

IN RESPONSE - WHAT IS WORSHIP?

by Dennis Prutow
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Dr. Robert Godfrey, President of Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, directed the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America to the treatise of John Calvin called "The Necessity of Reforming the Church." Calvin asserts,

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence among us, and maintains its truth, it will be found the following two not only have a principle place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., a knowledge, first, of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and, secondly, of the source of which salvation is to be obtained.

Calvin saw the need to reform worship as the first priority in his day. The same need exists today. One of the places the world most profoundly affects the church is in her worship. We are radically entertainment oriented and pleasure driven. I think this is true even in Reformed circles. In this series we look first at the meaning of worship.

The English word worship comes from an archaic word meaning worthy, that is, having worth from the standpoint of dignity, importance, or rank. In times of old, a king was called, "Your worship." Those approaching him expressed great deference, bowing and sometimes prostrating themselves. The king was the person of highest dignity, importance, and rank in the realm. All his subjects therefore rendered him respect, honor, homage, esteem, tribute, and obeisance.

God has ultimate worth. He has the highest dignity, honor, and rank. He is therefore the worthy One. In the scene around the throne in heaven the angels and saints sing,

Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created (Revelation 4:11).

Worship is therefore a response to the dignity, honor, and rank of God. Because He is of ultimate worth, we act as though He is of high rank; we honor Him, we worship Him. This is the biblical concept

of worship. Worship is response to the supreme dignity of God and of Christ. In Matthew 2:11 the three kings "came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and the fell down and worshipped Him." Literally, the three kings fell on their faces, prostrating themselves before the Savior, in recognition of His ultimate worthiness.

We see the same thing in Matthew 28:9 when the disciples meet Jesus after His resurrection. "Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him." The disciples literally fell on their faces with arms outstretched and hands touching the feet of Jesus. This was their worship of the worthy One.

Scripture displays two types of worship. There is the worship of God and there is the worship of idols or false gods. We contrast Exodus 4:31 and Exodus 32:7-8. In the former case, when Moses and Aaron presented the prospect of deliverance from Egypt and added signs and wonders,

The people believed; and when they heard that the Lord was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshipped (Exodus 4:31).

We see the contrast in Exodus 32:8. The people no longer considered God of ultimate worth.

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it, and have sacrificed to it, and said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

Now contrast Revelation 5:8-14 and 7:9-12 with Revelation 13:1-10. Look up the texts. Space does not permit full quotation here. In the first case there is worship because God is the Creator. He is the One who brought about salvation. There is worship because life, all life, comes from God. This is a response to the power of God. This is a response to the

good use of power. In the second case there is worship because of the power to make war. This is veneration of the use of power to do evil.

Beyond doubt we see both types of worship in our world today. Men and women either honor good, God, or they honor evil, the devil. We all worship power. Our worship of power to the exclusion of God is evil. We worship physical power in athletics. We worship economic power in business. We worship political power in government. None of these things are evil in and of themselves. When we turn them into objects of worship and use them for self aggrandizement, we are evil. We are to worship God and use all else for His glorification.

So the purpose of worship is to honor God. All worship must therefore be God centered. We must engage in worship to please God. We do not engage in worship primarily for our own pleasure. Our primary motivation for worship is not our own pleasure despite the arguments of John Piper in his book *Desiring God, Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*.

This does not mean we do not derive pleasure from worship. We do. Consider WSC Answer #1. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." We are to enjoy God. God intends this. Our joy and pleasure is not excluded from worship. However, that joy comes when our central focus is God as David exclaims in Psalm 27:4.

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to meditate in His temple. Our greatest joy is to behold the beauty of the Lord.

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IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP IS THE RESPONSE OF JOY AND GLADNESS

by Dennis Prutow

C. S. Lewis critiques the teachers of his day with the following words,

They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth are sentimental—and they conclude that the best thing they can do is fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded against a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments. By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged and a hard heart is no infallible protection against a soft head.¹

Lewis talks about inculcating just sentiments. Webster's New World Dictionary (1962) describes a sentiment as "a complex combination of feelings and opinions as a basis for action or judgment."

Sentiments are a combination of thinking and feeling, mind and emotion. The inculcation of proper sentiments is not the deployment of emotions in the place of thinking. We are not to place our hats in the vestibule with our brains in them when we come to worship. Both mind and emotions must be strengthened for proper worship to take place.

Another point Lewis makes is failure to instill proper sentiments results in hardness and negativity. Before his death, Charles Darwin spoke of a loss of taste for poetry, art, pictures, and music which formerly gave him great delight.

My mind seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collection of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone, upon which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive.... The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness, and may possibly be injurious to the intellect,

and more probably to the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.²

Following Darwin, our materialistic, naturalistic, mechanistic approaches to life tend to disparage and even bury emotions. All emotions suffer. There is a loss of proper sentiments.

Post-modernism with its radical individualism and relativism moves us in the opposite direction. Emotions are given free reign. We are encouraged to express our rage, indignation, lust, etc. Here too there is a loss of proper sentiments. C. S. Lewis is correct. Sentiments, good and bad, are always present. Just sentiments must be encouraged, taught, and instilled

Just, good, wholesome, uplifting, enriching, gracious, sentiments are brought out in worship. Notice Psalm 92:4. "For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by what Thou hast done, I will sing for joy at the work of Thy hands." Among other sentiments, the Psalms reverberate with joy and gladness.

According to Psalm 92:4 God's sovereign work on our behalf makes us glad. This is the objective work of God in sending His Son to die on a cross. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). On the other hand, Romans 5:5 reminds us "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." This is the inner work of God sending the Holy Spirit into our hearts enabling us to embrace the death and resurrection of Christ. This double work, objective and subjective, is both the ground and capacity for gladness welling up within and pervading our thoughts and emotions. This is deep seated joy arising from the work of God.

Imagine a circle. The circumference is your emotions. The center is your heart and spirit. In worship, your emotions are stirred as you come before God. Are you made glad by the inner work of the Holy Spirit applying the work of Christ to your heart? Are your emotions stirred as you understand Christ and gladness wells up from within? Or are your emotions stirred from without, by the stimulation of your senses by particular music forms and

instrumentation? Is worship simply an emotional release, an alternate form of stimulation? I maintain we are incapable of telling the difference between the excitement at a football or basketball game and the sense of euphoria we experience in a worship service when stimulated by the carefully crafted and orchestrated music. I am contrasting external stimulation of our senses with the instilling of the Godly sentiment of gladness by the Holy Spirit.

We live in an over stimulated society. At every turn our senses are assaulted with lights, noise, music, pictures, movies, video productions, etc. Our fast paced society calls us to run on adrenalin, a chemical that prepares us for flight or fight. We are in a fight or flight mode most of the time.

A worship service in which our senses are not highly stimulated is boring. We seek an adrenalin rush. What does adrenalin do? "[A]n elevated adrenalin level can also give a person a heightened sense of well-being, increased energy, reduced need of sleep, and feelings of excitement or even euphoria..."³ "We learn to 'psych' ourselves up to a high level of adrenalin arousal with certain actions and attitudes just to feel good."⁴ Worship can be used to bring about the sense of arousal we seek. "We can begin to confuse adrenalin arousal and true spirituality."⁵

Deep seated gladness coming from God may actually be foreign to us. Yet worship involves this gladness. "For Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by what Thou hast done, I will sing for joy at the work of Thy hands" (Psalm 92:4).

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¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), p. 24.

² Quoted by John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 78.

³ Archibald D. Hart, *The Hidden Link Between Adrenalin and Stress* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), p. 22.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 68.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 39.

IN RESPONSE - WORSHIP IS THE RESPONSE OF DELIGHT

by Dennis Prutow

As a small boy I recall going to bed to await the arrival of Santa Claus. What a delight to find the tree and presents Christmas morning. In Seminary, it was a great delight to go to Disney Land. In Vietnam it was sheer delight to go to Saigon to a clean, cool, air conditioned, restaurant serviced by Americans. It was a great delight to see Erma in Hawaii on leave from Vietnam. These are simple delights.

Here are some synonyms for delight: pleasure, happiness, rapture, ecstasy, beatitude, bliss, rhapsody, joy, gladness, exaltation. Pastor Ray McCracken delights in fishing. He had a trophy on the dashboard of his car to indicate that delight. Some Kansas folk delight in working the earth. If we love baseball, we go to baseball games. If we delight in the Bible, read the Bible.

Our delights tend to lead us in one of two general directions. The disposition of the heart is at issue. Genesis 6:3 is an example of delight in that which is opposed to God.

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to here husband with her, and he ate. This is the first place in Scripture where the word delight appears. With such a disposition of heart, our delights run counter to God. If someone invites us to worship we say, "I'd rather be fishing," or "I'd rather be golfing," or "I'd rather be skiing."

Psalm 1:1-2 gives the opposite picture.

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Here is the way of the believer. This is a test. If you delight in your God, you delight in His Law. This means to be happy about God, in God, and with God, not in just a frothy effervescent way but with deep joy.

As a high school boy I used to repair to a root beer stand with my friends after football practice. We were provided frozen mugs with frothy heads on the root beer. That head of froth is like the tempo-

rary joy in the parable of the soils interpreted by Jesus in Matthew 13:20-21.

And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

The delight and joy we are talking about is deep and lasting not temporary.

In this sense, our worship is to be a delight. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord." We are to find our satisfaction in Him. We are to thoroughly enjoy Him. We are to rest in Him. We exalt in Him. This is worship. We are to experience a taste of heaven. We are gathered around the throne of God with archangels, angels, departed saints, and believers all over the world. We are, albeit, on the periphery of heaven. But we are there looking over the myriads of angels and saints up to the throne on the crystal sea surrounded by the four living creatures and twenty-four elders.

This is a question of basic desires and joys. WSC Answer 1 calls us "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." We are called to enjoy God, to delight in God. Many people direct their lives by the earthly inheritance they hope to gain. Psalm 73:25-26 reminds us God is the Christian's inheritance.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee?
And besides Thee, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

The word portion means inheritance. God Himself is the inheritance of the believer. If we delight in earthly inheritances surely we should delight in the Lord who is our eternal inheritance.

In addition, in worship, a profound meeting with God is possible. As Psalm 37:4 exhorts, we are to delight in the Lord. God also delights in His people. Proverbs 3:12 teaches, "For whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights." When two persons who delight in each other meet, there is a communication of love and compassion. This is the nature of true in worship.

Putting it another way, we seek that in which we delight and those in whom we delight. The parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep are good examples. We are called upon to seek the Lord (Isaiah 55:6). At the same time, God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). God is seeking us at the same time we seek Him. Thus we meet Him. There is power here. There is transformation here.

Why do we not delight in the Lord more than we do? We suppose too high a degree of sanctification. I think I am actually no more than 1/1000th of 1% sanctified, more likely 1/10,000th. Yet I really do have joy in Christ. You also delight in Him. One hundred times my present degree of sanctification and joy brings me to the .1% level. One thousand times brings me to the 1% level. If we wrongly suppose we are 80% or 90% sanctified, when we depart weekly worship we may ask: "Is this is all there is?" Yet we have mere taste like a sample of fudge at the Copper Kettle or a sample of ice cream at Baskin Robins. The taste is meant to get us to buy more. The taste of the Lord is meant to cause us to seek Him more, to delight in Him further.

Beyond doubt, Moses had wonderful tastes of the power, glory, and grace of God in the desert at the burning bush and in Egypt. Moses took great delight in the Lord. The delight Moses had for God led him to cry, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). When God acceded to Moses' request, "Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship" (Exodus 34:8). Moses' worship was delight in God. Similarly, our worship is the response of delighting in God. "Delight yourself in the Lord."

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RESPONSE - WORSHIP IS THE RESPONSE OF REST

by Dennis Prutow

Psalm 46:10 exhorts, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Worship involves a stillness before God which engenders a deeper knowledge of who God is. This is rest in the midst of the tragedies, tumults, and temptations of life.

This rest is epitomized in the word *Selah*, a musical direction given seventy-four times in the psalms. *Selah* means pause, or rest. It may be a dramatic pause. Here is a point of rest, reflection, reorientation, and rejuvenation. Spurgeon quotes this rhyme in his commentary on Psalm 46.

Selah bids the music rest,
Pause in silence soft and blest;
Selah bids uplift the strain,
Harps and voices tune again;
Selah ends the vocal praise,
still your hearts to God upraise.

When Israel had its back to the Red Sea, Moses called the people to be still and know God is truly God.

Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The Lord will fight for you while you keep silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

We are to "Be still" and "keep silent" before God in the sense we should stop our striving and rest. "Cease striving and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10, NASV). Our worship is this kind of pause or rest.

Such a pause occurs in Revelation 8:1, "There was silence in heaven for about half an hour." This dramatic pause follows the vision of the throne of God and the worship of angels and saints who sing, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen." With this resounding Amen there is silence. There is time to reflect on all of redemptive history. There is time to meditate on the greatness of God who holds all things in His power. "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Psalm 46 likely responds to the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, in 688 B.C.

Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out, and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead (2 Kings 19:35).

God exhorts Israel, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Psalm 46 celebrates the power and greatness of God on behalf of His people. Charles Spurgeon says, "Happen what may, the Lord's people are happy and secure...." The psalm develops this theme in three parts indicated by the word *Selah*.

Verses 1-3 relate the presence of God preserving His people in the midst of tumult. Calvin says: "God is our refuge and strength: he is found an exceeding [or superlative] help in tribulations." A refuge is a hiding place. Strength refers to God as the source of our inner abilities, emotional, physical, and spiritual. The mountains are kingdoms. Seas indicate the mass of surging humanity. Though the whole face of the earth should be altered, God is our shelter and power. As a present help He is found [Isaiah 55:6] to be all the shelter and strength we need. We pause to contemplate this good news in worship. *Selah*.

Verses 4-7 turn to the city of God, Jerusalem. This is the church. As God's sanctuary was in the midst of Jerusalem, God's presence abides in His church. He is with His people. In contrast to the churning seas we now have a quiet river bringing sustenance to the city of God. Jerusalem was well supplied with conduits bringing water. The church is supplied by the living waters of the Spirit. Jerusalem was protected from the Assyrians by God. The gates of hell will not prevail against the church. The Lord of Hosts is Jesus, our Immanuel. We pause to contemplate the marvelous presence of God with us in worship. *Selah*.

Verses 8-11 recognize the exaltation of God throughout the whole earth. Believer and unbeliever are called to witness the work of God. He causes the war to cease. Sennacherib and the As-

syrians saw and experienced this. Jerusalem was constrained to be still and witness the deliverance of God. This was evidence of God with them. Jesus Christ commissions His church and gives a profound promise.

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:19-20)

Once again we are called to pause and contemplate God's presence in worship. *Selah*.

In each case there is comparison with the end of time. Verse 1-3 remind us of the final conflagration. Verses 4-7 remind us of the river of the water of life coming from the throne of God in the new Jerusalem. Verse 8-11 point to the final cessation of war when the lion and the lamb will lie down together.

At the end of each section we have the dramatic pause. *Selah*. It is our appropriate response to God. In the first case, verses 1-3, we respond to the strength and comfort of God in the midst of trouble with rest. Our worship recognizes this rest as a foretaste of the final rest we will receive.

In the second case, verses 4-7, we respond to the presence of God among His people, the church. As we gather for worship we come to a place of rest. We contemplate God's immediate presence and the consummate presence of God in glory.

In the third case, verses 8-11, we respond to the victory of God's gospel over all the nations now and in the final state. We rest in God's promise, "I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10).

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