

Let Us Worship

Mount Zion RDU Kingdom Group

The Elements of Worship

Outline and Handout #1

The Elements of Worship

Hezekiah was only twenty-five years old when he took the reins of government after the death of his godless father, Ahaz. Reflecting the godly influence of his tutor, Isaiah, this new king opened the doors of the house of the Lord the very first month after his coronation. Under his father, all temple worship had ceased, and the temple had become a storage building for the king.

First Hezekiah regathered the priesthood and challenged them to reinstitute worship for all Israel and to clean out the house of the Lord. Second, he provided for the recasting of the vessels of the Lord that had been destroyed by Ahaz (see 2 Chronicles 29).

It was not until after all the elements of worship—the brazen altar, the laver of the outer court, the lampstand, the table of shewbread, and the altar of incense of the holy place—had been completely restored in the cleansed and repaired temple that Hezekiah called the congregation together to worship.

The chronicler records that:

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... When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David King of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped (2 Chronicles 29:27-30).

Hezekiah restored jubilant worship to Israel. But he began by restoring the elements of worship, for he realized that without these channels of worship neither the priests nor the people would have a route of access to God or a means of expressing their worship to God. These elements were not mere rituals, they were channels for the communication of worship unto God. Elements of worship, then, are important.

To review, just what is worship? It is an attitude of heart, a reaching toward God, a pouring out of our total self in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, and love to the God who created us and to Whom we owe everything we have and are. But worship is even more than that.

The worshippers in the Old Testament gave tangible evidence of their heart attitude. They built altars, made offerings, slew animals and later became deeply involved with the elaborate ritual of the tabernacle worship. These saints translated their heart attitudes into facts of worship. Even the Magi who came to worship the child Jesus had tangible evidence of their heart attitude in the gifts they presented as they fell down before Him (see Matthew 2:11).

Has Christ's position as the sacrifice slain once and for all negated these acts that give tangible evidence of our heart's attitude? No! Only the sacrificial system was abolished in Him.

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Wise men still worship Him, and they will need some elements to help them express that worship. We are being reintroduced to some acts of worship such as clapping of the hands, raising our hands, dancing before the Lord, bowing on our knees, and using our voices to sing and shout His praises; but we have only scratched the surface. A broad dimension of worshipful expressions are just now beginning to resurface in our generation but, actually, they have been a part of worship from antiquity.

Those who have recently been released from extreme formalism and ritualistic worship usually decry the need for elements. "I want to be free to worship the Lord in my own way," they cry. "I don't want to go back into bondage." But it isn't long until they discover that they must either embrace old elements of worship or invent some new ones for, limited beings that we are, we all need something that will inspire us to worship and channel our desires into a true worship experience. The Bible has given us quite a variety of such elements and even Jesus did not condemn them. He did, however, condemn the exaggerated emphasis on ritual practice which was used as a substitute for genuine righteousness (see Mark 7:6).

In the very giving of the Lord's Prayer and the new ritual of the Lord's Supper, Jesus recognized that men need aids to worship. He consistently taught the need for commitment to God, for the expression of divine love back to God, and for purity of heart and mind which would normally find expression in acts of worship. It is the certainty of God within us that gives substance, reality, and power to any external motions used to translate heart attitudes into acts of worship.

God did not make us mystics. When we seek a mystical approach to God we tend to become hyper-spiritual and unduly emotional, trading substance for feeling. Often this approach is embraced for lack of proper understanding of the difference between supernatural and spiritual. Everything that God does is entirely natural to Him and His spiritual kingdom. It only

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seems supernatural to us because we view all spiritual acts from our natural world. If God never violates His nature in what He does, if all His acts are very natural to Him, then I would expect Him to appreciate worship that is consistent with our born-again nature and that is natural to us. True worship need not violate our God-given nature. It should express it. We need not be “spooky” to be spiritual. The most spiritual men of the Bible were very down-to-earth human beings who had learned how to come into God’s presence and worship. Even their great spiritual power did not divest them of their humanity as Paul and Barnabas declared to the people of Lystra when they sought to make gods of the apostles after they healed the cripple who had never walked. Paul and Barnabas “ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, *Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you ...*” (Acts 14:14, 15).

No, we’re not mystics, we’re men. We’re not miniature gods; we’re mere people who need to do something to successfully make the transition from our natural kingdom to God’s spiritual kingdom.

Those things that we do to bridge this gap are elements that help give form and substance to our worship. The Gospels record such elements, Paul manifested them in his life, and the Epistles teach about them and command us to use them, for God has not left worship a total mystery; there are certain things that we can do that both bring us into worship and express that worship unto God.

Prayer is one such element. Jesus regularly used the prayer channel for times of fellowship with His Father, and Paul taught and practiced the use of prayer as a channel for worship. We need to communicate in order to come into communion, and prayer is essentially communication. If we can talk with God, then we can fellowship with Him and flow worship unto Him. Just as nothing strains a marriage faster than a breakdown of communication, nothing will disturb worship more than prayerlessness. How often have we bridged the gap between

our world and His through the channel of prayer.

Prayer, in its simplest essence, is a communication from man's spirit to God's Spirit, while worship is communion between these two spirits, and communication greatly aids communion. It is safe to say that the prayerless saint is never a worshipper.

Praise, confession of sin, and confession of faith are also elements of worship. They will be considered in greater depth a little later in this book, but we can't ignore the fact that praise is very often the vocal end of worship, although it cannot become a substitute for it. Furthermore, the very confession of sin is a part of worship, for it is an acknowledgment of the finished work of Christ at Calvary and it is a positive application of divine grace. We dare not let sin keep us out of God's presence when confession of sin will help to bring us into His presence.

Even the confession of our faith can become an element of worship, for faith must be released to be effective, and faith is most normally released in our speech.

Reading the Scriptures can become another channel for worship, for private reading of the Bible for spiritual edification often elevates the reader into a worshipful atmosphere that makes contact with God simple and most natural. Even public reading of the Scriptures can become an element of worship, for this was part of the worship of the early New Testament church. (Private copies of the Word were unavailable to all but the very wealthy). If prayer and praise are fundamentally our communication with God, then reading the Scripture is basically God's communication with us. Since worship is like dialogue we must have movement in two directions: God comes to man and man goes to God. Like Jacob's ladder, there is an ascending and a descending. If worship is to meet God, we should expect to meet Him in His Word.

Sometime ago I was ministering in a small church in

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Virginia. That night the worship leader evidenced great exhaustion, and the song service was lifeless. I stepped to the pulpit and offered to take over. Opening my Bible I invited the congregation to turn with me to the first chapter of the book of Hebrews, assuring them that I was not going to preach; I merely wanted everyone to stand and read the chapter in unison with me. At first, every few verses I paused and helped them to realize what they had read, and then we would read on. By the time we had completed chapter 2 that congregation was so conscious of the presence of God that they had already begun to worship. The mere awareness of God's provision for us in Christ Jesus formed that "spark" that bridged the gap between earth and heaven. If the Old Testament priests could minister at the golden altar of incense only if the lampstand was lighted, then we, too, need illumination to aid our worship. Proverbs 6:23 says, "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light ...," and the Psalmist declares, "The entrance of Thy words giveth light ..." (Psalm 119:130).

Preaching is also an element of worship. The New Testament makes great provision for preaching, for it proclaims God's Word, it declares God's work, and it enlightens, informs, and inspires God's people to respond to Him. Every prophesying and exhortation are elements of worship since they, too, declare the words and works of God and magnify His offices.

Anointed, Bible-centered preaching should be a part of the worship of the church but it should not be a substitute for worship. One notable thing about a New Testament church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling he had the privilege of contributing something to it. Paul wrote, "To sum up, my friends: when you meet for worship each of you contributes a hymn, some instruction, a revelation, an ecstatic utterance or the interpretation of such an utterance" (2 Corinthians 14:26, NEB). Preaching, then, is not the end; it is a means to an end. Worship is the end to be sought in all our church services. Everything should contribute to worship or

have no place in our gatherings.

The Lord's Supper was instituted as an element of worship. "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me," Jesus said (1 Corinthians 11:25). This element of worship replaced not only the Passover but the temple offerings. This is probably why there is so much sacrificial language associated with this sacrament. "This is my body which is broken for you," and "this is my shed blood" all speak of the death of the lamb slain for the sins of the people.

The great beauty of the Lord's Supper is that it is Christological rather than liturgical in the narrower Old Testament sense.

It is not the mere serving of the Communion that becomes an element of worship, but it is the remembering of the covenant we have entered into because of this shed blood, and the memory of Christ Jesus Himself. I have participated in observances of the Lord's Supper that were more funeral services than times of worship. Conversely, I have enjoyed some very bright periods of worship during the serving of the Communion. The difference lies in the concept being presented at the time. When it is Christ-centered there is a great potential for worship, but when it is ceremony-centered, it often becomes a substitute for worship.

Certainly these examples do not exhaust the many elements of worship made available to us throughout the Bible. Space does not permit our discussion of song, Christian fellowship, church construction, testimony, baptism, pageantry, choral presentations, etc., as aids to our worship experience, but we are somewhat familiar with them by virtue of personal experience.

I feel constrained, however, to admit that there can be negatives to the employment of these elements of worship. Each may be a part of worship but any and all are vehicles for worship that can give guidance to worship and can become

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expressions of worship, but in themselves they are not worship.

Just as we can have a Communion service without it becoming a worship service, we can pray seven times a day and still not worship. It is even possible for the one who preaches the sermon to fail to worship, since ritual, for ritual's sake, will never produce worship. While it is true that worship does not require vestments, cathedrals or pipe organs, these may be elements that help to bring the saints to worship. Jesus continually emphasized that worship was a one-to-one relationship that was not dependent upon locale or trappings, while all the time refusing to condemn the liturgy of His day. I embrace the statement made in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, "Anything that really stimulates and expresses the worshipful spirit is a legitimate aid to worship, but never a substitute for it, and is harmful if it displaces it."

Our Quaker brothers and sisters leaned to the mystical approach in worshipping God; so they came together in total silence awaiting the worship experience, but the way into worship is not silence; it is expression. It is not in doing nothing, but in doing something that will stimulate, direct, and then channel our worship unto God. The goal of our life should be to get into the divine presence rather than to find and follow a prescribed ritual. Whatever we find that brings us into that divine presence should be continued until we flow into a full worship experience.

Although varied rituals may help bring us to the place of worship, it will be the expression of correct attitudes that enables us to step from ceremony to Communion. But just what are the correct attitudes of worship and what will be the attitudes of those who observe that worship? And, even more important, what will be the attitude of the One who is being worshipped?

***Take Notes and Fill in the Blanks When
prompted by the Facilitator(s)***

- As defined by Judson Cornwall in “Let Us Worship”, WORSHIP is an _____
_____, a _____ God, a
pouring out of the _____ in
thanksgiving, praise, adoration, and love to
the God who created us to whom we owe
everything we have and are.

- The worshipper in the _____
_____ gave tangible evidence of
their heart attitude.

- The _____ was
abolished through Jesus Christ; however,
the New Testament worshipper will still
need elements to help express their
worship.

Elements of worship give _____ and
_____ to our worship.

God has not left worship a total _____;

there are certain things that we can do that

both bring us into worship and express that

worship unto God.

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1 _____

- If we talk with God, then we can fellowship with Him and flow worship unto Him.
- Prayer, in its simplest essence, is a communication from man's spirit to God's Spirit.

2 _____

- Praise is very often the vocal end of worship, although it cannot become a substitute for it.

3 _____

- Confession of Sin is a part of worship, for it is an acknowledgement of the finished work of Christ on Calvary and it is a positive application of divine grace.

4 _____

- Confession of Faith can become an element of worship, for faith must be released to be effective, and faith is most normally released in our speech.

5 _____

- Private reading of the Bible for spiritual edification often elevates the ready into a worshipful atmosphere that makes contact with God simple and most natural.

6 _____

- This element of worship replaced not only the Passover but the temple offerings.
- The great beauty of the Lord's Supper is that it is Christological rather than liturgical in the narrower Old Testament sense.