

May 10, 2020

Worship?

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is our reasonable act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

Romans 12:1-2

From the very moment of Jesus' death on the cross until now believers have struggled with the concept of grace-based salvation and how that salvation is effected by our own personal obedience. This struggle is apparent in a lot of our belief systems as believers, but no where is it more apparent, I think, than in what we call 'acts of worship'.

The Apostle Paul told the Roman believers that our only ***"...reasonable act of worship..."*** is the offering of our very beings as living sacrifices to the God of Heaven. I am convinced that the Apostle is teaching us that every aspect of our lives as believers is and should be, in fact, worship to our God. In our moment by moment obedience we are honoring and worshiping him to a far greater degree than we do for a few hours on a Sunday morning.

For most of us however, the concept of 'acts of worship' is more about what we do together in those few hours at the building than how we live as believers day by day. For much of the Christian world the 'acts of worship' include singing, the Lords' Supper or Communion, Giving, Praying, and Preaching. So, for the next few weeks I would like to share some thoughts on these 'acts of worship' and why we do what we do.

Singing has always been an important part of the fellowship of the church and nearly every form of Christianity has some form of singing/music included in its 'service'. This practice among believers can be credited to a few specific passages in the New Testament.

In Romans 15 Paul references passages from the Psalms that speak to all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, praising God in song. In I Corinthians 14 Paul tells the believers that he prefers to sing with the Spirit and with understanding and that when they come together, everyone should have a hymn to share. James commands those who are filled with joy to sing praises.

Two parallel passages in Paul's letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians give us the most specific direction for our singing as a part of our fellowship. The Apostle commands the Ephesian believers to, ***"...be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."***

In the parallel passage in his letter to the Colossian believers the Apostle writes, ***"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."***

I am convinced that the Paul is teaching us to sing together, as has always been the habit of believers, but in particular he is I think, commanding us to sing with purpose. What purpose?

First, our singing is the product of who and whose we are. We are ***"...filled with the Spirit..."*** and so we sing. The word of Christ dwells in us richly and so we sing. The purpose of our singing though, is not to make noise, even though we often seem to focus on that. Instead, the Apostle tells us that in our singing we are speaking to one another. We are admonishing and teaching one another. As is so nearly always the case in the things we are to do when we are together, the focus is primarily on our community of faith.

While it is easy with all our 'acts of worship' to focus our attention on the how and when and where and to completely ignore the why, I would argue that to do so is, in reality, a rejection of our grace-based salvation. Any time we practice a particular 'act of worship' with our focus on getting the how and when and where 'right' and ignore the purpose of our practice I believe we have completely missed God's intent. This is even more the case when we decide that the how and when and where are 'salvational issues.'

Focusing our attention on the quality of our noise is not the purpose of our singing. Instead the inspired Apostle wants us to focus on the message in song we share with our community of believers because in the end community matters most.

