

Worship as part of my spiritual discipline
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May 2, 2009

“Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” (1 Tim. 4:7, NASB)

Both Christians and those who are not Christians want to know the answer to the question: How can I experience the transforming power of God? A common understanding involves corporate worship. A Barna survey from a few years ago suggested that 47% of churchgoers understand worship as an activity undertaken for personal benefit. The average person goes to church for what they can get, not for what they can become. If church is about what you can get, and you don’t get anything, then you quit going. Spiritual disciplines are undertaken as a means to an end. Spiritual discipline becomes something you do. The focus is on the doing, not on what one is becoming. Nowhere are these misunderstandings more likely to lead us astray than in how we understand worship.

Selfishly-driven worship becomes entertainment, emotions, and enthusiasm. Nothing wrong with exuberance, but please allow me time to “be”—be still and know that God is God. Be reflective; be remorseful; be penitent.

The primary object of worship is not me.

The primary object of worship is God. God is not the subject of worship; we are the subjects. In biblical language, worship is bow down.

- Psalm 95:6-7, kneel before the Lord our God....
- Revelation 4:10-11, fall down before him....

Soren Kierkegaard spoke of the theater of worship, but by analogy addressed the falsity of much worship. Are we real? Are we actors? Is this life?

Worship is directed to God, to deity, to divinity.

Do you worship God? Do you worship Jesus? Do you sing to Jesus? Some suggest we cannot pray to Jesus, only through his name or authority. How do you include Jesus Christ in worship? How do you confess and demonstrate his Lordship? (See Phil. 2:8-11.) If worship is directed to God, in all of his manifestations—Father, Son, Spirit, what are the implications for worship? What must we do? What must we understand?

James Thompson says, “Worship ushers us into the presence of the living God and demands the attention, receptivity and response of our whole being. It asks us to disengage from the nose-length focus of daily life and see below the surface to life’s source. We can then reengage the realities of the world from a deeper and clearer perspective.”

If we get this right, it seems we must move beyond our artificial reading of John 4:23-24, “worship in spirit and truth”, and say more than “according to Scripture and sincerely”. While worship must be sincere and spiritual, and according to the word of God, Jesus is calling genuine worshipers to see beyond the dynamics of Old Testament worship (which was according to Scripture and heart-felt). What is this new dynamic that comes from being in the very presence of God?

Worship comes from the heart.

Our terminology betrays us. The fallacy of the phrase “acts of worship” is that worship is more than actions. Worship integrates body and spirit.

Isa. 29:13 is often quoted by Jesus, “Their hearts are far away....” Worship easily becomes vain, selfish, and ritual.

Richard Foster writes, “Worship is our response to the overtures of love from the heart of the Father.”

Let me suggest some practices for deepening our worship.

1. Prepare yourself. Focus, commit, examine, and offer self.
2. Enter with expectations. What are your expectations—to leave with less of self, to hear, to be changed, to express gratitude, to see God at work? Add to this list, or make your own list.
3. Respond to God. The best public worship is that which develops the best private Christianity. Someone has described the experience of the human being in this way: He worships his work, he works at his play, and he plays at his worship.

The words of the Psalmist summarize the goal, “I have seen you, I have beheld your power and your glory” (Ps. 63:1-2). **We will likely never be holy devoted until we are wholly devoted.**