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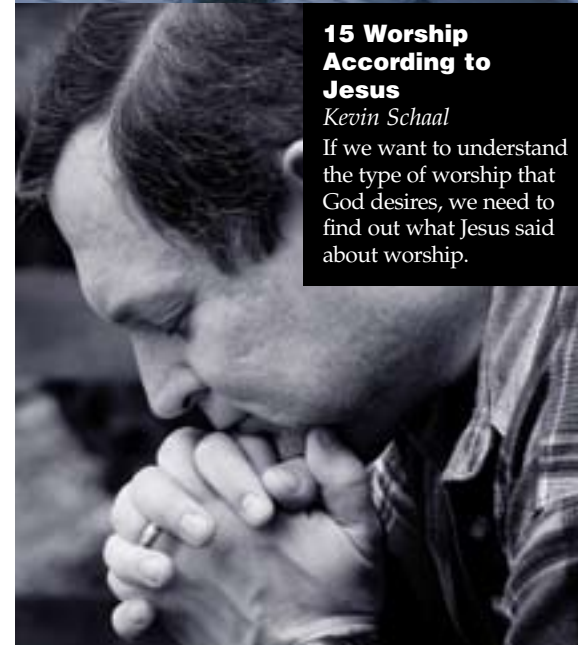
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Thank you for the Chaplain News. I am an FBFI-endorsed police chaplain, and both my wife, Marie, and I serve as P.O.S.T.-certified chaplains with the Perry (Georgia) Police Department. We had the wonderful privilege of attending the chaplains' meetings at the FBFI Annual Meeting and the chaplains' meeting that followed it. It was great to put faces with the names of the chaplains that we pray for. We were both burdened to pray for the military chaplains' wives. They have a very important part in their husbands' ministry.

F. D. (Doc) Henzler
Georgia

I am writing to clarify a matter in a letter to the editor in the September/October 2005 issue of *FrontLine*. Let me begin by saying that I am quite sympathetic to cautions against errors propagated by John Piper (there are, indeed, many). However, in the matter

of Spurgeon as evidence that Piper's priority of regeneration to faith is "extreme Calvinism," I believe a factual error was made.

Much has been made in recent publications of Spurgeon's comment of September 20, 1863, that a pastor need not preach saving faith to a regenerate man because he is already saved ("Warrant of Faith," *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 9:532). Context clearly reveals, however, that Spurgeon was responding to a true Hyper-Calvinist position—one that denied the warrant of preachers to offer the gospel freely to the lost but instead urged preachers to withhold the gospel message until positive proof of regeneration was manifest in their hearers. Spurgeon's statement was not intended to delineate the relationship of faith to regeneration, but to affirm the free offer of the gospel.

Less than six months after delivering this

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FrontLine • November/December 2005

On the Front Line

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Fundamentals of Worship

John C. Vaughn

Not too long ago, a lady who had agreed to visit our church at the invitation of a friend explained to me why she was returning to her Charismatic megachurch to enjoy its more aerobic service. "I need worship. You people don't worship here." That charge certainly got my attention, but the serious reflection that followed did not lead me to incorporate any of her preferences into our services. She was not rejecting what she thought was merely boring; she was rejecting what is actually Biblical. She was not looking for more adoration, but for more adrenaline: a quest that provokes a question, "Which is more fundamental to revitalizing worship?"

Contemporary discussions of worship are often driven by concerns about contemporary styles of worship. Yes, revitalization of worship can be detoured by the roadblocks of ritual or the lack of it. If our focus

would be drawn to meaningful revitalization—putting the life back into a thing—then we would do well seek the fundamentals from the Psalms. There we find the word "worship" fifteen times, and it is always a translation of a Hebrew word that means "to prostrate oneself" or "to bow down." Its first appearance is in Psalm 5:7, where David declares what must be vital before it can be revitalized: "But as for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple."

Spiritual life begins with God's mercy. Reverent ("in thy fear") worship is provoked by the realization of that mercy which draws the worshipper toward God. The argument will be made that the more physically expressive are simply more excited about the mercy they have received. Even if we could yield the point that what seem to be "revellings" are actually a species of reverence, we still come to Psalm 29:2 (cf. 96:9), "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."

Whether we argue that "the beauty of holiness" means no more than "in His holy sanctuary," or the more liturgically satisfying, "in the splendid array of religious vestments," or even the more practical application, "wear your best to church," it certainly does not promote the casual approach. It would not do violence to the text to suggest that it means "with the outward expressions of

separation." However we apply the second half of Psalm 29:2, its meaning is undeniably a restatement of the first half, "Give unto Jehovah the glory that He deserves." His exaltation is at issue; our experience is not.

What is it in the human heart that can shout "Amen" but never sing it? How are some so vocally supportive of the sermon but silent during the song? If actions express attitudes, when the heart is singing, shouldn't the vocal chords participate? Singing is fundamental to worship. Psalm 66:4 tells us what will accompany the future, universal submission to God:

"All the earth shall worship thee, and shall sing unto thee; they shall sing to thy name. Selah [Think about that!]." Worship is offered by saved people who reflect their submission in their singing. They recognize that the lost are not the audience of our music—God is.

He is most honored when we are most humbled. That is the theme of Psalm 95:6, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker." This is no command for empty Romanist ritual nor Islamic pretense. But the admonition is clear: fundamental to worship is humility in the inner man that is expressed by the outer man. The essence is, shall we say, essential: "Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy" (Ps. 99:5; cf. 99:9 and 132:7). Salvation, singing, submission—these are fundamental, but there is bedrock on which even these foundation stones rest.

Fundamental to Biblical worship is the Bible. The Word of God is that which exalts the Name of God. It is that which introduces us to the Son of God, who is God Himself. Psalm 138:2 is God's word about God's Word: "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." Worship looks to the place of sacrifice: the cross. Its praise is not only for the human experience of God's "lovingkindness," but for His "truth." Since He has magnified His Word above His Name, our worship must magnify His Word. Fundamentally, worship is done by saved people who sing from their hearts in humble submission to God while seeking Him in His Word.

The Desire of all Nations

Fred Moritz

During this Christmas season many Christians will listen to the music of Handel's *Messiah*. We will join in singing Wesley's beloved carol "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" or his less well-known "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus." In each case we will hear musical settings of God's prophet when he said, "and the desire of all nations shall come."

We understand that God's promise in some sense speaks of Christ's advent. A Jewish rabbi who wrote before the time of Jerome understood the term to mean "Messiah shall come."¹ Let us look at this promise as we worship Christ.

Haggai prophesied to Israel after the captivity. Ezra records that old men who had seen Solomon's temple wept when the foundation of the new temple was laid (Ezra 3:12). The new edifice was nothing in its glory like the old house of worship. The new temple seemed almost nonexistent compared to the previous one (Hag. 2:3). Yet God commanded them to work and build the structure (Hag. 2:4, 5). He promised them His presence and the power of His Spirit. He reaffirmed His covenant purpose for them as a nation.

Through Haggai God promised to shake the earth and the nations and fill this house with His glory. We learn the important lesson that the place in which we meet is merely incidental to our worship. God must be the One whom we worship. His glory must be our motive and desire in our worship. We must remember this critical truth at all times, and it is especially important that we remember it during this season that the world increasingly makes more materialistic and secular.

The Preparation for the Desire of All Nations

Before the desire of nations comes, God declares that He will do some shaking. He announced that He will shake the physical creation, including "the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land" (Hag. 2:6). We must understand this as a literal prophecy that God will fulfill. The author of Hebrews urges his readers to hear and obey God's Word. He tells us that God shook the earth once at Sinai (Heb. 12:25, 26; Exod. 19:18) and goes on to remind us that God has promised to again shake the earth and the heavens (Heb. 12:26). Peter tells us of that time when God will destroy the earth and bring in "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:10–13; cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22). Believers are part of that eternal kingdom which will never be shaken (Heb. 12:28). Christ's kingdom is unshakeable and unmovable.

God also declares that He will shake the nations (Hag. 2:7). Babylon had already fallen by the time Haggai wrote, Persia would follow soon, and Greece would fall as a world empire before Christ's birth. God fulfilled this promise in Israel's sight (Hag. 2:21, 22). In about two hundred years God shook and removed three world empires, demonstrating man's frailty and the futility of worldly power.

The Promise of the Desire of All Nations

The promise "the desire of all nations shall come" confronts us with some difficulties in interpretation. First, in the Hebrew the verb "come" is plural, and the noun "desire" is singular. The grammar seems to indicate that the "desire of all nations" is a collective term which indicates "the things desired by all nations."

Some scholars think these things desired of all nations are their wealth, power, or glory, which during the millennium they will bring to Jerusalem (Isa. 60:5–7). It is true that this will happen when the nations come to worship God. His house will be filled with glory at that time.

However, it does not seem that these things are what the nations desire. No matter how steeped in manmade religion, nor how obsessed with his own power he is, man still is aware of a great lack in his life. There is that deep and dark feeling of the necessity of supernatural light and influence. Bewildered in the mazes of error and superstition, they could find nothing satisfactory respecting the Divine Being, pardon, emancipation from the power of moral evil, and a future state of existence; and more or less earnestly desired to obtain information in regard to these important and necessary points.²

Keil and Delitzsch, commenting on Isaiah 42, note the same reality.

It is an actual fact, that the cry for redemption runs through the whole human race, i.e., an earnest longing, the ultimate object of which, however unconsciously, is the servant of Jehovah and his instruction from Zion (Isa 2:3)—in other words, the gospel.³

The Personification of the Desire of All Nations

"And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts. . . . The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former saith, the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts" (Hag. 2:7, 9).

The new temple never matched Solomon's temple in its physical beauty, nor did the Shekinah Glory (the brilliant light symbolizing God's presence) ever dwell there. Herod later took the temple down to its foundations and rebuilt his temple on the site. Though it was a new structure, in popular and religious language Zerubbabel's temple and Herod's were viewed as one. "Accordingly, nothing is more customary than for Jewish writers to speak of only the first and the second temple."⁴

Though the new temple never housed the Shekinah Glory of God, God *did* fulfill His promise and fill the house with glory. When Joseph and Mary brought the infant Christ into the temple, Simeon the prophet held Him and declared, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:30–32). Instead of the light symbolic of God's glory, He who *is* the glory of God came into that temple!

Paul tells us that we proclaim "the glorious gospel of Christ" (literally, "the gospel of the glory of Christ," 2 Cor. 4:4). He explains by declaring, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

The author of Hebrews teaches us that God spoke to mankind by Jesus, who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). The same verse proclaims that the purpose for which Christ was

incarnated was to "[purge] our sins."

John informs us that the eternal Word, who is the Creator God (John 1:1–3), "was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

God did fill the second house with His glory. This time He did not send the symbolic manifestation of His glory to fill the house with light. Rather, He who is the light and the revelation of God's glory came to that temple. The second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ our Lord, graced that house with His blessed presence.

God revealed His glory in Christ for a specific reason—to bring the saving gospel of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:3–6), to cleanse us from our sins (Heb. 1:1–3), and to take away the sins of the world (John 1:14, 29). One day He will literally shake the heavens and the earth, and He will bring everlasting righteousness (2 Pet. 3:10–13). He satisfies the longings of the heart when He forgives, cleanses, and saves a sinner.

Conclusion

Handel and Wesley were right to refer to Christ as "the desire of all nations." He alone can fill the longing of sin-weary hearts. He satisfies the desires of the heart. He is the glory of God who came to fill the temple with God's glory and to bring salvation to Adam's fallen descendents. If you do not know Christ as your Savior, I urge you to turn from your sin and receive Him (John 1:11, 12).

Let us remember that we do not worship the beauty of a physical house of worship, but we worship the God who revealed His glory to save us. He alone must be the object of our worship and service. Let us enjoy the benefits of this Christmas season and treasure the time we spend with family and loved ones. But we must remember that Christ is the glory of God, He is the fulfillment of the things desired by the nations. We must put Him first in our observances and celebrations.

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.⁵

Fred Moritz is the Executive Director of Baptist World Mission.

¹ Ebenezer Henderson, *The Twelve Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980 reprint), 355.

² Henderson, 356.

³ F. Delitzsch and C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Rio, WI: Ages Software, version 8, 2000), 7:538.

⁴ Henderson, 358.

⁵ Charles Wesley, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" in *Sing His Praise* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1991), 425.

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David J. Whitcomb

TRUE WORSHIP

REFLECTING GOD'S GLORY

Worship is a big issue for religious organizations. It always has been. Most religious organizations agree that worship is their primary function. But what is worship? A quick perusal of the local yellow pages reveals that nearly every church advertises times for worship services. What do they do at the worship services that makes them unique from other services? Some churches advertise that they offer contemporary worship while other churches offer traditional worship. Which, if either, is correct? Many ministries that once offered only traditional worship are now experimenting with contemporary methods of worship. Other Christians still prefer something more traditional. Which is the right kind of worship? Is there a right kind of worship? Maybe contemporary worship is concession to the desires of the flesh. But maybe traditional worship is mindless repetition of so much dead ritual. Obviously we need a standard. We need a mooring for our ships of worship. The only suitable standard and mooring is the revealed Word of the God whom we attempt to worship.

In the seventeenth century during the reign of Elizabeth I, some ministers in England grew weary of the abuses of the church. These Puritans were agitated with the accepted form of worship in their day. They concluded that the so-called worship of the day was nothing more than expressions of fleshly wisdom. The Mother Church published the order for their services. The Mother Church appointed the pastors. The Archbishop's office ordained the details of ministry, and little of it had any resemblance of true worship. The essence of public worship focused on human strength and satisfaction of the flesh.

The Puritans reacted against this abuse and determined that they would effect change. These were not ignorant and unlearned men. Many of them were graduates of Oxford University who became Anglican priests in an effort to change the system from within. In time they discovered that internal change was impossible. They were driven from the official church and forced to preach wherever they could find opportunity.

These godly men encouraged direct personal religious experience, sincere moral conduct, and simple worship services. A major focus of change for the Puritans was in the area of worship. They were motivated by intense theological convictions and definite expectations about the seriousness of genuine worship. They were zealous for personal godliness and doctrinal correctness. Through diligent study of God's Word, the Puritans codified their view of worship in the *Regulative Principle*. In short, the Regulative Principle stated that God commands true worship. They, therefore, concluded that anything that is not in accord with God's commands must not be considered true worship. They appealed to the Bible alone for their standard of worship.

The Puritans were humans and often evidenced the warts of human character. But, for the most part, they were people who loved God and respected God's Word. They were determined to live life according to the standard they discovered in God's Word. That is a good pattern for modern Christians to adopt in their quest for the principles of true worship. The Bible is replete with descriptions of the kind of worship that God ordains. Psalm 29, for example, is a concise statement of the foundational principles of authentic worship.

The Call to Worship (vv. 1, 2)

The psalmist's call to proper worship, stated in the first two verses of Psalm 29, demands our attention. David repeatedly called out, "Give unto the LORD glory." The title he chose for God is deeply significant. It is the unique name for God, the name the Jewish scribes held so sacred that they refused to write it completely. He is Yahweh, the self-existing, eternal, creator God. This God calls on His creation to glorify Him. Yahweh created the world for His own glory. No power constrained Him to create. He chose to create; therefore, it is only fitting for the Creator to expect His creation to reflect His glory. In the beginning it was so. When Yahweh completed creation, He, who is by nature good, announced that His creation reflected His goodness (Gen. 1:31). Reflection of God's character is an essential feature of true worship. God's announcement that His creation was good was saying that it was pleasing and excellent—just like Him.

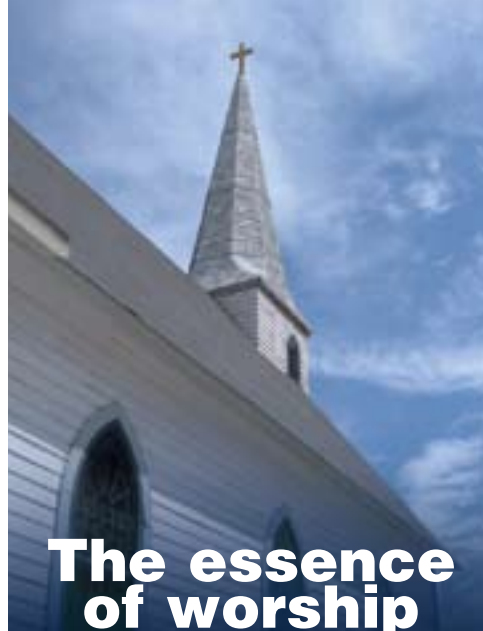
To some extent the creation responds positively to this call to reflect God's glory. The heavens still declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1) even though they are tainted by the sin principle. The human body, which is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14), reflects God's wisdom. But sin limits the glory creation is able to give. Stars that declare God's glory die out, and bodies that reflect His glory die and decay.

God's people, of all people, should respond positively to the call to "give unto the LORD glory!" The call in verse one is directed to the mighty ones, which probably refers to angels. But God also desires for His people to worship Him. God's people are the recipients of His mercy. He strengthens and blesses His people (v. 11). Surely, the people who receive God's blessing should desire to reflect His glory through worship. In fact, many psalms, like this one, were written for God's people to sing in worship to Him. Psalm 96:3 challenges God's people to "declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people." True worship should challenge everyone to reflect God's glory.

The Object of Worship (vv. 3–10)

No doubt many sincere worshippers would be offended if they were accused of not practicing true worship. They worship regularly. They worship devoutly. However, the question is whether the object of their worship is Jehovah (Yahweh). David left no doubt in this psalm that the object of our worship must be the true and living God. The self-existing, eternal God alone is worthy of worship. He is the great and awesome God. He is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending." He described Himself to John as the One "which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Rev. 1:8). How much glory, what kind of glory, should be reflected to that kind of God?

Furthermore, the title "Yahweh" emphasizes God's faith-



The essence
of worship
is humble
submission.

fulness. The Bible is full of evidence that God is faithful to His word and covenants. He is the mighty and holy God, as described in verses 3 through 9. It is one thing for a superior to make great promises to his subordinates, but another thing for him to fulfill those promises. Yahweh makes great promises. Will He be faithful to do them? Can He be faithful? God's faithfulness is proven by the fact that He is mighty to do what He says. No hand will ever stop Him. His arm is not shortened that He cannot do what He has promised. His voice breaks the mighty cedars (v. 5), stirs up the flame (v. 7), shakes the wilderness (v. 8), and strips the forest bare (v. 9). What kind of worship is due a God like that!

The object of true worship is altogether holy. The Bible record leaves no doubt that God is perfectly sin-

less. Indeed, the Bible record reveals that God's holiness stands in contrast to our fleshly desires (Ps. 99). Therefore, we are without excuse if we fail to offer God authentic worship. He makes His glory and majesty known in nature (Rom. 1:20), in our consciences (Rom. 2:15), and in His written Word (Rom. 3:1–4). What greater revelation does one need? Therefore, everyone who fails to reflect God's glory in worship is left without excuse.

The Purpose of Worship (vv. 1, 2, 11)

The purpose of worship is to acknowledge God's greatness (vv. 1, 2). David expressed that purpose by saying that we should reflect the Lord's strength. It is a call to recognize God's might and power. When David wrote, "Give unto the LORD glory and strength," he did not imply that mere humans can give strength to the Mighty God. Rather, he meant that we should reflect to God the reality or certainty of His strength and power. Therefore, authentic worship requires intimate knowledge of the object of worship. Where knowledge of God (experiential and intimate) is missing, worship is bound to be skewed. The quality of worship is determined by Yahweh's name. His name reveals His character. Who is He? What is He like? What am I in relation to Him? We must answer all of these questions to some extent before we can begin to truly worship God. Without this knowledge we are like the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus said, "You don't know what you're worshipping." Attempts to give glory that is due Yahweh without knowing Him makes us like the Athenians to whom Paul said, "As I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you" (Acts 17:23). Because the purpose of true worship is to reflect God's glory, it must begin with a right understanding of God.

Furthermore, true worship acknowledges our dependence on Yahweh (v. 11). Yahweh's people should freely admit that He gives strength. People naturally focus on human ability or

talent, which ultimately dismisses the need for God-supplied strength. A common response is for people to turn to God and acknowledge His provision of strength only after they have exhausted all other resources and are still in need. True worship is more likely to occur when God's people actually depend on Him for strength—and acknowledge that truth continually. God's people often concede to peer-pressure and adopt expressions of the flesh in worship. But true worship is not concerned about the opinions of the pagan world. What they think of us becomes immaterial when we are truly dependent on God. A purpose of true worship is to acknowledge full dependence on God.

A secondary purpose of worship, also mentioned in verse 11, is the worshipper's admission that God grants peace. When God's child is engaged in true worship, he should be reminded that Yahweh bestows tranquility and confidence on His people. How much modern worship is characterized by the expression of calm assurance and confidence that Yahweh is actually in control? That kind of peace is the result of dependence on God alone. True worship acknowledges that dependence.

The Nature of Worship (v. 2)


The essence of worship is humble submission. The very word, both in Hebrew and Greek, describes the proper attitude in worship. It speaks of bowing down, prostrating oneself, showing reverence. When the heart is right, the outward expression of worship will be more in line with God's expectations. Therefore, when we "give unto the LORD" in worship, we will be giving out of a proper spirit. The psalm repeats the need to *give* Yahweh proper glory respectfully.

No Scripture presents a picture of God's people barging into His presence high-fiving and telling God what a great dude He is. That is a modern perversion of worship practiced by people who obviously do not know or understand God. Neither men nor angels can *give* anything to the Creator. Rather, we ascribe, or acknowledge, His glory in methods that show proper respect for the Mighty God. It involves the mind, the heart, the hands, the voices.

Acknowledging the proper attitude in worship helps us understand what David meant when he said that worship must be splendidly clothed in holiness (v. 2). To worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness is to make a full separation from sin before we attempt to reflect His glory. To approach God in holiness is splendid in God's eyes. No one ever reflects God's holiness by making excuses for fleshly weaknesses.

A good picture of authentic worship is found in the last book in the Bible. In Revelation 4:2–11 John described a striking scene in heaven. God is seated on the throne, and all around Him, the citizens of that throne room fall down in humble submission and cry out, "Holy, holy, holy." It is an accurate description of the proper attitude in worship. It is the only fitting expression of hearts that know God as the "LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come"! That is what true worship looks like. It is good for God's people to put their worship to the test by asking this question: "What does my worship say about God?" If it does not reflect the God who reveals Himself in the Bible, it is probably not true worship.

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REVITALIZING PERSONAL WORSHIP

THROUGH QUIETING THE NOISY SOUL

S hawna can't seem to "click off" at nights, and her mind races nonstop replaying the events of the day. Fran was released from another job because of low productivity. She obsesses about cleanliness and orderliness to such a degree that she can never finish a job.

Bob just received his second job warning. He was late to work again. He sleeps fitfully and feels paralyzed as he awakens and considers the day's responsibilities. His despair seems to sit on his chest, making it feel impossible to get out of bed.

These believers carry heavy burdens—failed relationships, health problems, shattered dreams, and spiritual doubt. Together these matters make for very noisy souls. How can we help them, and how can we avoid the same battle? To begin, let's stop and listen to the noise.

Noticing the Noise in Your Soul

Noise in the physical realm consists of waves created by a disturbance of some kind. We see it in the concentric circles made by a pebble thrown into a quiet pond. Noise in the soul consists of thoughts—responses to our circumstances on a fallen planet.

- Sounds of fear—thoughts of worry, vulnerability, uncertainty
- Sounds of despair—thoughts of hopelessness, defeat, self-pity
- Sounds of anger—thoughts of hurt, demands, thwarted goals
- Sounds of bitterness—thoughts of injustice, contempt, revenge
- Sounds of lust—thoughts of indulgence, covetousness, ambition

- Sounds of guilt—thoughts of sinfulness, remorse, embarrassment
- Sounds of obsessions—thoughts of habits, self-imposed demands, cover-ups
- Sounds of entertainment—thoughts of movies, music, sports, video games, adventures

God's Noise Abatement Plan

The collective noise is deafening! How different is the Master's desire for us. He said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke [of discipleship] upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy [custom-made], and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28–30). Quieting the noise in our souls is linked to our willingness to learn certain things from and about the Lord Jesus.

Our pride is the godfather of noisemakers. Pride whines, pouts, demands, argues, debates, covets, retaliates, shifts blame, indulges, manipulates, schemes, obsesses, and frets. Pride cries out, "I will not . . .," "I must have . . .," "I don't have to . . .," "I won't let . . .," "I can't take any more of . . .," and "I don't like. . ."

In utter contrast to this is the life of the Lord Jesus, whose mission was not about Himself. He clearly said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29). We must learn this kind of dependence and humility to quiet our noisy souls, but our pride walks hand in hand with another enemy—unbelief.

The Danger of Unbelief

We might not immediately link our noisy souls to unbelief. To understand the connection, let's define some important terms.

Truth—Truth is that which corresponds to reality.

Most of us stopped believing in Santa Claus when we learned that the whole story was just a fairy tale. There is nothing in reality that corresponds to the events of a large man in a red coat sliding down every chimney on Christmas Eve with a large bag of toys, and reindeer do not fly.

We do know, however, that Jesus was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, that His birth was announced by angels to shepherds, and that He is the Son of God. This story is true because the components of the account correspond to reality. These events happened!

Belief—A belief is what you accept to be true.

Believing in Santa Claus does not make the story about him true. We can believe something that is not true. It has little effect when we are children, but a grown person still leaving cookies and milk under the tree and writing letters to the North Pole would raise some eyebrows.

Unbelief—Unbelief is rejecting what God says is true.

We tend to think of an unbeliever merely as one who rejects the message of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus. However, anytime we know something to be true about God, we are living in unbelief if we reject that reality. Consider these truths about God—these statements of reality.

1. **God is always good—always!** That means . . .
 - a. He will always meet my genuine needs—always!
 - Philippians 4:13, 19; Matthew 6:31–33
 - b. He will always forgive my sin—always!
 - 1 John 1:9; Psalm 51; Isaiah 66:2b
 - c. He is always up to something good in my life—always!
 - Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:26–34
 - d. He will always love me personally—always!
 - Romans 8:35–39; Jeremiah 31:3; John 17:23
 - e. He will always give me the grace I need—always!
 - 2 Corinthians 9:8; 1 Corinthians 15:10; 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10
2. **God is always great—always!** That means . . .
 - a. He is always in control of all things—always!
 - Psalm 103:19; Isaiah 14:27; 46:9, 10
 - b. He is always present with me—always!
 - Psalm 139:7–12; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 23:24
 - c. He is always the same—always!
 - Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 1:10–12
 - d. He is always trustworthy—always!
 - 2 Timothy 2:13; Psalm 36:5; Numbers 23:19; Deuteronomy 7:9; 31:8

- e. He is always wise in what He does—always!
 - Romans 11:33; Colossians 2:3; Revelation 15:3, 4

To reject any of these statements is unbelief. For example, it is easy when facing a difficult or devastating circumstance to believe—accept to be true—that God must not love us. Believing the idea that God does not love us is on the same plane as believing that Santa Claus delivers our presents at Christmas. Both of them are fantasies because they do not correspond to reality.

The *reality* is that a world where God does not love His children does not exist. Neither can He be loving toward us at some times and not at other times. God always loves us—always! To reject that truth is unbelief, which starts us on the path of our own disintegration—the way down.

The Way Down

When we accept *as truth* the idea that God has *not* provided what we need today and God Himself is *not* enough for us today, we have believed a lie and are walking in unbelief. That unbelief shows up first in discontent—"if only" thinking.

"If only my spouse would appreciate me more."

"If only I had more money."

"If only I had better health."

"If only I hadn't been abused."

"If only I had grown up with different parents."

"If only I were married to someone who loves me."

Discontent is dangerous because the lust for more is the basis of every temptation in the heart—including the temptations to worry, to be angry, and to despair.

From Unbelief and Discontent to Anxiety

Once we have decided in our unbelief that we do not have what we need for peace and joy, we are easily tempted to worry. Worriers meditate upon all the possibilities of what might happen and scare themselves with their imaginations and fantasies. Worry is the root cause of the "anxiety disorders" of today—the panic attacks, obsessive thinking, compulsive behavior, many sleep disorders, and the self-injury we see in the form of anorexia, bulimia, and cutting.

The "if only" thinking of discontent leads to the "what if" thinking of worry.

"What if my husband is into pornography?"

"What if I get up to sing and I forget the words?"

"What if I have another panic attack, but this time while I'm driving?"

"What if I can't sleep again tonight?"

"What if someone breaks into the house and kills all of us?"

Anxiety is driven by unbelief and the resulting discontent. This is why anxiety is always portrayed in the Bible as a spiritual problem. We will not be anxious if we know God well and are content with what He has

provided because we have found Him to be more than enough for us.

From Unbelief and Discontent to Anger

Anger is the strong emotion of displeasure that is fueled by frustration, hurt, or fear. This, too, is the result of believing that something must be different in my life if I am to be content and at rest. We will not be angry if we know God well and are content with what He has provided because we have found Him to be more than enough for us.

From Unbelief and Discontent to Despair

Despair is sorrow over loss coupled with hopelessness. When God's true nature is not in the picture, our thoughts of hopelessness only multiply, and when that hopelessness is laced with self-pity, the condition is even more toxic.

Feeling down is not sinful and can be caused by bodily conditions, but *thinking* hopeless thoughts is entirely a matter of the heart and is an indication of spiritual needs. We will not despair—even when our bodies are suffering—if we know God well and are content with what He has provided, because we have found Him to be more than enough for us.

The Way Back

Liz was fighting battles on many fronts. She was dangerously overweight, her marriage was in trouble, she could not sleep, her work situation was disintegrating, and she had alienated her adult children by her controlling ways. She testifies, "I did not see that my discontent was actually unbelief in the God who loves me. God broke my heart and showed me my sinfulness. The God I knew was heavy-handed and was ready to pounce on me at any time. The God I am beginning to know loves me, is kind to me, and continually shows me new things.

"Sorrow never drove me to Him before—only to despair. Frustration only grew deeper. I felt unstable most of the time, and I worried constantly. I lived a life of 'what ifs.'

"God has changed my disposition toward the ones I work with—toward the people who hurt me. Even Christmas is different for me this year. I couldn't think of anything I wanted this year—really. The only things I could think of were books or taped messages or something to help me grow. I have come to learn that 'God is more than enough for me.'"

Noisy Souls Need a Savior, Structure, and Saturation

Liz knew she needed a Savior to deliver her from eternal judgment, but she had never realized she needed a Savior to deliver her from her pride and unbelief. God allowed her mediocre Christianity to unravel until she was desperate enough to see her need of Him again.

"The way back" started with a brokenness over her self-reliance. She sought and received forgiveness from the Lord she had given only lip-service to before. She

committed herself to pursuing the knowledge of God, realizing that to become godly she needed discipline (1 Tim. 4:7).

Liz started a systematic guided study of who God is and worked on exercises that taught her to look at the destructive patterns of her thinking. She learned to track her thinking, not her feelings. She learned to see the self-centeredness underlying her impatience, critical spirit, angry outbursts, and nagging.

Through His Word, God confronted and changed Liz's view of Himself. She saw with illuminated understanding that God was loving, merciful, wise, powerful, and continually present with her. The day-by-day saturation of the Word along with the penetrating questions of her study materials taught her to examine her thoughts—her beliefs—not just respond to her feelings.

The Master's Promise

Christ promised that those who would come to Him to learn from Him would, indeed, find rest for their noisy souls. His words aren't mere hype. They are statements of reality to those who will seek a Savior and saturate their minds with the knowledge of who He is and what He has done.

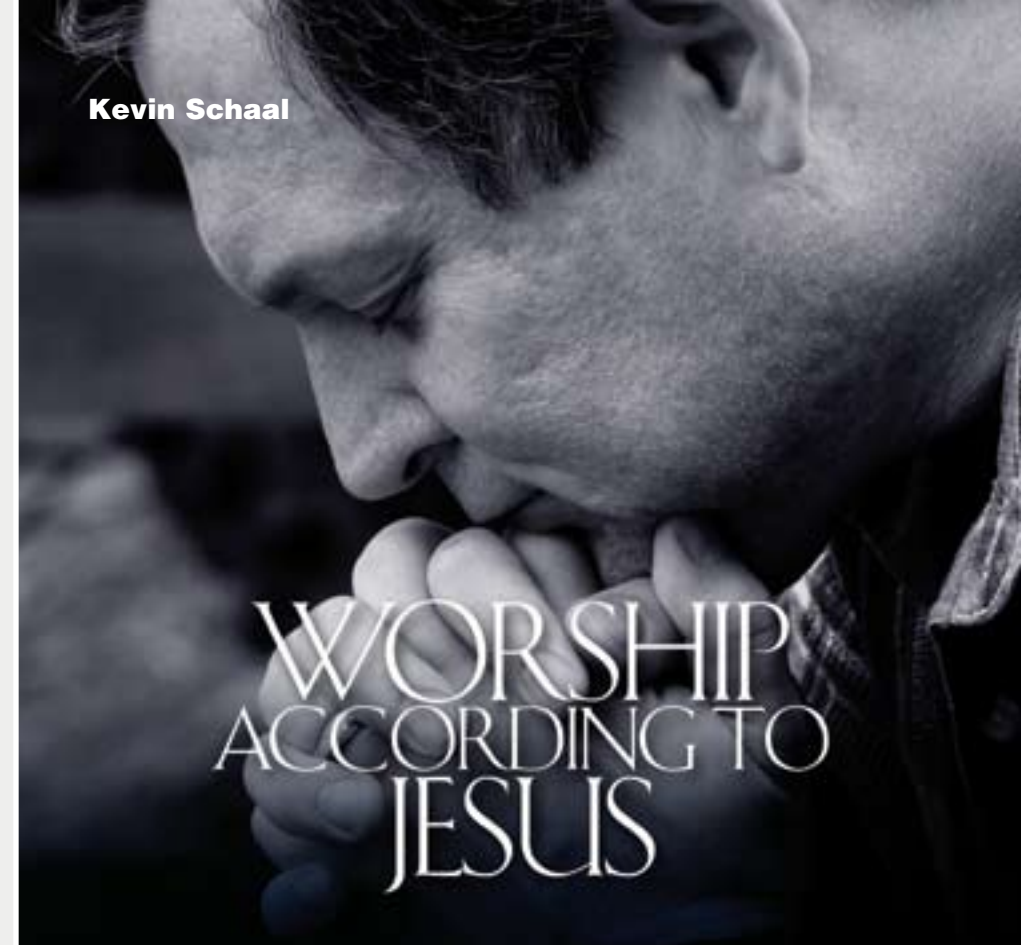
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American worship is as fad-oriented as present American society. The slickly marketed, high-energy, fast-moving approach to worship, so popular in the 1980s and '90s, is giving way to the calmer, highly sensory, Montessori-style worship of the Emergent Church movement. The problem with all these worship styles—even traditional forms—is that worship and church leaders are more interested in staying in touch with people than staying in touch with God. After all, worship, by its very nature, is about God, not about us. Planning worship forms around the worshippers is much like giving my wife a power saw for her birthday. I like it, I will enjoy giving it, but it's not what she asked for and is certainly not what she wants.

If we want to understand the type of worship that God desires we need to find out what Jesus said about worship.

Jesus' Teaching on Worship in John 4:19-26

Jesus went to Samaria with a purpose. The Samaritans represented the vestiges of the Israelites who remained in the land of Israel during the Babylonian exile. They had intermarried with the occupying nations and were considered half-breeds and outcasts by the Jews who returned from the exile. They had continued the Samaritan form of worship begun by Jereboam when he rebelled against Reheboam after Solomon's death. When Jereboam rebelled, he changed the place where Israel worshipped. For political and practical purposes, he made Samaria the

new place of worship for the Northern Kingdom. Jesus sat next to an historical site—Jacob's well—built by the patriarch, a common ancestor to both Jews and Samaritans.

As Jesus waited for the disciples to return from the city with food, a woman of the city came to draw water. It was the wrong time of day for women to draw water. She was a social outcast because of her many sins.¹ When Jesus began to talk with the lady, she was at first startled, then intrigued by His words. But when the conversation got uncomfortably personal, she quickly switched the subject to an issue that had been a flashpoint of conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans—worship. "The Samaritan woman diverted the conversation from her own troubled domestic life to the theology of worship. She gave our Lord opportunity to express words that rivet our attention and rock our assumptions."²

Nature of the Question

With her question she drew from our Lord one of the most significant statements on worship found in Scripture. Of this passage, Hodges says,

Her expectation was not disappointed. She had raised the subject of worship, and the Savior's reply was as pregnant a statement on this theme as had ever escaped the lips of man. Indeed, once He had uttered it, it would be impossible thereafter for any man intelligently to ponder this theme without returning to consider those priceless words. As an utterance on worship they were timeless and absolutely definitive.³

She brought up a contradiction between the Samaritan teachings on worship and the Jewish teachings. She wanted to know which was the proper place of worship—Samaria, where her fathers told her, or on the temple mount in Jerusalem. Whether or not her question was sincere is beside the point. It is Jesus’ answer that astounds.

Jesus’ Answer

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know no what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:21–24).

True worship is not bound by location. Jereboam’s sin was not one of simply changing worship locations, but of rebellion. The Jews worshipped all over the wilderness in a moveable tabernacle. So the argument of here or there is moot. It is not an issue of location but of heart. But what is worship from the heart? The heresy of the Samaritans was that they selectively incorporated Judaism into their worship. “The heresy of Samaritanism—the practice of picking out what we like to worship and rejecting what we do not like—is widespread.”⁴

True worship must be intelligent. Jesus said, “Ye worship ye know not what” (John 4:22). In this area the Jews were right. They had an understanding of the true God. The Samaritans had lost the doctrine that provided the foundation for true worship.

The Samaritans worshipped in ignorance, He said. There was one sense in which that was factually true. The Samaritans accepted only the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament. They rejected all the rest of the Old Testament. They had therefore rejected all the great messages of the prophets and all the supreme devotion of the Psalms. They had a truncated religion because they had a truncated Bible; they had rejected the knowledge that was open to them and that they might have had. Further, the Jewish Rabbis had always shared the Samaritans with a merely superstitious worship of the true God. They always said that the Samaritan worship was founded not on love and knowledge, but on ignorance and fear.⁵

They had no concept of who God was or what they were doing when they worshipped. Jesus pointed out that the problem with the Samaritans was that they did not know what they worshipped. This was clear in the Old Testament when Israel fell so quickly into golden calf worship after Jereboam (1 Kings 12:28–33).

Ritual becomes empty without meaning or understanding. One great danger of present-day worship is the use of forms without understanding. That is why constant preaching and teaching is an essential part of worship. Churchgoers sing the same hymn for years, memorize the words after years of repetition, yet have no concept of its meaning. In the market church setting, the sentimentality

and lack of doctrinal content in worship music and practice leaves little of cognitive substance with the worshipper beyond the worship experience.

True worship is spiritual. Jesus said that worshippers must worship “in spirit” (John 4:23). God is a spiritual being, not a physical being. Worship is where man seeks to come before God, into His presence. It does not seek to lower God to man’s presence. Worship must be performed with the spiritual part of man. The idea of the word “spirit” in this verse is not the Holy Spirit. It is the spirit of the man that is worshipping. Worship is not simply an outward form or exercise. Martin interprets this verse, “worship in spirit and reality.”⁶ The concept of the word “truth” has to do with genuineness of heart rather than the revealed truth of Scripture. It has been already demonstrated that didactic truth is essential to proper worship, but so is genuineness of heart. Jesus is not saying that worship does not include the physical, but rather, worship that is not in genuineness of spirit, is not worship at all. Bodily actions or words without heart do not count for worship.

True worship must be focused upon God. “True worshippers shall worship the Father” (John 4:23). The nature of worship is dictated by the nature of God. It is not a place or a process that is most important, it is a person. As soon as worship makes celebrities of the worshippers, it ceases to be worship. Jesus moves the emphasis from men and places it upon God. There is, then, a danger, even in this study. If a simple process is delineated whereby a church can “improve” its worship, the focus can easily shift to a process of worship. Worship is and must be person oriented, and that person must be God.

God is actively seeking worshippers. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him” (John 4:23). This is the prime motivation for winning souls: they become true worshippers of God and finally bring glory to God. Any other reason is a secondary benefit. God is now desiring His children to worship Him, and that they reproduce themselves in others who will worship Him in truth.

True worship is made complete in Christ. “The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:25, 26). The woman could not understand completely. She looked to the Messiah to understand. When Christ revealed Himself as Messiah, she responded with faith. There is a mystery about God that can be revealed only in Jesus. The fact of Christ’s deity allows us to worship Christ and still be worshipping God.

Jesus’ Teaching on Worship in Matthew 12:1–8

Another passage that reveals significant teaching of Christ on worship is found in Matthew 12:1–8.

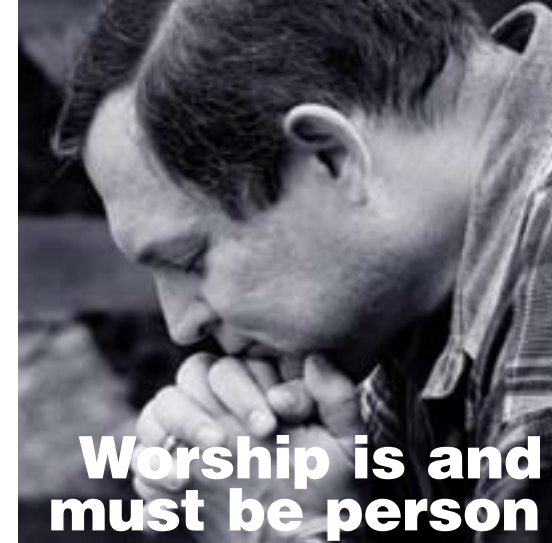
At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and

began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.

Jesus’ disciples walked through a field on the Sabbath and picked grain and ate it. The narrow strips between fields of grain were considered a right-of-way for travelers. Also, according to Jewish law the disciples were correct in taking grain to eat. “There is no suggestion that the disciples were stealing. The Law expressly laid it down that the hungry traveler was entitled to do just what the disciples were doing, so long as he only used his hands to pluck the ears of corn, and did not use a sickle”⁷ (Deut. 23:25). But it was the Sabbath Day. “Harvesting” on the Sabbath violated one of the many Sabbath laws of the Jews. The Pharisees caught the problem and were critical.

Laws of worship were not made to be completely inflexible. When David and his men were hungry (starving), they ate the priests’ food and were not condemned, even though the law did not allow it. David was called a man after God’s own heart. David did not consider it sin. Technically, the priests violated the law by performing their temple duties on the Sabbath. Jesus says this to point out the ridiculous nature of their argument. “Human need must take precedence of all other claims. The claims of worship, the claims of ritual, the claims of liturgy are important but prior to any of them is the claim of human need.”⁸ Worship is meant to be reasonable. It should not place burdens upon people too great to bear. It is meant to draw the heart toward God, not make the worshipper physically miserable. While worship forms must not be subject to every human whim and fad, they should not rule over legitimate human need.

God is greater than the practice of worship. There is some debate as to what Christ meant by the words “Son of man” in verse eight. Some would see “Son of man” as a reference of Christ to Himself. Jesus is saying that He rules the Sabbath and may do with it as He pleases. Others say that Jesus is using “[son] of man” as a reference to men in



Worship is and must be person oriented, and that person must be God.

general. Thus He would be saying that human need overrides the importance of the Sabbath. Because of Christ’s primary use of the term and the following context, the former is the most likely interpretation.

The practice of worshipping had become more important to the Jews than God Himself. The source of inflexibility in worship is selfishness. The Pharisees would save their sheep if it was in trouble on the Sabbath and not consider it sin. The motivation was obviously personal wealth and well-being. The Pharisees considered it illegal to heal on the Sabbath because this was work. They placed the value of a sheep above the value of a man. The reason was that the

healing of a man did not serve their own self-interest. The Pharisees were so self-centered and absorbed with meaningless ritual that they missed the fact that the Messiah, the Lord of the Sabbath, was in their presence. They worshipped worship.

Jesus referred to an Old Testament passage to drive home His argument about the nature of worship. Hosea 6:6 demonstrates that in the Old Testament, God was more concerned about a man’s relationship with God than his practice of worship ritual. Jesus used the Old Testament that the Pharisees revered to teach the error of their practice.

We who consider ourselves Bible-believers ought to regularly examine our worship practices to see whether they conform to the teaching of Christ. Changes happen subtly, and it’s easy to miss them, especially as churches get larger, more diverse, and more talented. Do we worship our worship style, our talented performers, the worshippers themselves, or the God who ought to be the focus of worship? Is He pleased with what He sees in our congregational gatherings? Is God pleased with what He saw in your church last Sunday?

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² Allan and Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Multnomah Press: 1982), 32.

³ Hodges, Zane, *The Hungry Inherit* (Multnomah: 1980), 18.

⁴ Tozer, A. W., *Whatever Happened to Worship* (Christian Publications: 1985), 42.

⁵ Barclay, 159.

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⁷ Barclay, 21.

⁸ Ibid., 24.

Sam Horn

THE WANT OF WORTHY WORSHIP

We leave our places of worship, and no deep and inexpressible wonder sits on our faces. We can sing these lilting melodies; and when we get out into the streets our faces are one with the faces of those who have left the theaters and music halls. There is nothing about us to suggest that we've been looking at anything stupendous and overwhelming. Far back in my boyhood I remember an old saint telling me that after some services he liked to make his way back home alone by the quiet paths, so that the hush of the Almighty might remain on his awed and prostrated soul. This is the element we are missing. —J. H. Jowett

In recent years worship has become the new topic of theological discussion in contemporary American Evangelicalism. Seminars abound to discuss new ways to “do worship.” Books and articles have exploded on the scene articulating every conceivable variation on worship. Even secular America has tuned in and turned on to worship. *Newsweek*, *Time*, and even news programming on prime time network television have commented on Americans’ return to spirituality and church. And no one is paying more attention to this trend than Evangelicalism.

On the surface, it might seem a positive thing that worship has come to the forefront of Evangelical thinking. After all, is it not the business of the Church to worship

corporately? Is it not the aim and duty of the Christian in personal worship to render through his daily life acceptable worship and service to God? On the one hand, we should be thankful that the Church has turned again to the primacy of worship. On the other, we should be concerned that the worship espoused be acceptable to God and not just to man. After all, worship is not about us but about Him, and therefore, as both the Source and the Object of all Biblical worship, God not only merits but has mandated that men everywhere worship acceptably in His sight. It is not enough that we turn our interest to worship. Nor is it sufficient to discuss worship, even in a setting like this. At the end of the day we must worship, and we must do so acceptably in the sight of Him whom we worship.

We are by nature worshippers. Instinctively we all worship something or someone. Left to ourselves we end up either worshipping the wrong object or worshipping in wrong ways. This danger makes it necessary that any profitable discussion about worship begin by observing that man is a worshipper and that he is such necessarily rather than accidentally or incidentally. There is no such thing as an accidental worshipper. Furthermore, the resulting conversation must be confined within the context of what God has said rather than merely with our personal, experiential, religious, cultural, or social obser-

ventions. It is not enough to be interested in worship, to discuss it, or even to engage in it personally. We must worship acceptably and what constitutes such worship must be measured against God’s unchanging standard, His Word. Consequently, the discussion must go beyond the idea that worship is good and necessary. Any profitable discussion must be radically committed to a certain kind of worship—worship that is acceptable in God’s sight. And that worship will of necessity be Biblical. When it is not, it is neither acceptable to God nor profitable to the worshipper. James Montgomery Boice observed the disastrous results that come from careless or un-Biblical worship when he stated,

Whenever in the church biblical authority has been lost, Christ has been displaced, the gospel has been distorted, or faith has been perverted, it has always been for one reason: Our interests have displaced God’s and we are doing His work our way. The loss of God’s centrality in the life of today’s church is common and lamentable. It is this loss that allows us to transform worship into entertainment, gospel preaching into marketing, believing into technique, being good into feeling good about ourselves, and faithfulness into being successful. As a result, God, Christ, and the Bible have come to mean too little to us and rest too inconsequentially upon us.¹

When the focus of worship shifts away from God and to the worshipper, it ceases to be worthy. When worshippers are more impressed or affected by the worship experience than by the glory and majesty of God, something is dangerously amiss. It is time for the Church to return to authentic worship that is Biblical rather than cultural or experiential—worship that leaves us awed and transformed more than entertained and satiated. The kind of worship that causes us to *make our way back home alone by the quiet paths, so that the hush of the Almighty might remain on our awed and prostrated souls*. But how are we to arrive again at such worship? What constitutes it? How, where, why, and by who is it offered? In short, what is its essence?

The Essence of Biblical Worship

Defining worship is notoriously difficult.² It is perhaps better described than defined. And, of all the various descriptions writers have put forth, the one by William Temple is most striking. He said,

Both for perplexity and for dulled conscience the remedy is the same; sincere and spiritual worship. For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and

We are by nature worshippers. Instinctively we all worship something or someone. Left to ourselves we end up either worshipping the wrong object or worshipping in wrong ways.

all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable.

Part of the difficulty in defining worship is its relational nature that precludes all attempts to define it as an object or a mere act. At the heart of true Biblical worship is the creature-Creator relationship. And that relationship must be expressed in ways appropriate to the creature and acceptable to the Creator. This important distinction requires that all worship be evaluated, expressed, and directed for the glory, honor, and pleasure of the Creator rather than the creature. This is evident in the nature, design, and

regulation of Israel’s worship in the Old Testament. It is also evident in the expressions of worship found throughout the New Testament documents. Interestingly, most of the New Testament references which speak to worship describe rational creatures rendering worship to God the Father (John 4:21–24; Acts 17:23; 18:3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 14:25; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 4:10; 14:7; 15:4; 19:10; 22:9). God, then, is the *who* of worthy worship. But what of the where, when, and how of such worship?

The Expansion of Biblical Worship

Even a cursory reading of the Old Testament reveals that acceptable worship happened in a specific location—the temple/tabernacle, at specific appointed times, and in carefully prescribed ways. Additionally, during the Mosaic dispensation worship was primarily seen through the lens of the corporate worship of Israel rather than as an individual personal experience. For redeemed New Testament believers, appropriate worship has been adjusted in three important ways.

First, the scope of acceptable worshippers has broadened beyond national Israel. In John 4:23, 24, Jesus deliberately sought out a worshipper who would have been disqualified on several grounds had she come to worship at the temple. In His invitation to her, Jesus declared that true worship would no longer be limited to a physical, national context such as Judaism but that all true worship on earth would now be open to anyone who had the Spirit of God, regardless of race, gender, or background.

Second, although the scope of worshippers is expanded beyond national and religious Israel, it is not open to all without distinction. There is a new and an important boundary. The worship God seeks must be offered in “truth.” While it is true that God demands sincerity of heart and life, this is probably not the main point Jesus was making in this text. All through John’s Gospel, he points the reader to Jesus as the “truth.” He is full of grace and truth (1:14, 17). He is the truth that will set men free (8:32). He speaks only truth (8:45, 46) because He is the truth (14:6). He has sent the Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26) to

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Upcoming Fellowships

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Calvary Baptist Church
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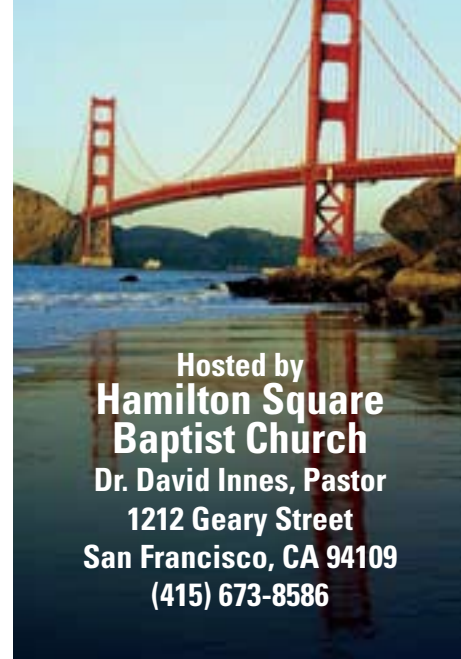
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SOUND WORDS

HOLD FAST THE FORM OF SOUND WORDS—2 TIMOTHY 1:13

First Partaker

Megiddo and Me

Nothing in the Bible seems to provoke public imagination like the one terrifying word “Armageddon.” Books and movies blazon it as their title, depicting it as some coming horrific disaster. A Public Television series, *Avoiding Armageddon*, investigated the grim prospect that it will be Armageddon if terrorists acquire biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons. For ecologists and astronomers, the word serves to alarm readers about an overwhelming future natural disaster—a mega tsunami, a super volcanic eruption, or earth’s collision with a giant asteroid. Someone even posts a hypothetical clock on the Web that’s counting down the final seconds to the mid-night of Armageddon.

Actually, Armageddon is not an event at all. It’s a place. It’s named “Armageddon” in Revelation 16:16 by the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word for mountain or hill, *har*, combined with the name of a well known city in ancient Canaan, *Megiddo*. The result is Har Mageddon, Hill of Megiddo, or Armageddon.

Megiddo’s Strategic Importance

Ancient Megiddo sat on the east end of the middle-most of just three passes that penetrate from the Mediterranean coast through the Mount Carmel range out into the heartland of upper Israel. Though constricting in ancient times to as narrow as thirty feet across, Megiddo’s pass was the most direct route for crossing the upper part of the country horizontally.

For instance, if your camels were carrying trade goods to Egypt from the countries bordering the Euphrates or the Tigris, the only route was through Canaan.

You entered it from the north just above the Sea of Galilee, crossed the Jezreel Valley in a southwesterly direction, but then found your way blocked by the Carmel range, six miles wide and fourteen long. The Megiddo pass, or Musmus, was your fastest way through.

Or going in reverse, if you were an ancient pharaoh, hurrying north to battle Assyria or Babylon, your best option was a quick march up Canaan’s coastal plain to the foot of Carmel and then a cut northeast through the Musmus out into the Jezreel Valley. In fact, this route—from Egypt up the Mediterranean and then east through the Musmus Pass, north to Damascus, and then east again to the Euphrates—was so well known in the ancient world that it was called the international way of the sea.

Ancient Megiddo’s location, therefore, was inestimably strategic, vital to any nation intent on controlling the international trading route between the river kingdoms of the Nile and the Euphrates. All commerce between Asia and Egypt had to use the Musmus Pass at Megiddo or else reluctantly resort to some other disadvantageous route. It’s no overstatement to say that whoever controlled Megiddo controlled the narrow passage between the two poles of the ancient world.

This past summer I co-led a tour group that spent a soul-expanding two hours at Megiddo. I came away with several impressions related to my own life and ministry as a pastor and preacher that I’d like to share. First, a little fascinating archaeology.

Megiddo, Canaanites, and Leadership

Megiddo consists today of a single twenty-acre hill, about three or four football fields’ length in each direction at its top. It’s the kind of hill archaeologists call a “tell.” A tell is an earthen mound piled up over many centuries with the accumulation of ruins from successive human occupations. To the uninformed

*“The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits”
(2 Tim. 2:6)*

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eye, a tell looks just about like any other hill of rocks, dirt, sand, and debris. But once excavators peel back its surface layer by layer, a tell becomes a history book, museum, and treasure trove all mounded shapelessly into one.

In the case of Tell Meggido, archaeologists believe they've exposed as many as twenty-five layers of human habitation that together stretch back as far as 6000 years. That would mean that twenty centuries before Christ, when Abraham first entered Canaan, someone was living at Megiddo.

Abraham's first settled encampment in Canaan was at a place called Shechem, located in the hill country that looks out east over the Jordan rift forty miles below the Sea of Galilee. From Shechem ran an important road northwest right up to Megiddo, just thirty miles away.

The Bible says that when Abraham encamped at Shechem *the Canaanite was then in the land* (Gen. 12:6). From what archaeologists conclude, that included Megiddo, because there they've excavated an immense ancient Canaanite worship complex

Leaders often have multiple reasons for toleration and accommodation, but over and over again Scripture testifies that one of the most tempting is the complaint or criticism of their followers. It can be pressing. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us (Exod. 32:1).

dated to Abraham's time. Its centerpiece is a circular stone altar five feet high and twenty-six feet in diameter. Seven steps ascend it from the east. Extending out from two of its sides for up to fifty yards are the ruins of temples. One is the largest from its era ever discovered in Canaan.

Even the altar is gigantic. I have a picture of an adult man lying spread-eagled in the middle of it. He appears small and vulnerable. From the looks of it, several dozen men could lie down up there like that.

Just exactly what sort of worship took place on that altar in those early days is uncertain. But we do know that in the Canaanite pantheon Baal was the popular deity credited with controlling rainfall. Thunder and lightning were the evidences of his work. He was also

sought for protection. An ancient prayer to him reads, *O Baal, please drive away the strong one from our gate. . . . The bull, O Baal, we will consecrate; the sacrifice, O Baal, we will fulfill. . . . Then Baal will hear your prayer—he will drive away . . . the warrior from your walls.*

But Baal couldn't come through for them when Israel entered the land about 1400 B.C. The first of thirteen Biblical references to Megiddo includes it in the list of thirty-one cities whose kings died battling futilely against Joshua and the children of Israel (Josh. 12:21).

Megiddo was subsequently allotted to the tribe of Manasseh. But the Scripture reports surprisingly that *the children of Manasseh could not drive out the inhabitants of those cities; but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. . . . They put the Canaanites to tribute; but did not utterly drive them out* (Josh. 17:11–13).

This is evidently a fact that God doesn't want the reader to overlook because Judges 1:27, 28 says it all over again almost verbatim: *did not utterly drive them out*, it repeats reproachfully.

Now the lesson for me. The failure was unquestionably from the top down. *And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua* (Judg. 2:7). So whatever failure followed began in the hearts of the new leadership.

Leaders often have multiple reasons for toleration and accommodation, but over and over again Scripture testifies that one of the most tempting is the complaint or criticism of their followers. It can be pressing. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us* (Exod. 32:1).

The people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, the spies bemoaned faithlessly. We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we (Num. 13:28, 31).

Only the utmost spiritual fortitude must have kept Moses himself from capitulating to the clamorers for the next forty years. Saul completely collapsed under the weight of their voices. *Because I saw that the people were scattered from me*, he pleads for Samuel to understand (1 Sam. 13:11). *The people spared the best*, he whines to justify his disobedience, *the people took of the spoil* (1 Sam. 15:15, 21).

Startlingly, even our Lord was subjected to this from no less than an apostle! So be prepared for this from even your most trusted spiritual counselor: *Peter took him, and began to rebuke him* (Matt. 16:22). It compelled Christ to display His sternest side. *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men* (Matt. 16:23).

There's the critical difference between followers: those that savor *the things that be of God* versus *those that be of men*. In any church, school, or mission board, how many followers display a long, conspicuous tes-

timony of fighting passionately against the *counsel of the ungodly* because they consistently think God's thoughts after Him? I don't know. But I think I know how to spot them.

What comes out of their mouths is Bible. Not corporate strategy. Not management theory. Not the times. Not public opinion polls. Not even *Christian* opinion polls. But Bible! That's how I'll know the difference between godly counsel and a devil.

I believe in listening to followers, but primarily to learn where they are, not to determine what to do. I want to know where they are so I can round them up to take them where they need to go. But God's Word is the only safe guide to where that is. And I can count on it—what He counsels won't make sense or have appeal to culture samplers.

O, Lord, give me counselors who savor the things of God! I need them stern like Moses, single-minded like Paul. Severe as Jesus. Only they are safe. So please, please! Make me deaf to the balanced and brilliant, the conciliatory, the corporately credentialed, reasonable, and winsome Christians who behind closed doors savor discreetly the things“that be of men”!

Thorny Neighbors

In the face of the difficulties of prosecuting an unrelenting extermination of the Canaanites, someone reasonably counseled pragmatism. *They put the Canaanites to tribute* (Josh. 17:13).

But the Canaanites entrenched in hills like Megiddo quickly became thorns in Israel's side. Inevitably their gods became a snare.

By the time of Deborah, two hundred years after Joshua, the resurgent Canaanites had apparently regained control of all Galilee, the Jezreel Valley, and even areas farther south. Their king, Jabin, reigned from Hazor, ten miles due north of the Sea of Galilee. But his general, Sisera, commanded 900 iron chariots from Harosheth, less than ten miles up the Carmel range from Megiddo. So undoubtedly the Canaanites in Megiddo had also reversed their role from that of subjects in Joshua's time to that of oppressors in Deborah's. Failing to believe and obey God turns the tables like that.

You can almost hear Paul applying Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites in the same way he applied her failures in the Wilderness earlier. *Neither be ye . . . as were some of them. Neither let us . . . as some of them*, he urges us. *All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition* (1 Cor. 10:7–11). That includes the resurgence of the Canaanites.

What's it like to harrow hard soil, sow scarce seed, weed through torrid summers—all with crude tools—only to have the entire year's harvest greedily torn from your gaunt wife and desperate children? What's it feel like to watch helplessly while Canaanites rifle your possessions and seize your children? Jabin *mightily oppressed the children of Israel* (Judg. 4:3).

There are Christians, even preachers, all across this country who have tolerated enemy fortresses in strategic places. We know it because their sins suddenly find them out. But long before being humilatingly exposed to public view, men more gradually fall under the oppression of what they deceive themselves into supposing they're capable of keeping subject to places, times, and outbreaks of their own choosing. Inevitably, because the God they preach about Sunday after Sunday really is alive, and really does reign, and really will not be mocked, they lose nearly everything in the end. They are at last *mightily oppressed*. Wayward children and disillusioned wives, mounting debts and broken health, uneasy consciences and suspicious minds sink them into depths of inconsolable despair.

God Defamed

The worst of it is what only truly godly people and God Himself care about—His diminished glory. About this God is passionate to the point of a fearful jealousy. And because He is, He will not sit silent forever. He will act on behalf of His name.

There's a new series of Jonathan Edwards's previously unpublished sermons being compiled by Michael D. McMullen and published by Broadman and Holman. In the second volume, *The Glory and Honor of God*, is a message based on Numbers 14:21, *But as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*. This is God's reply to Moses' pleas that He pardon Israel's balking at entering the land. *I have pardoned [them]*, the LORD responds. *But as truly as I live all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD*. And the consequence is that the entire generation, those who put the LORD to the test ten times, will *not see the land which I swear unto their fathers* (Num. 14:23). Edwards argues for the necessity of God's displaying His displeasure even against His own people. *The glory and honor of God requires that His displeasure be manifested against sin. . . . If He didn't so act, it would not be evident that he was so displeased with sin. . . . It would also not be apparent how dreadful a thing it is to despise God. . . . Men would take encouragement to sin against him and would even do it without restraint. . . . And hereby the creature is made more sensible of the worth of His pleasure*.

So there's an almighty purpose pressing irresistibly forward in all the universe: God's relentless pursuit of His own glory and fame. Both people and preachers are required to display it, even if it means being *mightily oppressed* by what they refuse to drive out by the arm of His omnipotence and at the insistence of His sovereign will.

God Unknown

Deborah and Barak finally threw off the Canaanite yoke for a generation (forty years; Judg. 5:31). But the first record that Israel ever completely conquered Megiddo comes from Solomon's reign (970–931 B.C.). *And this is the reason of the levy which king Solomon*

raised; for to build . . . the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer (1 Kings 9:15).

That means that stretching back nearly five hundred years, a half-millennium from Solomon to Joshua, the sacrificial fires of that Canaanite altar up there on Tell Megiddo continued to smoke. God willed to cleanse the land of every vestige of its defiling presence. All omnipotence stood ready at His irresistible will. But the tribes didn't bank on it, and that failure called His mighty power into question for at least five more centuries. Five centuries during which generation after generation of Israelites conspicuously failed in their chief end: *The chief end of man is to glorify God.*

Every time a sacrifice was made, every time Baal was invoked, every time the detestable rites took place, God was defamed.

Whatever interlude to this offensiveness Solomon's conquest created was short-lived. Just seventy-five years or so after Solomon, Elijah was compelled to draw a stark, stern, insistent line through the dirt somewhere on Carmel within sight of Megiddo. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.* So by that time, not merely the presence or power, but even the very identity of God was in question. Years of tolerating idols will finally do that. Then and now. At first it's, *I'm too weak.* Inevitably it's, *He's not able.* Finally, it becomes, *Maybe He's not God.* Do we think that unlikely?

Here are some of Harvard's laws for students three hundred fifty years ago.

Everyone shall consider the main end of his life and studies to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3). . . . Everyone shall so exercise himself in reading the scriptures twice a day that they be ready to given an account of their proficiency therein. . . . They shall eschew all prophanation of God's holy name, attributes, word, ordinances, and times of worship, and study with reverence and love carefully to retain God and his truth in their minds.

Here are some of Yale's two hundred fifty years ago.

All Scholars Shall Live Religious, Godly, and Blameless Lives according to the Rules of God's Word, diligently Reading the holy Scriptures the Fountain of Light and Truth; and constantly attend upon all the Duties of Religion both in Publick and Secret.

Here's one sentence from Archibald Alexander's inaugural address at Princeton Seminary less than

two hundred years ago: *O my fathers and brethren, let it never be said of us on whom this task has fallen, that we take more pains to make polite scholars, eloquent orators or men of mere learning than to form able and faithful ministers of the New Testament.*

And here's the alarmed conclusion not of a Fundamentalist, but an Evangelical:

If there is not loving confrontation, but courageous confrontation, and if we do not have the courage to draw lines even when we wish we did not have to, then history will look back at this time as the time when certain "evangelical colleges" went the way of Harvard and Yale, when certain "evangelical seminaries" went the way of Union Seminary in New York, and the time when other "evangelical organizations" were lost to Christ's cause—forever (Francis Schaeffer).

Remember Where It Begins

Lost to Christ's cause—forever. On a corner table here in my study sit several potsherds from Megiddo. They're small, broken fragments of larger pottery vessels. One is part of a handle, another three inches or so from a rim, a third a concave piece about the size of my palm. Tells like Megiddo disgorge hundreds of thousands of these. Only the best and most identifiable are kept by the archaeologists who oversee the digs.

I brought back these discards, all from a section of the dig dated between Abraham and Elijah, to remind me of where the irretrievable loss to Christ's cause begins. Somewhere after the faith of Abraham. Somewhere after the courage and obedience of Joshua. Somewhere when ambition, fear, and insecurity come up against entrenched culture, iron, and obstacles. Somewhere that pragmatism will temporarily succeed, but only the LORD God, ruler of Heaven and Earth, can win.

I think of the churches we pastor. Where in them are the influential, successful, and admired who've absorbed so many secular seminars, imbibed so many movies, and absorbed so much contemporary culture that their counsel in a crunch will be persuasively *the things that be of men?* On our building committees? Over our music programs? Among our deacons or elders?

Or is it I? Might I, in the stillness of the most sacred spot on earth to me, my own quiet study, begin to reason apart from the Word, tolerate, then justify, and finally promote what I would unmistakably recognize to be patently Canaanite were mine a more Word-saturated mind? The possibility nearly paralyzes my heart for fear. *O LORD God, my heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. . . . Keep back thy servant, I pray Thee for Thy name's sake, from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me. Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.* ☞

Bring . . . the Books

Conversations with Ichabod: A Pastor's Sketches by Ichabod Spencer

Ichabod Spencer spent his ministry pastoring two churches in the northeastern United States in the 1800s. Born in 1797 in Vermont, he was reared in a home where he heard the gospel regularly. He came to Christ just after his eighteenth birthday, one year after his father's untimely death. He trained to teach and served with distinction in that field for several years. In fact, he was so successful that the University of Alabama invited him to come as president in 1830 and so did Hamilton College of New York in 1832. However, God had called him to preach, and he accepted an initial call to serve as an assistant at the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, where Jonathan Edwards served years earlier.

Spencer served this congregation faithfully for four years, and during that time church records indicate over 250 individuals came to Christ under his ministry. Utterly exhausted and in poor health, he resigned to seek a less demanding ministry. Upon learning of his availability, the largest church in New England, Park Street Church in Boston, invited him to come as their pastor. Instead, Spencer accepted the invitation to pastor a small group of 40 believers at the Second Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. Spencer spent the rest of his ministry at this church. His labor extended over two decades. The results were astonishing. Second Baptist grew to become one of the largest and most influential churches in New York.

There is no one secret to his success, but his biographers all point to one remarkable aspect of his ministry that certainly was a major factor: his pastoral visitation. Spencer determined to visit the home of each member of his congregation every year, and he did so for the twenty-two years he was at Second Baptist. One biographer noted that he averaged over 800 visits with people each year until his death in November of 1854. Small wonder that his people loved him so and that the church grew as it did.

Unbelievably, Spencer kept detailed records of each visit in his journal. Over the course of his ministry, his journals contained over 20,000 such entries. The wisdom and insight he gained from this aspect of his ministry soon made him a widely sought-after counselor to fellow ministers. So helpful was his counsel that he was compelled by friends and co-laborers to write it down in book form. *A Pastor's Sketches* was the result. Initially published in two volumes, it contained carefully selected details from seventy-seven different visits Spencer made during his ministry. *A Pastor's Sketches* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2001) is a reprint of

the first volume, with the second volume to come later.

Spencer wrote not just to help fellow pastors but to direct lost sinners to the Savior. His own words reveal this to be the case:

" . . . when thou comest, bring with thee . . . the books" (2 Tim. 4:13)

The Author has hoped, that these Sketches might be useful, not on the ground of their marvelousness, so much as on the ground of their applicability, as they refer to common experiences and common difficulties, which have occurred under the ordinary ministration of a very humble individual; and are, therefore, likely to occur again. He has hoped, that they might be instructive, by showing the application of divine truth to human hearts—by leading some anxious inquirers after salvation to see what it is that hinders them from peace with God—and by leading private Christians and young Ministers of the gospel to study more carefully what they shall say to those, who inquire what they shall do to be saved.

The accounts in the book continue to be of great value today. Although Spencer was not a Baptist, every Baptist pastor burdened to care for his sheep will find much help in his examples and in his commitment to press lost men to come to Christ for salvation. Many accounts describe in detail both the questions or objections to the gospel raised by real men and women he met with and his answers to them. Additionally, there are several examples of both God's power to draw a resisting soul to Christ as well as examples of man's ability to continue on in his hardness to the gospel. On one occasion he was asked how he knew exactly what to say to each individual inquirer, to which he responded:

I aim to conspire with the Holy Spirit. If I perceive any one truth has impressed the mind, I aim to make that impression deeper; because the Holy Spirit has already made that impression, and I would not diminish it by leading the mind off to something else. If I perceive any error in the individual's mind, I am to remove it; for I know that the error is of sin, and not of the Holy Spirit.

I have profited immensely from Spencer's accounts and am sure they will be a rich source of blessing, encouragement, and help to all who desire to minister more effectively to individuals God brings across their path. ☞

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Straight Cuts

Possibly the most important chapter in the Bible on the doctrine of sanctification (holiness) is Romans 6. In the first two verses of that chapter Paul says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” Paul’s statement in verse 2 that the believer is presently “dead to sin” has been the source of some unfortunate confusion concerning sanctification. This is somewhat understandable since “dead to sin” might seem to indicate that the believer is somehow immune to the influence and effects of sin. However, the tense of the Greek word translated “dead” does not actually indicate a state of being but a past, completed action, i.e., “How shall we who *died to sin* live any longer therein?” But even the more accurate “died to sin” does not clear up all the difficulties. After all, what does it mean that the believer has “died to sin”?

Romans 6 has often been understood to mean that the believer has the *potential* for victory over sin so that he can live a life above sin, possibly free from temptation. Paul is understood to be giving instructions in Romans 6 for *how* a believer can have this life of victory. From Paul’s exhortation in verse 13, “yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God,” a formula is deduced for entry into the life of victory by the simple act of reckoning—“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (v. 11). And so we are told that by a simple act of faith, reckoning oneself dead to sin, the regenerated believer can enter a higher state of Christian living that results in a life of victory over sin that is not enjoyed by the average, normal Christian.

There is a major flaw with this interpretation of Romans 6, for Paul is not primarily telling us *how* a justified person can lead a holy life, but *why he must* lead a holy life. The question that begins Romans 6, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” is a false inference that one might draw from Paul’s statement in the last part of 5:20: “But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” The apostle’s statement might be misinterpreted to mean that God is somehow bound to bestow more grace while we remain willfully in the state of sin. Paul’s answer

Dead to Sin—Romans 6:2

to the question “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” is that the justified person *cannot* “continue in sin” because he has “died to sin” (v. 2). To “continue in sin” means to have a lifestyle of sin—the life of the unbeliever. This is not possible because the justified person has “died to sin,” which means, according to the promise of verse 14, that the justified person is no longer under the dominion of sin (“For sin shall not have dominion over you”). In verse 3 Paul says that this death to sin took place for every believer at conversion/baptism: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?”

This death to sin does not mean that the justified person is sinless or that he is insensitive to sin’s enticements, rather that he is delivered from the absolute tyranny of sin. Death to sin means that sin’s sway as a dominating, ruling power is broken; the believer is no longer a slave to sin: “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (vv. 17, 18). Paul’s contrast in Romans 6 is between the justified person, who is a slave to righteousness (v. 18), and the unbeliever, who is a slave to sin (v. 17).

So we see that in Romans 6 Paul is speaking of a freedom from the dominion of sin which is the *actual*, not merely *potential*, possession of every born-again believer. This freedom from the dominion of sin comes at conversion to every believer. Since it is a fact that all believers have “died to sin,” that is, they are no longer slaves to sin as they were in their unsaved condition, Paul calls upon each of us to “reckon ourselves dead,” that is, to realize that the power of sin has been broken in our lives so that as a result of regeneration we have the capability and the responsibility to live lives that are pleasing to God. While the justified person must still battle sin, he is not under sin’s lordship, and his fundamental disposition in life is toward holiness (Rom 6:4). Paul’s point in Romans 6 is that Christ’s death and our union with Him secure not only our justification but also our progressive sanctification. As Calvin noted, “Christ justifies no one whom He does not at the same time sanctify.” ☞

“Rightly
dividing
the Word
of Truth”
(2 Tim. 2:15)

Dr. William W. Combs is Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, Michigan.

Windows

Americans have come to enjoy a standard of living that far exceeds that of much of the world. In 1900, the year my grandmother was born, she could expect to live scarcely more than 47 years.¹ A mother with four children expected one child to die in infancy, and children, by age 21, had an even chance that they would lose one of their parents.² The average baby born today will live nearly 78 years. Much of this increased longevity comes from medical advances that have alleviated pain and suffering, coupled with generally better healthcare. For example, in 1928 Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, which was widely used during World War II to save the lives of GIs who otherwise might have died of infections. Estimates are that since their introduction, penicillin and related antibiotics have reduced the mortality rate of staphylococcal infections by more than 85%. Other medical breakthroughs, such as Jonas Salk’s polio vaccine in 1952, have greatly improved our quality of life. While these medical breakthroughs are not the sole blessing of Americans, our healthcare system gives us ready access to all of the latest lifesaving advances often not available in other parts of the world.

American incomes have risen significantly since 1900. A century ago, the average American earned about \$3,000, adjusted for today’s dollar value. He had no indoor plumbing and owned no car or telephone. Today, our teenagers can earn that much during a summer of hard work. Many have their own cars and cell phones. Life in twenty-first century America is good! It is little wonder that we Americans in general display little awareness of our own mortality. Many young adults simply assume that a long life is their prerogative and pay scant attention to evidences of life’s brevity all around them.

The Bible addresses our mortality in forthright, sobering terms. “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil” (James 4:13–16). Indeed, all humanity needs to ponder the brevity of life and recognize that time is short and preparation for eternity is incumbent upon all—the old and young, the rich and poor, the unbeliever and the believer alike. How often does God remind us of life’s fleeting moments?

On April 10, 1912, the White Star Line, one of the world’s leading shipping companies, launched the largest ship in history from Southampton, England. The majestic vessel had three powerful screws to propel the 882-foot hull, weighing 46,328 tons, through the water. A marvel in modern technology, the RMS *Titanic* was

considered “unsinkable.” On her maiden voyage were a number of prominent Americans—members of the rich and famous—including John Jacob Astor IV, a 47-year-old heir to the Astor fortune and builder of New York’s Astoria Hotel. Astor, with his second wife Madeleine Talmadge Force, whom he married after a scandalous divorce, sought refuge from New York gossips by traveling abroad. Learning his new wife was expecting, Astor booked a first class cabin aboard the *Titanic* so that his heir might be born in America. Also aboard the vessel was Benjamin Guggenheim, wealthy son of Colorado mining magnate Meyer Guggenheim, and Isidor Straus, a German-born former Democratic Congressman and co-owner of New York’s R. H. Macy department store.

After stops in Cherbourg, France, and Queenstown, Ireland, to disembark and board passengers, *Titanic* made its way across the Atlantic. Four days out, she was nearing Canada. Captain Edward J. Smith ordered the *Titanic* to veer ten miles south of the normal shipping lanes after receiving reports of icebergs. The evening of April 14 brought additional reports of danger into the wireless radio room on board the *Titanic* from the steamers *Amerika* and *Mesaba*. Icebergs lay in the path of the great ship. Oddly, neither message was conveyed to the bridge or the captain. Shortly after 11:30 P.M. on a calm, moonless night, a lookout spotted impending disaster. The ship’s crew made a frantic effort to avoid a collision. However, at 11:40, calamity struck—the *Titanic* collided with the iceberg, tearing a 300-foot gash in its starboard side. Within an hour, the captain realized she was doomed and gave the order to abandon ship. Unfortunately, the ship was outfitted with lifeboats that could handle fewer than half of the 2,223 people on board. The women and children were given priority. Astor attempted to board his wife’s boat on account of her “delicate” condition but was turned away. Exactly 2.5 hours after impact, the “unsinkable” *Titanic* slipped beneath the surface of the Atlantic, and John Jacob Astor IV was among the 1,517 that perished. Madeleine survived and gave birth four months later to a son, John Jacob Astor VI.³

War is a time when the brevity of life is seen and felt especially by the combatants. Soldiers face death as “part of the territory” for those who take up arms. Few civilians, however, worry about the ravages of war if they live far from the conflict. Still, war reminds us all that life can be unpredictable. Such was the case in 1915 with Alfred Vanderbilt, great-grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, American shipping and railroad entrepreneur.

“To every preacher of
righteousness as well
as to Noah, wisdom
gives the command,
‘A window shalt thou
make in the ark.’”

Charles Spurgeon

Alfred, who received the bulk of the family fortune after his elder brother Cornelius III was disinherited, was an avid horse-breeder. In May 1915 he found himself bound for Liverpool, England, to moderate a meeting of the International Horse Breeders Association. Despite warnings of impending danger in the German U-boat-infested waters off the coast of England during the Great War, the thirty-seven-year-old Vanderbilt booked passage on the RMS *Lusitania*. Six days out of New York and within sight of the southern coast of Ireland, the *Lusitania* fell victim to a torpedo from the German submarine *U-20*, captained by Walther Schweiger. With only three torpedoes left in its hold, Schweiger considered returning to Germany to rearm but figured that he could afford to dispatch one more of his lethal projectiles if he found an unsuspecting mark. On the 7th of May, *U-20* found that mark in the unprotected *Lusitania*. That lone torpedo hit amid ship, and a subsequent explosion, perhaps created by a detonation in the cargo hold of a cache of ammunition bound for the war effort, tore a gaping hole in the hull. In twenty minutes the *Lusitania* sank, claiming the lives of 1,201 of the 1,965 passengers and crew, including Alfred Vanderbilt. Sudden death was no respecter of persons.

War brings other tragedies to noncombatants and causes those touched to come face to face with life's unpredictability. The city of Halifax, Nova Scotia, boasts one of the finest harbors in North America. It has been an important harbor for vessels bound between Europe and the United States. During the Great War it served as a major port for ships laden with supplies and ammunition for the European conflict. It was far from the battlefields of Europe or the dangerous waters of the North Atlantic, but it was within reach of sudden, unpredictable tragedy, and suffered one of the greatest calamities of the twentieth century.

Less than a year before the end of the war, Halifax Harbor's Bedford Basin was the staging area for Allied convoys headed to the European conflict. On the morning of December 6, 1917, a French steamer, the *Mont Blanc*, was ordered to join a flotilla of Allied ships bound for England. The *Mont Blanc* was a floating powder keg, loaded with more than 2,000 tons of picric acid, a powerful explosive used in artillery shells; 200 tons of TNT; 10 tons of explosive gun cotton; and 35 tons of benzol, a highly flammable liquid, packaged in thin metal cans. A Norwegian ship, the *Imo*, working with the Belgian relief effort, was headed out to sea at the time the *Mont Blanc* was moving to join the convoy. As the *Imo* encountered heavy shipping traffic at the harbor narrows, she was forced to swerve out of her own lane and into the path of the *Mont Blanc*. At 8:45 A.M. local time, the two ships collided, causing the benzol onboard the *Mont Blanc* to ignite. With the crew unable to reach fire-fighting equipment on the *Mont Blanc*, the captain ordered them to abandon ship, leaving the distressed vessel adrift within the harbor.

Halifax was just beginning its day that ill-fated morning, with the streets of the town of 50,000 bustling with

children headed to schools and adults headed to work. The burning ship, moving in toward the town with the incoming tide, began to draw a crowd. Totally unaware of the danger that was rapidly approaching them, the citizens assembled in large numbers to watch the conflagration. At 9:05, as the ship rested against Pier #6 in the heavily industrial Richmond district of the city, the *Mont Blanc* suddenly exploded, decimating nearly 350 surrounding acres. It was the largest manmade explosion in human history until the first atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, August 6, 1945.

The devastation of the Halifax explosion was severe. More than 1,900 people were killed by the blast, including 250 people whose bodies were never identified and others who were never found. Over 1,600 homes were razed, and another 12,000 were damaged. Thirty-seven people were completely blinded by flying glass and debris. The tragedy touched the young and old, the rich and the poor, the believer and the unbeliever with hapless disregard. A Presbyterian minister lost his wife and daughter. Also killed was four-year-old Reginald McKenzie, son of Baptist parents, whose tiny body was never found. In a moment hundreds were swiftly ushered into the presence of God.

Tragedies like these are not the only things that remind us of life's tenuous nature. As I write, America is dealing with what President Bush is calling the greatest natural disaster to hit American shores in our lifetime. In the early hours of August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina hurled winds of more than 140 miles per hour down on the citizens of New Orleans. Only three other such powerful hurricanes have made landfall since records began to be kept—Camille, which hit the gulf coast of Mississippi in 1969; Andrew, which pummeled Miami-Dade in 1992 and did more than \$25 billion in damages; and Gilbert, which hit Mexico in 1988. This tragedy brought back memories of the worst such disaster in American history—the hurricane that hit Galveston, Texas, September 8, 1900. The storm claimed more than 6,000 lives and devastated that city. Galveston was then home to 37,000 and a major shipping port for U.S. cotton, with more than 1,000 ships visiting annually. Winds were estimated at 130–140 miles per hour. With the highest homes at the time scarcely eight or nine feet above sea level, Galveston was an easy target for the 15.5-foot waves that surged over the island and demolished everything in their path. The destruction stands as a compelling reminder—man's life is all too brief.

Sobering are the words of Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." Life indeed is marked by brevity, and all must be ready to stand in the presence of God at any moment. ☞☞

¹ Health, United States, 2004, National Center for Health Statistics. With Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans. Hyattsville, MD: 2004. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/abus/abus-04trend.pdf#027>.

² "The United States in 1900," accessed 27 August 2005. Available at http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=205.

³ John Jacob Astor V was the grandson of John Jacob Astor IV's uncle, John Jacob Astor III.

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The Want of Worthy Worship (Continued)

witness of the truth and remind men that He is the truth (16:13). It is through His truth that men will be saved and sanctified (17:17, 19). So when Jesus stated that God was seeking worship in “truth,” He was stating that all acceptable worship must be offered in Him. Just like all acceptable worship in the Old Testament had to be offered in the place of God’s choosing—the tabernacle/temple—all acceptable worship in the New Testament had to be offered in a place of God’s choosing—a new temple. Jesus replaced the temple (John 2:19, 20), and He is the head of a body that has become the new temple of God—the Church (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). The way one becomes a part of such worship in such a temple is by being “in Christ.” Only worship that is offered “in Christ,” “by Christ,” and “for Christ” is genuine worship, and only those who are joined to Christ can be such worshippers.

The third important adjustment to worship made in the New Testament is the expansion of the sphere of worship beyond corporate formal worship to personal daily worship. This is most clearly seen in Paul’s demand that all worship be offered in the context of personal daily living as an acceptable sacrifice (Rom. 12:1, 2). Such instruction does not replace or even supersede the importance of regular corporate worship; rather, this instruction demands that such worship be offered by transformed individuals who reflect their worship in daily living. This is significant because it fleshes out Jesus’ original statement that the Father is seeking worshippers who will worship in Spirit and in truth. Such worship will go beyond merely offering external sacrifices, gifts, and verbal praise. Such worship can come only from worshippers whose lives have been radically transformed by Him whom they worship. As “priests” in the new temple of God, their priestly service must be offered from a life that has approved that which is good and acceptable in His sight, evidenced by a commitment to reject that which God has disapproved in the world around them (Rom. 12:2). Since worship contains a relational context between creature and Creator, only worship that measures up to at least these three criteria will be pleasing to the One whom we worship. And, if He is not pleased with our worship, then it has been futile and has damaged our souls regardless of what we think we have experienced or been pleased by during the worship experience. But what of the final question—the purpose or goal of acceptable worship?

The End of Biblical Worship

To be sure, worship God’s way brought great blessing to the worshippers, but their well-being was subordinate to God’s greater purpose—exalting and extending His glory. This is not just an Old Testament concept. It lies at the heart of all New Testament worship. God’s first and primary purpose is to exalt and expand His glory throughout the entire universe, and one of the ways He has chosen to do this is by receiving acceptable worship from worshippers whom He has made worthy and equipped to offer such worship. Nowhere is this more evident than in the book of

Ephesians, where worshippers are exhorted to live in light of their calling as worshippers (4:1). The reason we are to walk worthy is so that all the universe may see the praise-worthiness of God (1:6, 12, 14) by observing the surpassing riches of His grace to those He has placed in the Church (2:7) and by seeing His manifold wisdom revealed through the Church (3:10). God’s surpassing wisdom in the plan and design of the gospel is worthy of praise (Rom. 16:27).

The goal of each individual worshipper is that every action in every sphere of life be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 1:11). The goal of corporate worship in the Church is the glory of God (Eph. 3:21). God’s express goal in calling, redeeming, indwelling, and gifting a community of saved sinners for His Son to rule over in love is to show through them the wonderful magnificence of His wisdom, the lavishness of His grace, and the unsurpassed brilliance of His wisdom to all the intelligent beings in His creation (Eph. 3:10) to the praise of His glory. If this is the true end of worship, then only worship that meets His requirements, is in line with His goals, and centered on His glory is worthy and acceptable. All other worship is worthless and empty, regardless of how exciting, acceptable, and attractive it might be to the worshippers. For the most part, such worship is sadly lacking in the modern Evangelical church, and the results have been both tragic and devastating on the corporate level as well as in the personal, moral, and spiritual condition of individual believers.

May God give His people the grace, wisdom, and understanding necessary to return to a commitment to Biblical worship and to render such worship in a way worthy of Him who alone is worthy!

Dr. Sam Horn is Executive Vice President of Northland Baptist Bible College in Dunbar, Wisconsin.

¹ Cited from the introduction to a work on worship edited by Philip Graham Ryken in honor of James Montgomery Boice after his death in 2000. *Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003), pp. 6–8.

² Perhaps the best and most theologically developed definition of worship is the one proposed by D. A. Carson in his book *Worship by the Book*. His lengthy definition is followed by a chapter that carefully examines, explains, and defends every phrase from Biblical texts. Carson defines worship as “the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, human worship of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, Christian worship is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and action, both in the individual believer and in corporate worship, which is worship offered up in the context of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation” (*Worship by the Book* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002], p. 26).



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A Cup of Cold Water . . . Then the Gospel

By Jan Milton

For thirteen years Operation Renewed Hope has followed this pattern. It is not a new pattern; to the contrary, it is a very old one. Jesus first mentioned it in Matthew 9 when He urged prayer for laborers in the harvest. It was because of His ministry to the physical needs and preaching that moved Him with compassion to command His disciples to pray to the Lord of the harvest. Compassion comes as we move among the people, healing all manner of diseases, teaching and preaching the gospel. Anyone who has ever given a cup of cold water in His name can tell you he has seen the harvest "up close and personal."

The work of Operation Renewed Hope over the years led us to the work on Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. We have helped those in need physically, and we have always preached the gospel of Christ. Katrina offered an opportunity to do this in our own nation. This disaster brought many to face the reality of how temporary this life actually is. It made all saints and sinners aware that no matter how strong or wealthy they may be, they need the assurance of divine help—God Almighty and His Son, Jesus Christ. As a result, our temporal physical labors accentuate the importance of the gospel and exalt the Savior.

Currently we are engaged in directing an effort to help churches rebuild facilities. We are helping Christian schools resume classes. We are helping pastors, church members, and missionaries rebuild their homes. We are putting food boxes, chainsaws, rakes, and other tools into the hands of servants of the Lord who are faithfully telling people about Jesus. We are providing good church members all over the United States an opportunity to use their talents to rebuild God's work. We are getting the gospel to thousands and ministering to thousands.

One such example came in from a person who was on a work team from one of our helping churches. I can't even remember who gave me the report, but I remember the

report so well. He said that he was out with a member of the church in which he was helping. As they were going down the street attempting to minister to people, they found a family weeping in front of their damaged home. He said that this fellow with him, being of great size, got out of the vehicle and approached this hurting family. In his big arms he hugged the entire family at one time. He prayed with them and wept with them right there on the street.

This type of spontaneous ministry is happening all over the Katrina and Rita disaster area, four states wide. Two months ago this was unheard of and unwelcome, but today it is welcomed by churches and citizens. Pastors have called me to tell me of people being saved and ongoing ministry. This is the type of ministry available to the church today. We must be prepared to do it.

I had a phone call from a brother impacted by Katrina when Rita was on the way up the Gulf. He said that his church was praying that Rita would follow the previous path of Katrina so that no new disaster would occur. What bravery and courage of God's people. Disaster can and will bring out the best in God's people.

Our churches have answered with authority and power. They mobilized and within a short time were supplying food, water, building teams, demolition teams, gospel teams, havens for the homeless, and, most importantly, hope to the righteous and the Good News of salvation to the destitute. It was not only churches working with Operation Renewed Hope. It was good Bible-believing churches, independently and in concert with other good organizations. It was God's people demonstrating God's transforming power in the life of the converted.

God help us to always answer the call to service immediately and for His glory.

Jan Milton is Founder and President of Operation Renewed Hope: www.operationrenewedhope.org.

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"May I judge my sincerity in religion by my fear to offend thee . . . and my willingness to deny myself."

—a Puritan's prayer

"We may have developed a generation incapable of reverence and worship in the presence of the holy God."

—Vance Havner

"Prayer is: the meeting of a human suppliant alone with God, for supplication and communion at the mercy seat, and revelation of the existence, presence, and character of God."

—A.T. Pierson

"The way of irreverence will never lead to the holy place."

—John Henry Jowett

"The preachers who have helped me most were the ones who were awestruck by the presence of the God about whom they spoke."

—A. W. Tozer

"We may be truly said to worship God, though we lack perfection; but we cannot be said to worship Him if we lack sincerity."

—Stephen Charnock

"The atmosphere is too laden with the law for the wicked to live in it, and too abounding in grace for the legalist so much as to breathe in hypocrisy."—Eliseus Howells' description of Sandfields Chapel where D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was pastor


"We've lost the integrity and true meaning of the music of the church. No one can honestly say he's been 'called by God to entertain.'"

—Glenn W. Harrell

"I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better."

—George Frederic Handel, of his *Messiah*

Compiled by Dr. David Atkinson, pastor of Dyer Baptist Church, Dyer, Indiana.





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Music at Christmas

Sheri E. Privett

Okay. I admit it. I love Christmas and just about everything associated with it. Our family has our tree up December 1 (or before) with Christmas music playing during all waking hours! I love the candles, white lights, the fresh greenery everywhere, the nativity scenes, the special smells coming from the kitchen (yes, I do try to bake a little extra!), the annual gingerbread cookies, and hot tea and chocolate around the fireplace. I eagerly anticipate the cantata, the birthday party for Jesus, the ladies' cookie exchange, and our Christmas Eve service. And of course, when else can you see *The Nutcracker* and hear live performances of Handel's *Messiah*? I also enjoy the special time with my sister, her family, and the grandparents. But I think the element of Christmas that I anticipate the most year after year is the music. I love Christmas music! If you don't believe me, ask any choir member when I start planning the Christmas concert and Christmas Eve service!


Have you really taken a look at the words to Christmas music? I am amazed at the number of references to "peace," "joy," "glory," and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The writers use each song to point the listener to Christ and the wonderful message and glorious purpose of His birth. With excitement the listener is taken back to circumstances surrounding His birth. Wise men, shepherds, angels, and even the animals are all highlighted in various songs. Even the weather does not get left out, such as in the carol "In the Bleak Midwinter." Christmas carols help keep the focus on Christ. Each one points to Him, His birth, His mission, His love for His people, and those who surrounded Him at that time. We don't see any other focus. The listener can't miss it. Yet do we?

Why is it that sometime around December 22 I find myself feeling less excited about this season? I feel rushed, overwhelmed, tired, a bit on edge, and a few other "not so spiritual" descriptions. As I have tried to analyze this phenomenon year after year, I have come up with my problem. I go into the Christmas season with my focus on Christ and what He did for me, but somewhere in the middle of the month, I turn my focus onto myself: what I have to purchase, wrap, bake, give, practice, perform, minister, serve, clean, and on and on. Do you understand my dilemma? I must remind myself that Christmas is not about me or my family but about Christ and His mis-

sion of providing salvation for mankind. That is when I turn my CD up a little louder and sing at the top of my lungs those wonderful carols of the season that point to Christ!

This year, join me and my family in keeping the focus on our Lord Jesus Christ. Let the music of this season help by pointing to Jesus—the only reason for the season.

Sheri Privett serves alongside her husband, Michael Privett, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Williamsburg, Virginia.



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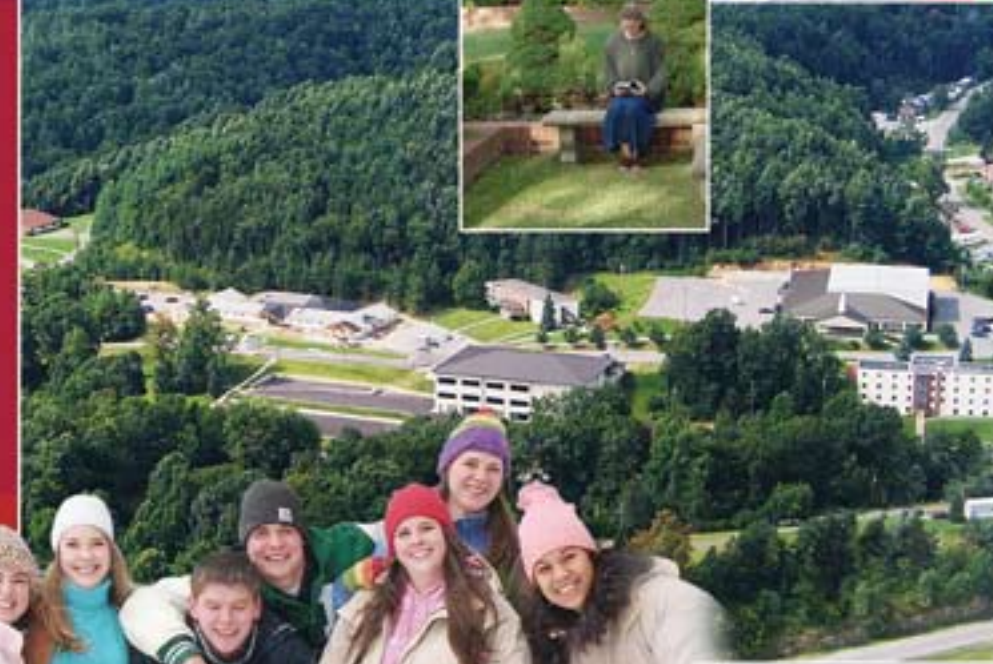
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The Evangelist's Corner

The Three Dimensions of Discipline—Part 3

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty

In the last two articles I've presented the areas of discipline that are crucial in our lives. First, the discipline of the mind by memorizing and meditating on the Scriptures. Second, the discipline of the body by eating properly and exercising regularly. Now I'm going to discuss the third area of discipline, which deals with the heart.

We often say of someone, "He has a tender heart," or "He has a heart for others," or "He has a heart for the things of God." What we are referring to is the inner being of that person. The apostle Paul said in Romans 10:1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." This is what consumed the life Paul; he wanted to see the Jews saved. I have often said that we must keep our hearts warm for souls and our vision clear for service. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." You don't have to be around a believer very long until you sense what dominates his inner being, for it will come out of his mouth! The same is true of an unsaved person; what dominates his heart will come out of his mouth. In Matthew 15:19 the Lord said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." When you hear an unsaved person cursing, telling filthy jokes, and talking of his affairs, he is exposing his heart—that is, the longings of his life. A true believer wants to guard his heart, and he'll desire to have a disciplined heart. This desire can be accomplished in two ways.

First, by worshipping the Lord. Recently I had meetings out in Arizona. The pastor invited a lawyer to attend our services. The lawyer was disturbed about the direction his own church was going and made the following statement to this pastor friend of mine: "The God that my church preaches is not the God that is messing with my life, because the God that messes with my life demands worship and commitment!" What a profound statement! The Lord does indeed demand worship. When the Devil tempted Christ to fall down and worship him, Christ answered in Matthew 4:10, "Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." The Lord wants us to worship Him, and many of His people are ignorant of how to do this. I can't go into all that's involved in true Biblical worship, but I will state a few thoughts. Worship must always be with a clear concept of who God is; that is, His personality and attributes. Jeremiah 9:23, 24 declares, "Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he

understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." We need to know Him! He is God (Elohim), which means He is the all-powerful, faithful Creator of the universe. He is LORD (Jehovah), which declares that He is the self-existent One whose main attribute is holiness. When a person worships the Lord, he will praise and glorify Him for who He is. Pastor David Whitcomb from Greer, South Carolina, says, "True worship is centered on God's Word and is only for those who believe that Word." Worship that goes contrary to this is false worship.

Second, we discipline our hearts by witnessing. True worship should be followed by witnessing for our Lord. For example, in John 4 when Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman at the well, she was shocked that He would even talk to her. In John 4:9 she said, "How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." In their conversation the subject of worship was brought up, and Christ said in John 4:24, "God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." She replied in the next verse, "I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things." Then in verse 26 we read, "Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he." When she recognized that the Lord Jesus was the Messiah, her immediate response was to witness to others about Christ. She said in John 4:29, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

When we truly worship the Lord, we cannot be silent in proclaiming what He has done for us. Worship will be followed by witnessing of the Lord's wondrous salvation He has given us through His Son.

Evangelist Jerry Sivnksty may be contacted at PO Box 141, Starr, SC 29684 or via e-mail at evangjsivn@aol.com.

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PRACTICING PRAYER:

Everyone understands that prayer is crucial to the Christian life. Yet many seem to assume that prayer is a practice that must develop independently and instinctively. Prayer is, after all, just talking to God. What could be more instinctive? One might make the same argument about preaching or teaching—it's just talking to people. What could be more natural? Both are simply forms of conversation. But the distance between simple conversation and actual *communication* is often significant. Substantive and successful communication involves *communication skills*. Communicating oneself to someone else clearly and effectively is hardly instinctive.

Much preaching, teaching, and discipleship overlook the importance of instruction in the discipline and method of prayer. Even in the context of academic training for ministry, we can invest a great deal of time and energy in the study of how to interpret, exposit, illustrate, and apply the Scripture (preaching). And we should. We must have courses devoted to teaching the next generation the proper interpretation and handling of every portion of God's Word. We should never assume that everyone can learn on his own to preach or teach God's Word—effectively, accurately, powerfully, transformingly—or that students would not benefit from training, mentoring, and the experience of focused practice in this area. Likewise, we should not assume that everyone ought to be able to learn on his own to pray—effectively, Biblically, powerfully, life-transformingly—or that he would not benefit from training, mentoring, and the experience of focused practice in this area as well.

Ever since I began teaching on the seminary level, I have incorporated a prayer project into my courses whenever possible. The suggested prayer "exercises" below are designed to cultivate a variety of disciplines in prayer, to broaden one's view of different kinds of praying, and to deepen one's appreciation for the relational and transformational value of prayer. For those to whom an "assignment" to pray and the requirement to pray in a certain way sound unnatural or artificial, here is what I tell my students. An assignment to pray, even to pray in a certain way or for at least a specified period of time, should not seem any more artificial or unnatural than an assignment to prepare and preach a sermon, even a certain kind of sermon on a specific passage that should last a specified amount of time. Doing *either* "assignment" purely as an academic exercise is hypocrisy. Rightly approached, both are equally sacred tasks. Both may be, and should be, pursued as acts of personal worship.

Thanksgiving

This has been a favorite with students. It is a great practice for personal devotions at special seasons (Thanksgiving or birthday, Christmas or New Year). For

starters, spend at least *one unbroken half-hour* in private praise, adoration, and thanksgiving to the Lord. Reflect on and thank Him for His attributes, for His creation, for His works, for His gifts, for His providential provisions and protections, for His trials, for His discipline—in short, for anything and everything that you can bring to mind. The greatest challenge is to do this "unbrokenly"—i.e., unbroken in time, *and unbroken by any request*. You will probably find yourself habitually lapsing into "request mode" within the first couple of minutes. Stifle the habit, and focus your spirit on God and His gifts, not on you and your needs or desires. I tell my students not even to get sidetracked by asking God to make them more grateful—at least not until the end.

Thanksgiving is a discipline of the thoughtful. The purpose of this exercise is to help you cultivate this particular discipline of awareness and gratitude in your relationship to the Lord. If thirty minutes sounds impossible to fill up with nothing but praise, this exercise is precisely what you need to open the eyes of your soul to how many things you unwittingly take for granted every day of your life.

Begin by simply quieting your heart before the Lord. You may find it helpful to preface your prayer time by reading through a brief praise psalm or other appropriate Scripture or hymn that will prime your thinking and focus your attention on specific things for which to thank the Lord. (By the way, I heartily recommend *reading* through hymns. I have been surprised at the fresh insights I have gained into songs I have sung for years, just by paying attention to the words and punctuation instead of the tune and rhythm.)

Think about the pleasures, privileges, and provisions of life that God has given to you, *and* that He has given you the capacity to enjoy. Thank Him for the most obvious things that come to your mind first; others will follow with thought. Look around the room: breath, health, family, church, daily provision. Look out your window: the blessing of seasons, the utterly unnecessary variety in creation, the sense of sight (not everyone has it). Think of what you enjoy: food (and taste), music (and hearing). Don't be afraid to be practical. And we haven't even begun to enumerate the multidimensional spiritual blessings of being in Christ. Each may be gratefully explored in more detail as you meditate on them. But above all, do not allow yourself merely to mouth "right" words without genuine feeling or conviction. Start as basically as you must, but be honest and genuine in your spirit before the Lord. Once you begin thanking your way through everything you can think of, you'll need much more than a half-hour.

Spending time in uninterrupted, undiluted thanksgiv-

PRAYER STRATEGIES FOR THE NEW YEAR

ing to the Lord not only deeply enriches your spirit and your awareness of the goodness of God; it also brings profound pleasure to the heart of God. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name . . . for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15, 16b).*

Doctrinal Passages

Pray through a doctrinal passage, meditatively and phrase by phrase (e.g., Eph. 1–2; Phil. 2:1–11; Col. 1:9–23; 3:1–4; 1 Tim. 1:12–17; 6:11–16). Refrain from using any commentaries or other reference works—just your English Bible (or Greek Testament if you know Greek well enough to use it without needing to consult references). The point is to avoid being distracted by the "academics" of the passage.

Focus your mind worshipfully on the words of God, phrase by phrase, meditating consciously in God's presence over the truths revealed in the passage, praying it back to God, and thinking through their reality and ramifications for you personally. Just like the apostles "looked upon" and "handled" the "word of life" Himself (see 1 John 1:1, 2), "handle" the written Words of life with the fingers of your mind, turning them over and pondering the phrases. The aim is to "gaze on God" through His Word and to allow the realities described by God's words to ransack your mind and soul—in short, to think His thoughts after Him. Rather than talking or listening to *others* (commentators or those who have written study Bible notes), talk and listen to God about His words.

This is in no way to denigrate the value or appropriateness of diligent study with such tools and helps. We can and should profit from what the Lord has shown others in His Word; to ignore the contributions of others to our understanding of Scripture (on the principle that we insist on being taught only by God directly) displays, at best, a serious misunderstanding of the relationship between God and His children as joint-members of a body and community of believers (and at worst, arrogance and presumption). There is a time and place for such study. There is equally a time and place—and unique value—to setting all that aside and literally communing with God over His Word. The apostles declared what they had seen and heard not only so "that ye also may have fellowship with us" but with the Lord Himself, for "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Praying over and talking through the Scripture with the Lord is the quintessence of fellowshiping with the Lord.

Passion Narratives

This is a variation on the suggestion above, and one that is particularly appropriate and profitable prayer-focus for Easter. Pray through one of the Passion narra-

tives in the Gospels. Again, no commentaries or reference books, just your English Bible. Don't be distracted by technical curiosities so that you start pulling books off your shelves. Focus worshipfully on what the Spirit has selected for you to know about the passion of your Savior for your salvation. Prayerfully personalize the events and what they mean for your salvation. Read through the passage (I suggest aloud) consciously in the Lord's presence; read it to the Lord (like Hezekiah did with the letter from Sennacherib, Isaiah 37), praying it back to Him, meditating consciously in God's presence over the truths revealed in the passage. Talk with the Lord about what happened; express your shame, your outrage, your amazement, your worship, your gratitude. This specific prayer-focus engages your spirit in a conscious, prayerful, interactive meditation on the central event of soteriology, of theology, and of human history. It, too, is a conscious exercise of 1 John 1:3—"truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ"—a fellowship in, over, and through a portion of His Word that is so central and vital that it is repeated fully and in meticulous detail four times over in your Bible.

Biblical Prayers

Why does God bother recording something so private, personal, and intimate as someone's prayer in the Bible? And so many of them? Why, if not for our instruction and emulation? Interestingly, you can find Biblical prayers that exemplify the very kinds of praying that I have suggested above. But this topic deserves more development and explanation than space allows here, so this will be the subject of the next column. May the Lord use some of these suggestions to enrich your walk with the Lord, to deepen your understanding of Him as well as your knowledge of yourself, and to reinvigorate your prayer life.

Recommended Reading

Bennet, Arthur. *Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers & Devotions* (Banner of Truth, 1975).


Carson, D. A. *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Baker, 1992).

Hiebert, D. Edmond. *Working with God through Intercessory Prayer* (BJU Press, 1991).

Talbert, Layton. *Not by Chance* (BJU Press, 2001), Chapter 13, "Providence and Prayer."

*The "sacrifices" that please God in verse 16b obviously include doing good and sharing in verse 16a; but the operative word is *include*. Clearly the God-pleasing "sacrifices" refer back to the "sacrifice" of praise mentioned in the previous verse.

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Newsworthy

Compiled by Gordon Dickson, FBFI Research Secretary

Catholic Church Questions the Bible

"The Catholic bishops of England, Wales and Scotland are warning their five million worshippers, as well as any others drawn to the study of scripture, that they should not expect 'total accuracy' from the Bible. In their book, *The Gift of Scripture*, they state that no one should expect to find scientific and historic accuracy. Apparently, these leaders of Romanism take aim at the Books of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. 'The first 11 chapters of Genesis, in which two different and

at times conflicting stories of creation are told, are among those that this country's Catholic bishops insist cannot be 'historical'. At most, they say, they may contain 'historical traces'." These Romanists also take issue with the prophecies of the last Book of the Bible. Specifically, 'they refute the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation, the last book of the Christian Bible, in which the writer describes the work of the risen Jesus, the death of the Beast and the wedding feast of Christ the Lamb.'" (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,13509-1811332,00.html>, accessed 10.10.05)

As one atheist critic put it, "Having been obliged at last to make these concessions, I wonder how much longer it will take for the virgin birth, the divinity of Christ and the resurrection also to be conceded as 'symbolic.'" (<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2005/1007authority.asp>, accessed 10/12/05)

Catholic Cardinal Supports Evolution

Roman Catholic Cardinal Theodore McCarrick addressed the question of creation and evolu-

tion in his interview with reporters at the National Press Club in July. He said that Roman Catholics don't have to accept the Biblical account of creation. He indicated that it was all right to believe in evolution as long as they also believed that God was involved. McCarrick indicated that Pope John Paul believed in "theistic evolution." (Agape Press <http://www.churchquest.com/news/story/2916>)

Views on Man's Origin

According to a survey publicized by CBS News, most Americans do not accept the theory of evolution. In fact, 51% say that "God created humans in their present form." 30% believe that evolution was guided by God. Only 15% believe that humans evolved without assistance from God. (<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/10/22/opinion/polls/main965223.shtml>)

Physicians' Beliefs Concerning Origins

The Louis Finkelstein Institute for Social and Religious Research at the Jewish Theological Seminary and HCD Research in Flemington, New Jersey, released the results of a survey conducted on May 13-15. This institute specializes in studies of issues confronting the U.S. health-care system. When asked whether they agreed more with intelligent design or evolution:

88% of Jewish doctors chose evolution.
65% of Jewish doctors agreed that humans evolved without supernatural involvement.
60% of Catholic doctors agree with evolution more than intelligent design, while 54% of Protestant physicians agree with intelligent design more than evolution.
78% of all the physicians surveyed accept evolution rather than reject it.
50% of those surveyed believe that schools should be allowed to teach intelligent design.
83% of the Jewish doctors and 51% of the Catholic doctors believe that a theory of intelligent design is "a religiously inspired pseudo-science."

(<http://www.jtsa.edu/research/finkelstein/surveys/evolution.shtml>)

Physician-Assisted Suicide

In response to the Supreme Court's decision to hear a challenge to Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, the Louis Finkelstein Institute also conducted a survey of physician-assisted suicide. In a national survey of 1088 physicians, it was reported that 57% believe that it is "ethical to assist an individual who has made a rational choice to die due to unbearable suffering" and 39% believe that it is unethical. (<http://www.jtsa.edu/research/finkelstein/surveys/pas.shtml>)

Movie: *Beyond the Gates of Splendor*

A new movie is being marketed to churches in the U.S. It is the story of Jim Elliot, Roger Youderian, Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, and Ed McCully, who traveled to Ecuador in the mid 1950s to evangelize the Waorani people. The film has been criticized for failing to emphasize the gospel that caused these men to attempt this challenge, and for frequent nudity. According to the interview in *Christianity Today*, the producer, Mart Green, grew up in a conservative Christian home and had never even been in a movie theater until recently. In a move apparently designed to get others to follow his example, Green has released *Beyond the Gates of Splendor* in churches, but plans to release his feature film on the same subject (*End of the Spear*) in theaters in January 2006. (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/interviews/martgreen.html>, accessed 10/10/05)

Quieting the Noisy Soul

When the emotional upsets of anger, anxiety, guilt, and fear become chronic—when they become serious obstacles to worship and everyday functioning—sufferers and those seeking to help may not know where to turn. And when destructive behaviors—eating disorders, obsessive/compulsive habits, or addictions of various kinds—enter the picture, secular resources may look like attractive, readily available alternatives. Self-help books and a relatively new craze—life coaches—promise everything from peace of mind to the realization of long-lost dreams. But individuals often find they are ill-equipped and too overwhelmed to sift through, catalog, and implement the recommendations of so-called

NOTABLE QUOTES

The best public worship is that which produces the best private Christianity.—J. C. Ryle

Prayers is the best expression of the total life. All things being equal, our prayers are only as powerful as our lives.—A. W. Tozer

God gave us five senses with which to worship Him and it would be sheer ingratitude for us to use less.—attributed to Martin Luther

It is a common misconception among evangelicals that worship is evaluated by whether or not one “gets a blessing.” Worship is first giving to God; any real significant “blessing” we may receive will be the result of that self-giving. It is proper to ask the people of God, the full congregation as well as the “appointed” musicians: What has it cost you to offer your “sacrifice of praise”?—Donald Hustad

The more I study religions the more I am convinced that man never worshipped anything but himself.—Sir Richard F. Burton

We have a base man-pleasing disposition, which will make us let men perish lest we lose their love, and let them go quietly to hell, lest we should make them angry with us for seeking their salvation: and we are ready to venture on the displeasure of God, and risk the everlasting misery of our people, rather than draw on ourselves their ill-will.—Richard Baxter

It follows that forms of worship should provide two things: channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God’s reality, and channels of the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth—that is, forms to ignite the affections with Biblical truth, and forms to express the affections with Biblical passion.—Donald Whitney

Modern man worships his work, works at his play, and plays at his worship.—Unknown

It is little short of blasphemy to make devotion an occasion for display. Fine prayers are generally very wicked prayers. In the presence of the Lord of hosts it ill becomes a sinner to parade the feathers and finery of tawdry speech with the view of winning the applause from his fellow mortals.—Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Compiled by Robert Conduct.

This news is presented to inform believers. The people or sources mentioned do not necessarily carry the endorsement of the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship International.

self-help books. And while the advantages of personal attention with a strongly “parental” approach cannot be discounted, life coaches are not an option for the majority. Coaching fees can add up to thousands of dollars—a high price to pay for accountability and cheering from the sidelines, especially for methods void of any Biblical foundation whatsoever. The desperate condition of the troubled soul certainly calls for simple, Bible-centered instruction and will often benefit most when that instruction is presented in a mentoring style.

A unique and timely new interactive DVD program developed by Jim Berg, Dean of Students at Bob Jones University, seeks to help those who become spiritually paralyzed and struggle with destructive patterns of thinking and behavior. Titled *Quieting a Noisy Soul*, the program actively engages even severely troubled individuals in recovery and spiritual restoration, helping them back to the place of inner tranquility and worship. It breaks free of the limitations of the self-help book and operates from a vastly different premise than the humanistic notions of most secular resources. It takes individuals through four sections of study to help them find the cause of their inner turmoil, to learn the way back, to overcome their obstacles, and to maintain a free and close walk with the Lord.

Adaptable to private in-home use, use with a counselor or within a group, the *Quieting a Noisy Soul* kit comprises four seminar DVDs, a syllabus and study guide, one MP3 CD of Berg’s complete 24-session seminar presentation, and a music and Scripture CD specially formulated for Scripture meditation and relaxation. (Our thanks to Brian Forrester for this description.)

Global Focus

Reviving Student Missions

Pearson Johnson

Over a century ago, thousands of students made the decision to identify with God’s heart for the nations—His Great Commission. This corporate surrender to God’s will became known as the Student Volunteer Movement; students became part of the movement by signing the following voluntary pledge: “It is my purpose, if God permits, to become a foreign missionary.” Over the next forty years 20,000 student volunteers traveled to foreign lands, and 80,000 stayed at home with a firm commitment to support them.

In the summer of 1886, D. L. Moody invited 250 students to a rural town called Mount Hermon, Massachusetts. This gathering was the incubator for the movement that would change an entire generation. Our church history books record the accomplishments of those students. Robert Wilder left that conference and visited 167 schools with the purpose of exhorting his peers about evangelizing the world. From his efforts thousands volunteered to go. Samuel Zwemer became known as the Apostle to the Muslims. He led the charge to an area of the world that had been untouched by missions—the Arabian Peninsula. Samuel Moffat led pioneer work in Korea. The full impact of that generation of young adults will be revealed only in eternity.

We are convinced that we live in a time in which God is doing amazing things around the globe for His Name’s sake. Our desire is to help young adults realize that they need to earnestly seek God’s will, identify themselves with His global cause, and be faithful in the role of His choosing. Throughout history, young people have played a crucial role in the realization of a movement toward evangelizing the unreached peoples of the world. Our church began the ministry of Student Global Impact to motivate and challenge our generation of young adults for a similar movement. Our desire is also to mobilize and network students on various campuses so they can be catalysts for a revival of the spirit of the Student Volunteer Movement.

With this vision and burden in mind we are serving this generation. We have hosted leadership seminars, visited campuses, spent hundreds of hours talking to students, co-authored a book, and have written articles and other resources that can spur students on in their quest of declaring God’s glory among the nations. We know that

the heart of every pastor reading this article yearns to see his students turn their affections from the cries of our culture to the call of God inherent in His commission.


One of the resources we have provided is the SGI National Conference. The conference environment is unique. First, it is a conference for the emerging generation that is not connected to any educational institution or mission agency—there are no mission board or institutional displays. Students enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and the opportunity to meet students from other schools and churches who are passionate about missions. Many have walked away knowing others who share their particular passion or dream for a mission field. Many have formed friendships that are still blossoming. Some from past conferences are serving together on the field today!

The conference is also unique in that it focuses on the dual role in missions: senders and goers. Godly and experienced missionaries and local church pastors preach and teach at the conference. The students see what missions-minded local churches are like by listening to the pastors. They also see excellent representations of missionary life in those who come from overseas. In addition to several general sessions, pertinent workshops are offered, such as “Building a Church via Discipleship in a Sparsely Populated Area,” “Missions Mobilization 101,” “Successful Ministry Trips,” and “Don’t Swallow Those Bones! Exercising Discernment in Missions.”

As a pastor, please take advantage of this resource for the sake of the next generation of your missionaries. Bring your college and career students and interact with them. They will be encouraged by the hundreds who have come to grow and learn, and you will be lifted up by what God is doing in the hearts of young adults today. Seeing so many students wanting to identify themselves with God’s global cause is nothing short of thrilling!

If you are interested in more information about the conference, visit www.studentglobalimpact.com and click on “Conferences.” You will be able to register online, pay online, and have all your questions answered. More importantly, please be in prayer for this event. We desire that God will greatly use it for His honor and glory. They would welcome your input and interaction.

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Chaplain News

Introducing the Navy's Youngest Active Duty Chaplain

Bob Ellis

Chaplain (LT) Tavis Long, command chaplain at the Marine Corps Logistics Base, Barstow, California, is no stranger to military life. His father, CDR Robert Long (retired) served in the Vietnam War as a Coast Guard pilot. Chaplain Long is the third of seven children.

Chaplain Long attended high school at Massillon Christian School in Massillon, Ohio, where he was active in the student council, vice president of his graduating class, a member of the varsity soccer and basketball teams, and a member of the National Honor Society. He graduated cum laude from Pensacola Christian College with a BS in Secondary History Education and a minor in Secondary English Education. While in college, he served in several capacities in student government, including as president of his class. He was also active in the soccer program and was named to numerous all-star teams. During the summers he served as the Summer Youth Camp Director of his home church.

Chaplain Long earned a Master of Divinity degree from Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. While in seminary, he worked as a teacher and a coach at a Christian school, while additionally serving as assistant pastor, associate pastor, or interim pastor in various churches.



In December 2001 Chaplain Long was ordained into the gospel ministry by his home church. In May 2001 he was sworn in as an Ensign in the U.S. Navy Chaplain Candidate Officer Program by his father. After graduating from seminary, he applied for active duty and signed his oath of office on September 15, 2004, as the youngest active duty chaplain in the U.S. Navy.

As command chaplain, Chaplain Long oversees all ministry activities on the base. Along with his duties as a Navy chaplain, he writes a column for the local paper and

has had numerous opportunities to speak at local civic functions.

Chaplain Long is married to the former Kendal Heeb. She has a degree in elementary education and currently works at the Child Development Center at the Marine base. She is also very involved with her husband in ministry opportunities on the base. Chaplain and Mrs. Long are members of the Faith Baptist Church in Newberry Springs, California, and serve as his responsibilities and schedule at the base permit.

Bob Ellis is the National Field Representative for the FBFI Commission on Chaplains. He and his wife travel extensively, visiting Fundamental Christian colleges and seminaries, promoting the FBFI chaplaincy ministry. He is also available to speak in churches and can be contacted at (850) 261-6647.

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sermon, however, Spurgeon did clarify his position in another sermon, “Faith and Regeneration,” in which he explicitly addressed the relationship of faith to regeneration. In it he noted, “Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always a result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate” (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 10:141). Note also the careful language employed in Spurgeon’s modified London Baptist Confession (language which, incidentally, also appears in the seventh chapter of the New Hampshire Baptist Confession, to which many Fundamentalists purport to subscribe). Spurgeon undoubtedly held to the position that regeneration produces faith.

Of course Scripture is the determiner of orthodoxy, and not Calvin, Spurgeon, or historic creeds and confessions. That Spurgeon held this position is ultimately inconsequential. It is likewise ultimately incon-

sequential that this is the position reflected in every major Calvinist confession of the past 400 years. Nonetheless, it behooves us not to relegate the teaching that regeneration produces faith to the “extreme” or “hyper” periphery of Calvinism. Instead, it is the virtually unanimous position of historic Calvinism.

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A Matter of Worship

Gordon Dickson

The clattering crash on the temple floor undoubtedly drew the attention of everyone present. Why would the Lord Jesus choose this spectacle to get the attention of the crowds? Why choose this moment to angrily drive both people and things out of the temple? It was a matter of worship. He was making a statement about the nature of true Biblical worship, and that resounding crash still echoes in our hearts today.

What was that urgent matter that abruptly demanded attention? The sweet incense of intercessory prayer was missing. In fact, the Lord reported that, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matt. 21:13). The missing goods were of great value to the Lord since “the prayer of the upright is his delight” (Prov. 15:8). Instead of being “joyful in [the] house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7), the people were being jilted by materialistic thieves. Worst of all, the situation had been created by leaders who were supposed to be representing the Lord. The religious guides had chosen to turn the place for the preeminent practice of delightful worship into a den of thieves.

It probably started innocently enough. Someone noticed that a ministry had produced a market: travelers needed to exchange monies and acquire sacrifices for temple worship. But in the most horrible of

“ends/means reversals,” the money makers moved in and, in so doing, warped the meaning of “the ministry.” Loving, spiritual worship had lost out to the love of material wealth. How did this happen? It’s simple when you worship the whimsy of the sovereign self—the “almighty, omnipotent me.”

It’s important to remember that the temple of the Lord today is the bodies of believers (both corporately and individually, 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:19, 20). He examines His temple as carefully today as He did during the account in the book of Matthew. The Lord feels just as strongly and expresses Himself just as vehemently. Those who know His purging hand know His painful, powerful purity.

Believers today are called upon to join hands with the Lord as they open the doors of their personal temples to Him. Those who do so recognize the deceptive ease with which they have set up idols in their hearts (Ezek. 14:2, 3). It is as if each heart has a lining of molten silver. Rising through that scintillating liquid is anything that we experience; anything we see, hear, touch, smell, taste, or think can acquire the silver lining and harden as an idol of the heart. Those who pooh-pooh personal purity have failed to recognize their hearts’ penchant for self-centered idolatry. In our own temples today, we must also choose to worship the Sovereign God instead of the greedy self.

The Lord’s example in Matthew shows us how to confront this problem. It’s time to commit savagery against our own idolatry. Does the Internet sneak away with time you meant for intercession? Has your “Christmas” become synonymous with “covetousness”? Does your money or your ministry occupy more of your mind? Is your comfort stealing from the Cause? It’s time to take a whiff: do you smell more like a den of thieves or a house of prayer? Jesus’ angry, loving act of cleansing is the greatest need in every temple of His. Why not walk with Him through the halls of your heart to look for “the high places”? By His power, each one of us can be “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). Remember that even the act of prayer can be compromised! If your prayers are dominated by “the organ recital” for human ailments rather than the eternal destiny of human souls, isn’t that a problem? Sure, it’s a preoccupation with the material at the expense of the spiritual.

We need to turn some of our holidays back into holy days. Take some concentrated time to cast out the thieves and return to your God-given purpose: to become a house of prayer. It’s a matter of worship. Let’s honor God with some resounding crashes in our hearts as we expel the thieves from our own temples and pray for God-given revival.

Gordon Dickson is the pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Findlay, Ohio.

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