worship experience would be enhanced. Read them and see if you don't agree.

1. What if each of us prepared ourselves through a personal worship time each week to culminate during our Sunday worship service?
2. What if each of us prayed for the Worship team and for the Pastor throughout the week and throughout the service?
3. What if each of us arrived to the Sanctuary early and prayerfully prepared for the Worship Service?

What if each of us allowed our emotions to be involved in our worship experience?

What if we worshiped with expectancy that the presence of God would "fill this place" and that the Holy Spirit would manifest Himself in mighty ways throughout the worship time?

6. What if we came to God in worship with only the attitude of what can I give today in worship through my singing, listening and participation that will be pleasing to the Lord, and not what can I get out of this service?

What if our worship became such a part of our lives that others noticed it and were drawn to God?

What if we sang hymns and choruses as though they really meant something to us? Or, what if we sang them as meaningful prayers of worship and adoration to the Almighty God?

9. What if, after a time of true and meaningful worship, we fully expected the Lord to speak to us through the sermon?

Next Sunday, take one of more thoughts from the above list and apply it during your worship service as you lift your voice in praise to our wonderful God.

(Authors Note: I would very much like to hear of your experiences in worship, especially your experiences with the music used in worship. Do you prefer the traditional format of worship, or are you comfortable with a more contemporary setting? This is an issue that impacts each of us so it is good to spend some time in dialogue about it. You can either send me a letter or an e-mail with your response. Our e-mail address is: village@gospelcom.net. I will look forward to hearing from you.)

EXCELLENCE IN WORSHIP

Before we begin our study of the word "excellence" and its relationship to worship, it would be wise to take a few moments just to review some of the highlights from the previous studies on this critical subject of worship.

First, we observed that worship was a word that occurred frequently in both the Old and New Testaments, and was used most often in the active tense, therefore, being something that a person does, not something that is done for him by another. Further, we observed that the word "worship" came from an old Anglo-Saxon root that meant "worthship", the act of ascribing worth to another. In our worship we are to give praise to God for who He is, in other words, we ascribe worth to Him. We concluded by saying that worship was the active response of my heart full of love toward God telling Him how much I do love Him.

Now, we discover God desires us to ascribe worth to Him, to worship Him with excellence. The dictionary defines this word as "the fact or condition of being unusually good of its kind; of exceptional merit, virtue, etc." In Philippians 4:8, Paul reminds us that we are to give full attention to those things that can be described as being excellent. Many of the leading Christian authors have written on this subject, especially as it pertains to the believer.

Personally, I am convinced that for too long we as Christians somehow had the idea that God approved of our giving Him the "cast-offs" of our lives. If we had an old-tattered shirt - well, it went into the missionary barrel. If we had some old furniture - doesn't the youth room need another couch? It always seemed that God got what was left- from our money to our time. The message we communicated was that God is not majestic. God is mediocre. God will accept anything!

Friends, nothing could be further from the truth. God demands our best! He wants and expects to receive excellence from us! You will remember from your Old Testament studies that the only sacrifice that was acceptable to God was that of an unblemished, perfect (might I say excellent) animal. In fact, the great cry of God, as recorded through the message of the prophet Malachi was that Israel was offering to God the crippled and blind, rather than the perfect and whole (read Malachi 1:6-8).

In this final article, I would have us notice the steps we can take to begin to achieve excellence in our corporate worship experience; how our sacrifice of praise might truly be acceptable in God's sight.

Take Time for Preparation

What, do you suppose, are the most hectic hours of the week for most Christians? Monday mornings?...no! Evenings during the school year?...no! Sunday mornings?...absolutely! You know...that late party on Saturday night...the need for just five more minutes in bed...out of hot water...the roast is not thawed...someone spilled the juice...a dress or shirt needs ironing...shoes that need polish...a car that won't start. By the time we get to church for worship and sharing the expression of our love with God, we wonder if it is really worth it.

A few years ago, I clipped the following little article from Christianity Today. It was part of a regular column known simply as "Eutyclus." This particular item was titled, "Go for the Gold". As you read, perhaps you will see yourself on several occasions.

With the summer Olympics nearly upon us, we'll soon be hearing about one of the most difficult tests in all of sport: the decathlon. This combination of ten track-and-field events demands speed, strength, and endurance. Only the finest dare compete.

Well, I hate to fly in the face of international athletic wisdom, but there is another tenfold event even more difficult. A recent Sunday with the grandkids reacquainted me with it.

This churchathlon begins with waking up on time. That sounds easy enough, until you subtract the hours of sleep lost Saturday night preparing a Sunday school lesson. Speed and agility are essential in the next four events: feeding the kids, bathing the kids, dressing the kids, and loading the kids into the car. Degree of difficulty increases exponentially according to the number of children involved.

If you have the determination to deposit each child in the proper Sunday school classroom - on time - you're still in the running for event number seven: teaching your own Sunday school class.

Your endurance is stretched after class when you collect the kids and seat them in the sanctuary with a minimum of talking or squabbling. Then comes the final-and ultimate-challenge: Quiet your heart to worship.

Anyone who completes that course deserves a gold medal.

Now answer truthfully: If you could do anything on a Sunday morning, what would you rather be doing? I addressed that question to a group of young people one day and their top three choices were: sleeping, going to the lakes, shopping. What was your response? Be honest now!

The psalmist had a passion for worship. He writes, in Psalm 84:2, My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Again he writes, One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple (Psalm 27:4). And who can forget these wonderful words, I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord" (Psalm 122:1).

Is it ever possible for us to have that same sense of anticipation? I believe we can if we properly prepare our hearts for worship. Let me share with you some simple steps you can take that will allow you to worship more effectively.

1. Don't burn the midnight oil on Saturday night.
2. Read and meditate during the week on the book or passage being taught. This will either raise questions which you will anticipate being answered or, will present positive truths that you will anticipate being reinforced.
3. Listen to some good Christian music as you rise from bed. This will help to set your heart singing.

4. Before you leave the house, pray that God would be pleased with your worship.

Friends, worship does not begin with the prelude!

Make a Sacrificial Presentation

Listen to these provocative words from King David as he negotiated with Araunah for a piece of property upon which would be built the temple. But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing"(2 Samuel 24:24). David would not think of worshiping God with something that had cost him nothing!

A sacrifice is costly. To the ancient Israelites, as we have already noticed, it cost them their finest animals. To the ancient Macedonians, it cost them their finances, even though they were poor, so that they might help the struggling church in Jerusalem (read 2 Corinthians 8:1-3).

Does our worship cost anything? If you are in a choir...it costs you time and the effort to practice and to prepare. If you are on a worship team...it costs you time to practice and to prepare. If you are teaching a class...it costs you hours to pray and to prepare. But too often we just throw something together and hope that God will accept it.

Lately I have wondered why I have had that attitude. I can proclaim that Christ is Lord of my life, but when it comes to worship, I am comfortable in giving Him what is leftover. Perhaps you have acted in similar ways. Why is that? Let me share with you what I think is happening. First, I forget that worship is to be a sacrifice...a giving up of something that I hold dear to myself. In the case of worship this something is time...time to prepare my heart to meet with God. If you are like me, I usually begin to think about worship about the time the alarm goes off on Sunday morning. By then it is difficult to prepare adequately.

Secondly, I forget that worship is directed toward God and not myself. If I come to church to have my needs met, that is not worship. If I come hoping to get something that will fill a void in my life, that is not worship. Now I firmly believe that both of those things will be accomplished if we truly enter into worship. Every aspect of our worship experience must be centered around God. We should ascribe worth to God through our singing. We should ascribe value to God through our praying. We should ascribe the amazement of God through our preaching and teaching. We gather, not to be entertained, not to have our needs met, but to worship God.

We often sing that wonderful little chorus that really describes what worship is all about: Open our eyes, Lord; We want to see Jesus, To reach out and touch Him; And say that we love Him. Open our ears, Lord; and help us to listen, Open our eyes, Lord; We want to see Jesus.

Some Concluding Thoughts

Friends, through this series of articles we have seen that God wants our worship to be alive and dynamic. He also wants it to be with reverence and awe. Our worship is then completed as we walk in obedience to Him. But to experience this excellence in worship, we must be willing to pay the cost, to make that sacrifice to praise and to thank God as He desires.

Someone has written: We come to church to catch a glimpse of God and as a result to pursue Him the rest of the week. May God help us in that pursuit! May we truly learn to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

A Postscript

I appreciate the many comments I have received because of this series on worship. My heart grieves because we have taken that which is the crowning jewel of the Church, namely worship, and allowed it to become a tool for dissension and even division. I have not wanted to add more fuel to this controversy. I have sought for a solid biblical foundation.

That does not mean that I do not have a personal preference of a worship style. I have a passion for the great hymns of the faith, having memorized many of them; but I also have come to appreciate many of the contemporary worship songs directed toward the person of God...yes, I stand in awe of Him. I prefer the sounds of a majestic organ played with skill; but I also appreciate a blending of the various instruments in an orchestra.

A comment I heard from several concerned the volume of noise generated by some worship experiences today. Just this morning I heard one of the Christian broadcasters (I could say, a Christian disc-jockey) tell his listeners to turn up the volume on their radios for the next song. May I take a few moments to address this issue as it is so important to many. Allow me to share some reasons why I believe this is happening...please feel free to disagree with me if you will, these are only my reasons...I have no documentation for them, just observations.

1. Noise has been a prevalent part of the music of that part of society we know as "the baby busters" and "generation X". I recall taking a group of young people to a concert. Of course they wanted to get as close to the front as possible. Where did the sponsors go? As far away from the front as possible...and it was still too loud for us. When I am in a worship service that seems unduly loud, I need to look over the audience, notice its make-up, and remember that they are ministering to a generation that has included noise and loudness as part of who they are.

2. Noise can be an integral aspect of worship. One can hardly fail to notice the admonitions in the psalms to shout to the Lord, to clap hands, to sing with joy before the Lord. However, there are also those admonitions to wait quietly before the Lord. I believe there is a place for balance. There are words that demand an increased crescendo..."No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in Him is mine" demands that we shout that truth to the heavens; so do those words: "Were the whole realm of nature mine, That were a present far too small." Yet, it is with quietness we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender." (There, I have exposed my love for the hymns).

Some closing comments about drums. In my observations these past several years in watching the transition in worship styles, perhaps no instrument has been so involved in a love-hate relationship with as many believers as has the drum. Yes, it is correct that drums are not mentioned in the Bible, but to build a case for their exclusion because of this can be difficult. Most musicologists believe that the drum was the very first instrument man developed. It was pretty simple to strike a stick against a log. It is difficult for me to imagine the orchestration recited in the psalms - cymbals of every size, strings of many varieties, horns as well - without the presence of a drum. Why do the scriptures fail to include them? Perhaps, and this is only a conjecture on my part, it is because the writers just assumed their presence.

If you would like to dialogue further with me on this topic of worship, please contact me at village@gospelcom.net. These studies will soon be available in a booklet form that will include some suggested questions suitable for a small group study. Please call the office if you would like to order one or several.