

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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Expressions of Worship

by Dan Trygg

“Oh give thanks to the LORD, call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples. ⁹ Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; speak of all His wonders. ¹⁰ Glory in His holy name; let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. ¹¹ Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face continually. ¹² Remember His wonderful deeds which He has done, His marvels and the judgments from His mouth, ¹³ O seed of Israel His servant, sons of Jacob, His chosen ones! ¹⁴ He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth. ¹⁵ Remember His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations,... Ascribe (give) to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory (honor) and strength. ²⁹ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come before Him; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.”

I Chronicles 16:8-16,28,29

“...an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. John 4:21-23

The question of “What is worship?” may bring up certain images in our minds, although it may be somewhat unclear or “fuzzy” to us as to what originated from Biblical teachings or practices, versus what are just images drawn from our culture, or church traditions we may have been exposed to. For many people, “worship” is equivalent to “singing” or “praying”, but there is much more to the concept of “worship” in the Bible than these practices. Conflicts in some congregations over the kind of instrumentation that is acceptable for “worship”, or postures and practices permitted within their traditions, are plainly out of step with clearly-taught Biblical practices. **What does the Bible have to say about “worship”?**

Before we can answer that question, **it is important to understand that “worship” is an English word. It is not strictly a Biblical word at all.** The English word is derived from the compound of “worth-ship”, meaning to acknowledge, celebrate, declare and express-in-action the value, greatness and supremacy of God. **There are four basic ideas involved in the Biblical teachings about worship:**

(1.) Obeisance – an expression of submission and a willingness to serve. This comes out clearly in the meaning of the actual Biblical words that are translated as “worship” in English. **The main Hebrew word means “to bow down or prostrate oneself”, and the main Greek term means “to kiss toward”.** *Both words were used in relation to human beings, as well as to God. The word picture from human relationships was brought over to help people understand the nature of their relationship with God. Unfortunately, most of us have never been exposed to such a relationship of absolute power as a king. The Biblical word picture of “obeisance” does not connect for most of us today. The act of bowing down to a person of greater power or stature was an act of submission. To “bow down” or “lay flat on the ground” left the person defenseless to protect himself. It also meant that you were willing to yield to and serve the greater person. It was an act of obeisance, the root of which is “obey”. It meant you were offering allegiance, obedience and service to the other person. **In the same way, the act of “kissing toward” was not an act of familiarity or intimacy. In the Biblical world, it was “kissing the ring” of the greater person, again an act of deference.** You brought your face down to the level of the master’s hand, which usually meant you were on your knees. It was an acknowledgement that this person was greater than you, that you were offering allegiance to him, and making yourself available to serve. **Most of the times you see the word “worship” in our English translations, its primary meaning is this: It is an act of deference, submission, acknowledging that God is greater than you. You are offering yourself to honor and serve Him.** When we “worship” God, *this* should be the primary thought in our minds, “Lord, You are my King. Here am I, willing to serve.”*

(2.) Seeking God – expressions of longing for God, calling on Him to reveal Himself, His will and His ways. The theme of this basic form of worship expression is the desire to know God, to experience His presence, or to see Him act on your behalf. Prayers of intercession and petition, reading, studying and meditating on God’s word, fasting, turning away from sin, simplifying one’s life, withdrawing to quiet places, etc. are all expressions of hearts that want more of God. This is exactly what Daniel did, when he decided to pursue God, “So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed...” (Dan. 9:3-4). **It is important to get honest with God, and attempt to walk with integrity.** Putting on a false front to impress others is hypocritical, and is motivated by pride. **A key spiritual principle is that God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble** (Jas. 4:6). If we humble ourselves before God and people, by admitting our mistakes and seeking to make amends, we will find favor with God. Psalm 51 is a tremendous example of seeking forgiveness with God after a moral breakdown. David says, “You desire truth in the innermost being, ...a broken spirit and a contrite heart You will not despise” (vss. 6,17). **When we go out of our way to pursue God, He sees our desire to value Him, and**

responds to reveal Himself. There are a number of places where God promises to reveal Himself to those who diligently seek Him (Deut 4:29; I Chron. 28:9; II Chron. 15:2; Jer. 29:13,14). *God encourages us to seek.* For example, Jer. 33:3 says, “*Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.*” Jesus Himself taught, “*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.*” (Matt. 7:7) and, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*” (Matt. 5:6). **Recognizing the need to seek God and His blessings is fundamental to any spiritual life, at all.** The book of Hebrews says, “...he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). **Throughout history, God has come to offer good news and promises to people to motivate them to pursue a relationship with Him. Seeking God is at the core of what worship is all about.**

(3.) Celebration and delight – an expression of God’s attributes and actions that show His greatness, goodness and worth. This can be anything from a recounting of God’s deeds, to songs of praise and thanksgiving for particular benefits He has blessed us with, to expressions of all-out joy and dancing at His goodness. Clapping, lifting your hands, jumping to your feet, cheering and shouting are all appropriate expressions of joy, ...just as tears, weeping, fasting, mourning for one’s sin before the Holy God, and lying prostrate before Him as an act of submission are also appropriate and effective expressions that can set the stage of appreciation for grace and celebration at God’s goodness. In the same way, it seems that **musical expression can range from quiet meditative string instruments, to loud, festive trumpets, drums, tambourines and cymbals.** A “sacrifice of praise” is when you celebrate the goodness and faithfulness of God, when you have *not yet seen* the positive result you are hoping for. In faith, you praise and honor God for His greatness and steadfast love *in spite of* any hardships or lack that you may be experiencing at the time. This recounting of God’s greatness, and His past deeds, not only builds up your faith, but also honors and exalts God. **Expressions of praise and delight in God often motivate Him to action on our behalf, because it puts into operation another fundamental principle of relationship with Him, “...those who honor Me I will honor, and those who esteem Me little will be lightly esteemed by Me”** (I Sam. 2:30). In other words, if we truly hold God in high regard, and invest ourselves in learning of Him, following His ways, singing His praises, acknowledging Him and giving Him thanks for His many blessings to us, God Himself will take notice of us and will respond to the cries of our heart for help or for a greater revelation of Himself.

(4.) Service – an expression of faith-in-action through specific acts of service that honor God. These acts of service can be directed toward Him directly (prayer, offerings, ministry work, etc.), **...or they may be acts of service to other people that are meant to bring God glory**, as well as to meet a practical need (helps ministry, relief and help to the poor, acts of service to others, giving rides, visiting the sick and imprisoned, etc.). We see an example of acts of service to God in Acts 13:2, “*And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting...*”. The word translated as “ministering” is a word meaning “public service”. In this case, it involved serving God in a group or public setting, or as a representative of a group (cf. Heb.10:11). **This kind of public service entailed leading others in worship of God, or somehow serving to create an environment that facilitates others being able to worship** (including caring for people’s comfort, so that distractions could be minimized). It could also be used for public service toward the poor (Rom. 15:27). Jesus advocated serving others as a way of serving God and bringing Him glory, “*Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16; cf. II Cor. 9:11,12). **Another more direct way in which we can serve God and benefit others is to share the story of what God has done.** Declaration honors God by proclaiming who He is and what He has done to other people, so that they might come to know and appreciate Him. While the focus of the first three aspects of worship are primarily inward, that is they are about what is going on inside of me (i.e., *my* submission, *my* expressions of delight in God or *my* need for Him), the focus of the declaration aspect of worship is on *other* people. **When we truly want to honor and exalt God, we can’t help but desire to tell others about Him. Moreover, we become jealous for His reputation and will want to live lives that will bring Him honor and good reputation to outsiders. The more we love God, the more we will want to make Him known.**

Do you desire more of God in your experience? Applying yourself to worship God according to these Biblical principles will open the way for Him to bless you with more of Himself. He *longs* to be gracious to us, and *is waiting* to have compassion on us (Isa. 30:18). What is He waiting for? For us to prepare our hearts to want what He has to give us, and for us to press in after Him to know Him more intimately. He *watches* to see if we are serious about Him, or not. “*So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD. His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth*” (Hos. 6:3). **Honor Him, and He will respond.**