



Worship

Worship began in eternity, for it is recorded that at the dawn of creation the sons of God shouted for joy in an act of worship (Job 38:7). Across that long bridge called time that spans the chasm between the eternity which "was" and the eternity "which is to come" men everywhere have been commanded to worship. The Old and New Testaments both loudly proclaim the call to worship.

In II Chronicles 16:29 instructs us to "give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name...worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness". The Psalmist cried, "O come, Let us worship and bow down". Matthew records the commandment to "worship the Lord thy God" and John quoted the conversation of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and His words "God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth".

Worship in the plan of God is perpetual. Jesus Christ uttered three divine imperatives: in John 3:7 - the must of the new birth in John 9:4 - the must of good works; and in John 4:24 - the must of worship. Only worship affords us the element of continuity. We have the opportunity to be born again and to work the works of Him that sent us only while we are creatures of time. But, how blessed to know that while our worship begins here - it will never end.

The decision to worship, like any other decision in life, is based upon three things: intellect, emotion, and volition. What I think about it, how I feel about it, and what I do about it. The act of worship stands upon the tripod of these faculties of the individual. The law of worship is in the heart, placed there by God himself. But the choice of what or whom to worship rests with the individual.

Worship is an intellectual act, but it is not that alone. Of the seven attributes of the spirit mentioned in Isaiah 11:2, five are intellectual, while at most only two can be classed as emotions. It seems that God is pleased for us to think upon Him and to intellectually approach him. Christ himself rephrased the Old Testament truth when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." There is a mental attitude of worship that cannot be ignored.

There are times when there is a fervent desire in our soul to be enraptured in the presence of God, when our spirit cries to the depths of God's glory, and yet there is that struggle of bringing our thoughts into captivity in order that the total man - body, soul, and spirit - might express his love to Jesus Christ. Was there ever a man more emotional in worship than David? He danced before the Lord. Yet, on another occasion he simply came into God's presence and the Bible records that "he sat" in an act of meditation and waiting, and worshipped God. We do not live in a meditative age, and if God has an enemy in this hour, it is that one word "hurry". Our mental attitudes and our intellect must be cleared of all clutter if we are to approach God with an open mind as well as an open heart.

The use of mental faculties in worship is most evident in considering the elaborate planning of the Old Testament tabernacle and temple. There is no haphazard way to approach God. It must be according to the spiritual protocol of the dispensation. In moving from Law to Grace, we also move from the external to the internal in the order of worship. Today, God is not simply interested in a holy place, or holy furniture, or a holy temple, but rather, He is interested in a holy people with holy hearts.

With Paul, we join in chorus and confess that, "After that way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets". We worship as we intellectually believe.

In as much as God is a Spirit, it stands to reason that only the deep emotions of the spirit can touch Him. Any man who attempts to think his way through to God, or who tries to find God through reason or logic while ignoring the emotional impact, will soon reach a dead-end street. A wise man once said, "We are not urging you to seek religious

excitement for excitement's sake. If it's excitement you're after, let me recommend a ride on a roller coaster."

We dare not ignore the faith element in approaching God. Paul admonished us to feel after the Lord, though He is not very far from any of us. We have that intellectually obtained knowledge that God is not very far away, yet there remains an emotional need to feel after Him,

Spiritual decisions are based on our own volition, that is, our will. There are those who have strong will power, and those with equally strong "won't" power. You must, of your own sovereign will, have a desire to approach and be touched by God in the act of worship.

Someone once said that a man who bases his religion on intellect alone is a formalist; a man who bases his religion on emotion alone is a fanatic, and he that bases his religion on his volition alone is a fool.

Scripturally it can be ascertained that the Pentecostal mode of worship is an intellectual, emotional, and volitional approach to God. These three are all vitally important ingredients to a well-balanced, God-accepted praise.

WHY WE WORSHIP

We worship God as an act of adoration, and to open our own capacities and prepare our own hearts. Every man was created to worship God. There is a God-shaped blank in all of us, which nothing can fill like lingering in the presence of Jesus Christ. It is a privilege to think that we are not intruders in the Throne room, but are actually there by invitation. Praise is such a privilege, we dare not waste time in our church services by not taking advantage of His presence.

God desires worship, He seeks after it. Was not man created for his fellowship and pleasure? We usually think of worship as blessing only the human participant. But remember the words of David when he cried "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name". How can a man bless God? Simply by giving Him the praise of our total self: Body, soul, and spirit.

Worship sustains God. It is His food and drink. He lives and revels in the praises of His people. One translation says, "God lives where people praise Him!" Often times the degree of God's presence in any service is dependent on how large a habitation of praise we erect for Him.

Isaiah 1:11, 12 gives us God's feelings toward those who go through the motion of worship long after it has lost its meaning: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and of the fat of fed beasts: and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts?" What a startling revelation! Didn't God require sacrifices? Didn't the Law demand burnt offerings? Why is that God now condemned them for the very thing He had earlier commanded of them? Their lips professed praise, but their hearts were far from Him. The meaningless act of obeisance was a stench in His nostrils. Throughout the following verses God condemns them for the very thing for which man was created - worship. Then, in verse 17, we hear the stunning enunciation, "Learn to do well". The subject insists that He means to learn to worship Him correctly. If man was created for this purpose, if God asks for it, if He inhabits it, if it must be according to spirit and truth, then it is imperative that we learn to do it well.

EXAMPLES OF WORSHIP

Let us behold, in this section, men in different dispensations as they were elevated into those dimensions beyond, where they had fellowship with deity. As we sample specimens of worship in every era, it becomes apparent that God has always accepted audible worship. Not only does He accept this vocal expression from an individual, but prayer and praise in concert is prominent throughout the Scriptures.

There are those who will say it is not necessary to express ourselves vocally to the Lord, as He already knows our heart. But, it is always pleasing to God to see His children put into action what He already knows is in their hearts. Abraham, when commanded, was willing to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice, yet we note in Genesis 22:12, "...for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me". That phrase 'now I know' does not indicate that God did not know that Abraham feared Him, but it simply teaches us that God wants a visible, audible, free expression of our devotion to Him.

ABRAHAM

When commissioned to take Isaac to Mount Moriah for sacrifice, the Bible declares that Abraham rose up early in the morning to go about the task. He took everything necessary to consummate the proposal of God. Isaac was there, the knife was there, and the wood was there. He even took a fire pan with live coals from his home to the mount of sacrifice. The patriarch took all this action in stride and classed it as worship, when he instructed his young men, "Abide ye here with the ass: and I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you" (Genesis 22:5). He was not dilatory about the task, for he came early. He was not negligent about the equipment, for it was all with him. Spirit and truth ran together as a river of praise as Abraham lifted up the knife to slay his son, heard the voice from heaven say, "Abraham, Abraham", and then lifted his voice and said, "Here am I".

An interesting factor here is that Abraham brought his fire with him. In those days there were no matches, and men actually carried fire with them in a vessel called a fire pan. Apparently, Abraham did this. He brought his fire with him from home and was prepared immediately to do business with God. Abraham could have stalled for half a day rubbing dry sticks together for friction, or beating upon flinty rocks for sparks, in an attempt to build a fire. He could have delayed the action for hours.

However, when he came to worship he came prepared.

Abraham made his preparation at home for worship that was to transpire three days later on Mount Moriah. It is useless for us to wait until we enter the sanctuary of worship to prepare our hearts for praise. The fire must be kindled at home, so that we enter the sanctuary as glowing embers, ready to join in producing a bonfire to the glory of God. How precious are the times when we can, with prepared hearts, collectively lift up our voices in adoration to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Ezra 3:11 says, "And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord...and all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord". The following verse informs us that the leaders of the people wept with a loud voice and shouted for joy. The Bible declares that they people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of weeping, for they shouted with a loud shout and the noise was heard afar off. The New Testament further emphasizes it with such words as "These all continued with one accord in prayer" (Acts 1:14). "And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord" (Acts 4:24).

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

This spirit of collective contribution in worship is evident during Solomon's temple dedication. "It came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever; that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God" (II Chronicles 5:13, 14). This spirit of harmonizing was an invitation for the glory of God to enter the temple.

MOSES AND MIRIAM

The scene is a familiar one. The Lord had just delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage. They had crossed the Red Sea on dry ground with a wall of water on either side. This eventful day had seen the Egyptian army dead upon the seashore as God had rescued His people from the hands of their oppressors. This was their first night east of Egypt and it was a night to be long remembered. Great joy was prevalent in the camp as Israel reflected upon the tremendous way in which God had so gallantly prevailed in liberating them according to the promise made to Moses. To their credit, the first thing they did that night around the campfires in the wilderness was to have church. Moses was evidently the song director as well as the preacher, as the scripture declares that Moses and the children of Israel sang a song unto the Lord. On and on Moses preached, sang, and chanted. Read Exodus 15 - the story is there.

It was the last phrase of Exodus 15:19 "But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea" that brought an explosion of praise in the heart of Miriam, Moses' aged sister. At this time Miriam was between 93 and 100 years old. Suddenly, as she looked back over the blessing of the years and the events of the day, her faith focused on worship. She stood to her feet, took a timbrel in her hand, beckoned to the women who were around her, and dear old grandmother Miriam went out before the Lord with a dance. The music was playing, the saints were signing, Moses was preaching and Miriam was dancing! It was all done in the spirit and to the glory of the Lord who had triumphed that day.

DAVID

The last Psalm exhorts God's people to praise Him with the timbrel and dance. II Samuel 6:13-16 records the journey of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom and we read that "David danced before the Lord with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord..." David leaped, David danced, David shouted, and David played!

THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

And we cannot omit the Upper Room experience, when the Holy Spirit invasion took place and the Spirit descended bringing its credentials, tongues of fire, to replace tongues of flesh. "And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:52,53).

Concerted, collective, cooperative, audible worship has always been expected and acceptable unto the Lord.

AZUSA STREET

E. S. Williams' report on the memories of the Azusa Street Mission records that, "Healing for the body was fervently taught, but it was not put in first place, Demons were cast out, but worship was the principal theme. As the doings of God were noised abroad, people came from all over the continent."

EXPRESSIONS OF WORSHIP

The New Testament Church considered every endeavor toward the Kingdom of God as worship. To them, worship was not simply an act reserved for a special time when they assembled for church, but it was included in their daily service to God. From Jesus Christ himself came the words, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve". And from this we see that it is impossible to distinguish between service and worship. We must use our every endeavor for the Lord as an opportunity to worship. Pastors, evangelists, and Sunday School teachers...every sermon, every revival, and every lesson is a fresh opportunity to worship while you serve. It has been said, "I worship while I serve, or I worship by serving". It is for this reason that they could rejoice when beaten, count it joy that they were considered worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

Donald Gee made this observation, "We are prone to swing between fervent zeal and over-emphasis upon being calm. And, perhaps it can mean a real peril if we attempt to perfect a balance. At times we need both extremes. In the exercise of spiritual gifts, the church has often quenched the spirit after an outburst of prophesying and speaking in tongues. Wise Pentecostal leadership aims at a balance where all things are done decently and in order...The uproar of a school playground is preferable to the calm of a graveyard. The woman who impulsively poured the costly ointment on the head of Christ at Bethany won His lasting praise more than the staid disciples who found fault."

I believe it is proper for the saints of God to get happy and shout aloud for joy. The Amplified Bible translation of I Peter 1:8 says, "Without having seen Him you love him; though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and exult and thrill with inexpressible and glorious (triumphant, heavenly) joy". The word "exult" means to leap vigorously, to be in high spirits. I suppose the adage is true here, "It's just better felt than told". Paul admonished us, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

Another interesting factor of Pentecostal worship is that it is accompanied with great joy. The saying is still true, blessed are they that know the joyful sound. To some, it is a nerve-wracking sound; to the dull ear, it is an uninteresting sound; to worldly hearts, it is a disturbing sound. But to the lovers of Jesus, the Messiah, the rippling waves of praise are still joyful sounds.

Christian holiness, that is the cleansing of one's self of flesh and spirit, and spirit inspired worship are Siamese twins. One cannot approach God in exuberant worship if condemnation and sin is found in his heart. Character must accompany the manifestation.

Audibly we pray to the Lord in unison. Together we clap our hands to His glory. Unashamedly we lift holy hands while praising His name. Not only is this method of worship scriptural it is most beneficial to the individual as well. Though the might rushing wind, the speaking in tongues, the peculiar actions, and the audible praises to God were perplexing to the bystanders on the Day of Pentecost, they were most normal in the mind of God. The same is true today. The twentieth century carnal man is not totally spirit directed, but these actions are still totally normal in the mind of God.

As long as the church remains truly Pentecostal, these actions will be most evident, as the cries of newborn babes are blended with the rejoicing of the sanctified ones. We must never allow ourselves to feel that we have matured to the place that this type of worship is no longer necessary. We must at all times heed the admonishment of Paul that "all things be done decently and in order", yet we must never become so overly concerned with fanaticism that we have no emotion or expression left. Someone has said, "Whilst we then should guard against fleshly emotion and man-made excitement, we ought on the other hand to shudder at the sleepy listlessness where in the coming Savior found the wise and foolish virgins". So afraid are we of wildfire, that we could become quite satisfied with no fire.

One of the best praise and prayer weapons is "tongues". It would seem that prayer and praise in which the mind is unfruitful would have little value. What blessing can it be to pray when you have no idea what you are praying about? Actually, one of the greatest blessings is that tongues are not subject to the limitations of your human intelligence. A prayer with a mind comes from the heart and must pass through a maze of linguistic, theological, rational, emotions, and personal checkpoints before it is released upward. By the time it emerges, it may be little more than a slender trickle. But, utterance in tongues comes upward from the depths, and instead of being channeled through the mind, it flows directly to God in a stream of spirit-prompted prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. This is the rest, this is the refreshing!

Undoubtedly there must have been a prophetic strain in the words of Paul's admonition, "Rejoice evermore". For the purpose of discussion, please allow me the privilege of temporarily adding a line to the words of Paul in I Corinthians 13:8. "Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away: but whether there be worship, it shall endure for ever and ever, world without end."

Revelation is full of descriptions of the worship in eternity...Revelation 5:11,12 "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing". Revelation 7:11, 12 proclaims, "And all the angels stood round about the throne and about the elders, and the four beasts and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, 'Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever.'" "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, 'Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever'". (Revelation 5:13).

There will come that time in the eons of eternity when we will not need our church discipline, our articles of faith, our tools of evangelism, or our cardinal doctrines. However, there will never come a time when the tongue will not find its highest employment in praise to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as children of God, there will come that day when we must keep an appointment with the death angel. But as we lift our weak voice the last time and say, "Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Thank you Jesus!" before crossing beyond the veil, the words of Sir Winston Churchill will be most applicable, "This is not the beginning of the end, but only the end of the beginning."