

# Essentials of Christian Worship

## 6 - Worship That Transforms

### Measuring Up

It is very common for us to evaluate worship on the basis of 'existential' terms - about how worship makes us feel (subjective indicators). But sometimes we look to more objective signs that worship was effective (raised hands, volume of singing, prophetic utterances, altar responses, 'stirring' preach, etc.). Yet even these are only measuring what God might be doing 'in the moment'. Is there a biblical approach we should apply to assessing worship?



When we think of people being 'transformed' by their encounter with Christ, we might think of Saul of Tarsus on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) or Thomas' confession of Christ's deity when he touched the risen one's scars. Even 2 Cor. 5:17 tells us that in Christ 'we are a new creation'. But these examples speak of one-time encounters - conversion experiences. They do not speak of what the Bible calls 'sanctification', which is really another name for 'ongoing' transformation - of shaping us into Christ's image.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, sanctification "is the work of the Holy Spirit bringing the whole nature more and more under the influences of the new gracious principles implanted in the soul in regeneration. In other words, sanctification is the carrying on to perfection the work begun in regeneration, and it extends to the whole man". (Rom. 8:29, Col. 3:9-10; Phil. 1:6)

So, then, the 'end goal' or 'telos' (grk.) of worship should be to **shape us into the image of Christ**. As Robert Taft has written, "A liturgy is successful not because of its fidelity to some past ideal, but because it builds up the Body of Christ into a spiritual temple and priesthood by forwarding the aim of Christian life: the love and service of God and neighbour; death to self in order to live for others as did Christ."<sup>1</sup>

### Re-ordering Reality

If that's the case, what should take place in an encounter with Christ?

- 1) It should cause us to '**re-order our reality**', as Mark Labberton says, in order to remind ourselves of God's sovereignty and to look at things through His eyes. (Ps. 100:3)
- 2) That should cause us to **make God's priorities our own**:
  - Love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
  - Love your neighbour as yourself.



The Incarnation was a reordering of reality on a cosmic scale. Spirit became material. The unseen became seen. The invisible God made Himself known in order to show us what we were destined to be before Adam fell. It is into that image that God wants to shape us by His Holy Spirit! It is a lifelong process, which will only be accomplished when we are finally in His presence. (James 3:2, 1 John 1:8)

<sup>1</sup> Robert Taft, "Beyond East & West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding", (The Pastoral Press, Washington, D.C., 1984), p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Labberton, "The Dangerous Act of Worship: Living God's Call To Justice", (IVP, Downer's Grove, 2007), p.90.

## Encounter Begins With Revelation

Encountering Christ always begins with revelation - of God to His people.

Scripture gives us three ways in which God has revealed Himself in History:

- 1) **General revelation** - God has revealed Himself through **Creation** - Ps 19/Rom 1.
- 2) **Special revelation** - He has revealed Himself through **God's written word** (Ps 19, Ps 139). There are also examples of **Theophanies** (appearances of God) in the Old Testament (Gen 12, Exodus 3), but most of these took place before the Law was given and God revealed His Name and character to His people.
- 3) **The Incarnation** - God revealed in Christ. John 1:14; Col. 1:15.



## What About Today?

*How does God reveal Himself in the Church age?*

Today, God still reveals Himself to us in the several ways:

- 1) The Holy Spirit in us bears witness to Jesus. (Rom. 8:16; Heb. 10:15-16)
- 2) The Spirit works through us by gifts of the Spirit. (Rom. 12:6-8; 1 cor. 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph. 4:11)
  - a. We become His witnesses in word and deed. (Acts 1:8)
- 3) The Proclamation of His Story in worship - song, prayer, readings, communion. (Acts 2:42-47)
- 4) The preaching of the Word. (Rom. 10:14-17)

**Our role** is not to fabricate an encounter, as though we can manipulate God as a toy. Rather, it is to 'remember' Him, bowing our hearts and dying to our selves that we might hear with *His* ears and see with *His* eyes. **WE MUST TRUST THE HOLY SPIRIT TO WORK THROUGH CHRIST-CENTRED WORSHIP and TRUST THAT HIS WORD WILL NOT RETURN VOID.** (Is. 55:11)

## So How Should We Measure Worship?

*By the fruit of seeing worshippers living out the Gospel - with their lips and their lives!*

"But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. - James 2:18 (ESV)

## Discussion questions:

1. Can the observable actions of worship be a part of assessing whether people are actually engaging in worship?
2. Why do we need to be *reminded* that God is sovereign when we gather to worship? Isn't it something we assume anyway?
3. How is 'remembering' the Christ story an important part of our 'sanctification' process?
4. Read Romans 12:1-2 again. Why do you think this is an important verse for our discipleship and growth?