

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

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The second part of our series “How Shall we Worship God Together.” Last time we laid a basis for worship. To briefly summarize is we said that what we like we praise. In reference to God as we think of his character and attributes all of worship is a rendering back to God admiration, respect, reverence saying to God what we appreciate and value in him. Worship is also called service.

The root meaning in the Old and the New Testament is the word “service.” It struck me this week that that’s why we say “We’re having an 8:30 *service*,” or “eleven o’clock *service*.” Why would you call a worship time, “service.” It’s because out of the original meaning of that word worship it meant service. We’re serving God with our praise.

We indicated that there are two foundations for worship. Right relationships with God and with other people and right motivation. Not coming out of habit or to be seen of men but coming out of a genuine desire to meet with God.

Then we looked at some verbal forms of praising God together. Silence which is internal words. Speaking – words that are given breath. Singing – words with music. Laughing – words overrun by joy. Weeping – words overrun by sorrow. Shouting – words with explosion attached.

One other thing about shouting. When I speak of Biblical shouting, I’m not speaking of individual persons interrupting a service by standing up and screaming. I perhaps did not make that sufficiently clear last time. As I understand shouting in the scripture, when it occurs it is done by groups in unison unless it is by a team leader appointed to led the people in some sort of response. Then there might be an antiphonal response – something is shouted forth and then the people shout back. Nothing can be so interruptive of a worship service than one person simply going off on their own. What I say in regard to the whole congregation shouting is there are appropriate moments in worship when the Spirit of the Lord is in the place to bring joy. There ought to be in those moments ways that we express corporately that ebullient enthusiasm we feel in God. And it’s all right to do that. In fact, not to express that at that time would be wrong. Because we would be deliberately squelching the praise the Spirit of God is causing to rise in our hearts. Shouting – words with explosion attached.

Before I look this evening at some ways we respond to God non-verbally – that is with actions – I wanted to sort of insert a personal thing. These are areas of deficiency that are my own personal bias in worship. They’re more than just opinions. I think they are judgments, shaped from years of worshipping in Christian community. I would like to point out what I feel are some deficiencies in our worship from time to time.

First deficiency I would spot in worship is what I would call mechanical. What we’re doing we’re doing it mechanically.

I’ve been mechanical just coming many times in a worship service, not even being in a leadership role. Somebody says Stand up, and I mechanically stand. Somebody says Sing, turn to page number so and so. And mechanically sing and not really make a serious attempt to begin

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day. One of the things we ought to treasure when we come to worship with the people of God is that we not come in a passive sort of attitude or response. Like waiting for something to happen to us. But that a more biblical way to worship is to come determined to meet with God in that moment and to be ready for whatever direction the Spirit might choose to take through the leadership of the service. To act actively rather than mechanically.

We have done a lot of things by robot in my won experience. God wants us to be fresh, not mechanical.

A second problem I have seen in worship on occasion is what I would simply call detached worship. We're here but we're really not here. Our bodies are present but our minds are somewhere else. Worship begins when we gather in his name and begin to open our hearts to him. The message is but a part of worship. Nothing is preliminary. It's all made front and center stage. It's all worship of God. And nothing is less than something else. Each has its place in God's economy and plan.

Another deficiency in worship that I notice is what I might call single focus attention. That's a complicated phrase for something I don't know how to properly put a handle on. It's where one or two persons in a worship service predictively stand out with some kind of mannerism or vocalization which they do which calls attention in kind of a unique way to them. It's different from if a person begins to rise in a service and others join in. There's a difference between than and that I might be all of a sudden doing something and therefore the center of attention. If that is the case then what is happening is not edification. People are stopping to watch me and what I'm doing.

A fourth thing that I was going to mention is simply passivity. I think that goes pretty well with detached. I won't comment on that.

Another thing I think many times hinders the congregation from worshipping is an infant situation which becomes uncontrollable – a baby or a toddler. Again, I do not make a point to say, "Please take the baby out." I think we have an obligation to be courteous with people and to ride through situations. I have a theory about babies. I guarantee you that if there is a baby in a service and the Holy Spirit really begins to move either in a very serious way speaking to people or an altar call that baby will wake up and begin to make sounds. I've never seen that theory invalidated if there are babies in the service. Babies even if they are not crying are cute! And about three rows a fixed on what that baby's doing and unable to respond to what God may be saying through his word.

If you happen to be in a worship service and are setting next to a situation where a mother is struggling with a baby don't poke her and say, "Out!" Begin to pray and see if you can maybe help out in some way. We're not here to judge one another but to be helpful.

One other area of worship where I've felt there were deficiencies in understanding the purpose is a common misunderstanding between an utterance in tongues and a word of prophecy. An utterance in tongues is a praise unto the Lord. It is a prayer. "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh unto the Lord." Prophecy is God speaking to us. It often is the case that when an interpretation of tongues occurs it comes in a prophetic mold rather than in a mold of an

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

interpretation of the tongue. That's not to say that the gift being expressed at that moment is invalid. It is simply to say that the gifts need beautifying. Gifts are improveable. They are such that we can strive to excel in the gifts. Many people shy away from expressing any spiritual gift because they think it isn't going to be perfect. I hope that never is a part of our congregation here. That a person is shy about expressing a gift because maybe they've never done it before. We hopefully are a patient and tolerant enough people in the Lord to give one another real room to grow and help some of our people fly in the Spirit. But I want to keep insisting on this subtle distinction between an utterance of tongues and an interpretation and a prophecy. That most commonly it should be expected that when an interpretation of tongues comes it would be in the form of prayer to God.

You say, "I thought when the Spirit of God moved upon somebody in the congregation to utter an utterance in tongues he had some word he wanted to address the congregation. That is why he causes the persons to utter in tongues." If we understand the gift directly from the scripture that it's speaking unto God, what is happening is the Spirit has come into someone's heart not so much to cause some word to be spoken to the congregation but to cause some response within the congregation back to God. If God wants a word to the congregation he will more directly desire to go through the gift of prophecy. When tongues occur he more directly wants to come through the heart of the congregation back in some language to God. Sometimes this will be praise.

I've found that sometimes God will want to cause me sometimes in prayer to lift up a particular concern so that maybe it will take the shades of prophecy. Like for example if I were giving a prophetic word I might say something like "I the Lord thy God will be with thee in trial." That would be the way a prophetic word would be shaped. But if it we are coming through an utterance and an interpretation of tongues it might be shaped something like, "Lord God, you have promised us you would be with your people in trial." The same thing is being said but a distinction is being made between the interpretation and the prophetic gift. I think it's an area of the gift of the Spirit when we can as a congregation seek to excel.

We've looked at the theme of responding to God with words. Let's look at responding to God with actions. We'll look at four specific actions but there are far more actions than I have listed in the outline.

Perhaps the most common way we respond to God with actions in worship is through sitting. I suspect we spend over 75% of a service just sitting down. That can be an act of worship. What is God doing in allowing us to worship him sitting down? Why don't we stand? In some places worshippers do not sit down because there is no room to sit down. Just solid humanity packed in worshipping God and listening to his word. The preaching is done while the congregation is standing.

Sitting though is very important. Especially people with bad backs recognize how important sitting is. What does sitting accomplish? Sitting does this in worship.

First of all sitting allows us to engage in extended periods of worship. Other forms of posture are very uncomfortable. If you had to stand and listen to pastors speak every Sunday you would probably be in very bad shape. Acts 2:2 the day of Pentecost occurred in the house where they were sitting. They were having an extended period of worship and in fact it had gone on for ten

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

days. 1 Corinthians 14:30 gives intimation that in early Christian worship services that people were as a rule seated. When a revelation came to one who was sitting down then that person in his turn could stand up. The idea being that only time the person who stood was when they gave an utterance and the rest of the time people sat.

Sitting also in worship is a position of feeding. That's a second purpose of sitting. It speaks of feeding. The only miracle that's told in all four of the gospels is the feeding of the 5000. Jesus tells them in all four gospels to *sit down*. Jesus himself taught the sermon on the mount *while seated*. He was seated and everybody about him was seated. And the Olivet discourse, the teaching on the future is given what Jesus has persons seated around him. It's intriguing to realize that in Matthew 13 which is also Jesus' teaching where he tells seven parables of the kingdom, he's seated in a boat and the people are standing on the shore.

Immediately this thought struck me. The reason why Jesus had the crowd standing in Matthew 13 was he was telling stories – seven stories. But in the complicated teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and the Olivet discourse a standing audience couldn't have absorbed what was happening. They needed to be seated.

Sitting also in worship is also a position of fellowship. When we come into someone's house they invite us to sit down. Jesus sat down at table with the twelve. That's why sitting can also be an excellent posture for prayer. It's not being disgraceful or disrespectful to the Lord to be praying while seated. It can be a mark of simply being in fellowship. Seated around the table with him.

Sitting also serves one other function in the New Testament. It is a position of rulership. A position of rule. Jesus has now sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. We also are described in Ephesians as seated with Christ in heavenly places.

When we come into the sanctuary and we take our seats we are to begin to consciously even to focus in on that event of what it means in worship. By sitting there we're able to have extended times of worship. We've come to be fed by God. We're expecting a position of fellowship with God. While we're sitting there we also remember that in the heavens we are already seated in the Spirit with Christ Jesus in a position of rule and power and authority.

Another action by which we worship God is standing. Here again is the common activity in worship, which we really don't think a lot about. The pastor says, Everyone stand, so we all stand. Someone else says, "Everyone sit down, so we sit down. There's a long period in the worship service where we might need to take a break so they'll say, "Let's stand and sing a chorus," and everybody can sort of stretch. A long-winded preacher in the middle he might have the good grace to let everybody stand. Other than that we don't really think what standing involves.

I'd like for you to think of standing itself as an act of worship. Standing in the scripture has these kinds of meanings.

One, standing is a sign of respect. Revelation 3:20 finds Jesus standing at the door and knocking. If Jesus is standing at the door and knocking and he wants entry our response is not to simply say, Come on it the door's open! If it's the Lord who's standing waiting entrance then a

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

position of respect is to rise and to let him in. That's why most worship services we begin with standing. Not just because it's convenient but because fundamentally it's an act of rising to Christ's invitation. He says as we gather here this evening "Behold I'm standing at the door of this service. I'm knocking to gain entrance. Will anyone come and open the door and let me in."

In the Old Testament in the holy of holies the most sacred place within Israel's history the priest always stood. You would never have been caught sitting in the holy of holies.

This sign of respect is carried further when the whole of creation in the redeemed multitude is wrapped up in Revelation 7:9-10 "After this I looked and there was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.'" God sitting on the throne and his people standing in respect. If Jesus were to come through those doors, everybody would be on their feet. A sign of respect.

Another thing that standing represents when we gather together for Christian worship is that it is a sign of welcome. I'm going to take an obscure passage to suggest this because it really demonstrates the courtesy that is in our Lord himself. We learned that when the Lord ascended to heaven he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. The New Testament is very clear about that. But when the first Christian was facing death namely Stephen, Acts 7:55 and 56 tells us that "Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing. [notice not sitting] at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.'"

Why does the scripture say that when Jesus rose and ascended to the Father, he sat down. But Stephen, when he's dying, says he sees the Son of man standing? I think it's because that in the Christian era, Stephen is the first one of all Christ's followers to die. And the Lord rises as a sign of welcome to Stephen. I'd like to think that just around the turn of the road called death, the Lord has just risen from his seat and position of power in heaven to greet me and welcome me.

The Lord – next week we'll speak about this nature and the glory of his person. But the Lord is full of courtesy and joy towards his people. He welcomes us. We rise in worship to welcome him.

Another thing that standing represents in worship is a sign of active praise. Often singing while we are sitting is of a more contemplative character. It is the case that frequently when we stand the songs we sing standing tend to be more ebullient, effervescent, exuberant in nature. This true with biblical evidence. In Jehoshaphat's time a king of Judah they were facing a time of being surrounded by three armies and Jehoshaphat has this great scheme after fasting and praying to send out the singers in front because the battle was the Lord's. What a crazy way to fight a battle. In that time when the people's praise was high toward God Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. They're agonizing over what God's going to do in this situation. Then some of the Levites stood up and praised the God of Israel in a very loud voice. Once they started everybody joined in. It was effusive praying, active praise. So often we will ask persons to stand in worship in order to engage in more active praise.

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

Another thing that standing represents is that frequently standing is a sign of leadership and ministry. Acts 1:15 when Judas had fallen from his position and the disciples need to choose someone to replace him Peter stood among the brethren. All of them were sitting. Peter as the recognized leader stands. Again, Acts 2 when the crowd on the day of Pentecost was being preached so Peter stood up with the eleven. The twelve disciples all stood together a one of them proclaimed the message of Jesus. Jesus himself when he ministered, stood. Luke 4:16 – he went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom and he stood up to read. That’s why frequently when there’s a reading of the scriptures you will be asked to stand.

Even when the early gifts of the Spirit were practiced by persons evidently in the body stood up. Agabus for example in Acts 11:28 when he prophesied stood up to prophesy. Standing up allows us then the idea of being heard and seen.

A fifth indication of standing and this is a symbolic meaning of standing. But sometimes in scripture standing represents a sign of support. You say to somebody, “I’m going to stand with you.” When we stand up in worship maybe there are times we need to feel like the Lord is standing by us, slipping his arm around us and saying, “I’m standing with you and I’ve got my arm on you. You’re not going to go through that ground you think is quicksand. I am with you.”

This is exactly what happens with Paul in Acts 23:11. After his arrest in Jerusalem. “The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage. As you’ve testified about me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome.” In Acts 27 later when is one ship that’s going to have the wreck in the Mediterranean he says to the whole crew, “Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve, stood beside me.” He later says again when he faces his final imprisonment in 2 Timothy 4:17 “But the Lord stood by my side and gave me strength so that through me the message might fully be proclaimed and all the gentiles might here it.”

We need to recollect when we’re worshipping in Christian community that always in almost every service were is someone in the service who is in desperate need of assurance that the Lord is standing with them. That is the great moment as we’re standing in worship is think about this and say, “Oh Lord we assure all those who are here today that you stand by their side. Quicken them with your presence as we stand.”

So sitting and standing. They’re just not motions that we go through. They have deep scriptural content and meaning.

Another way that we respond to God with actions is through leaping and dancing. Which we don’t do a great deal of because it’s kind of fanatical. 2 Samuel 6:16 “As the ark of the Lord was entering the city of David, Micheal daughter of Saul watched from a window. When she saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord she despised him in her heart.” That’s the most famous passage in the Old Testament regarding dancing.

It should be noted that the dancing wasn’t just simply because somebody wanted to kick up their heels. That it was associated with a great deliverance that the Lord accomplished. I give anybody in here permission that anytime God does something really spectacular on your behalf that has really brought liberation to your life he has spared your life from death or done some marvelous thing for you, you have permission in the service to dance.

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

Jesus says in Luke 6:23 “Rejoice in that day and leap for joy because great is your reward in heaven.” Acts 3:7-8 “The man who was at the Gate Beautiful, paralyzed from birth, when he was healed, got up walking and jumping and praising God.” Exodus 15:20-21 is a choreographed situation practically. The exodus had occurred and they were on the other side. “Miriam, Moses’ sister, took a tambourine in her hand and all the people followed her with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them, ‘Sing to the Lord for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.’”

The Psalmist says in Psalm 30 “You turn my wailing into dancing. You remove my sackcloth and clothe me with joy.” Psalm 149 says “Sing to the Lord a new song. Let them rejoice in their maker. Let them praise him with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp.” You’ve got to have the right music to dance to the Lord with.

One of the things the Lord asks us to do in worship is not to behave differently than we would in normal life. Sometimes we come to worship and we think we have to be constrained because we’re now in the presence of God who demands that we be all quiet and tuned in and cool and passive. We’re not that way at all. Many times in real life we get excited and we clap our hands. We wave our arms. We express ourselves. The better we communicate on interpersonal basis the more that we learn that it’s just not verbal communication. It’s non-verbal communication that says volumes as well. So it’s ok in worship to gather corporately and express ourselves in non-verbal ways to God. It’s all right to lift your voice and praise him. It’s all right even as the Spirit of God might, move and place.

A fourth element of worship... and this is not something we can really do in a setting as this where we have walls and the like because this kind of worship is symbolic metaphorical. It’s walking. Walking is a form of worship. By the word walking we mean praising God in our everyday life. I would not want to give the connotation that worship is not simply something we do when we’re here. Worship is the activity of all of our life dedicated to God. Walking best expresses that ongoing, day to day, moment by moment worship before the Lord.

Let me reflect to you some of the kinds of things walking does in terms of worship.

Walking may represent inspection. There’s the sense that God comes in to examine our lives, not from the vantage point of the freeway but he does, in the words of Genesis 3:8, the man and his wife heard the sound of God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. What was God doing? The man and the woman was hiding behind the bushes. He was wanting to inspect the finer points of their life but they wanted to hide from him. He walked as an act of inspection. So worshipping the Lord through walking is to consciously invite God to examine our lives and come into the rooms we might want to shut off from him because they’ve not yet been cleaned up. Walking by inviting him to look and to clean.

Walking is also a sign of fellowship. Genesis 5:22-24. “After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God, then he was no more because God took him away.” Evidently Enoch did not walk with God in his younger years. It says, “After the birth of Methuselah he walked with God. And he was 65 years of age when that happened.

HOW SHALL WE WORSHIP GOD TOGETHER

Part 2

Having a child is a sobering experience. I've seen a lot of people change when they've had a child. They began to walk with God. Walking for Enoch implied fellowship with God. When you're walking with someone you're side by side. You're not going in different directions.

Thirdly walking signifies direction. "Can two walk together unless they be agreed?" So walking implies that the Lord is going with us in our life. If this is not happening then Isaiah's words are coming true – people walking in darkness. But what happens when we see Christ? We see light. Paul says "In which you used to walk when you followed the ways of this world." But now he tells us we are to walk in love. And walk in light. Walking as an act of worship implies we have direction in our life.

The final thing that can be said about walking is walking is tremendously healthy. Walking is a tremendous thing to do for your body. That's true spiritually as well. Walking gives you time. Walking gives you opportunity to arouse yourself. I've noticed that the times I feel the drowsiest if instead of laying down I would go out and take a walk, I'm suddenly reinvigorated. Walking with God is a tremendously invigorating experience. The same thing applies on a spiritual dimension. Times I get myself up and walk with God, and be among his people and be in prayer it is an invigorating, healthful experience.

We've got some other actions in worship we'll talk about – raising hands, clapping, various spiritual gifts that are employed. We're going to look at that the next Sunday night we have together. I sort of wanted to set this groundwork this evening. I feel God is doing a new thing in our body. I have felt it very incumbent upon me as teaching minister to give some kind of foundation so that God would be free in work, to biblically ordain and approve me.

Dr. Orr has said on spiritual renewal: Whenever the Spirit of God begins to move mightily in any given time what you will notice first is the same thing you'd notice if there is an old house that hasn't been attended to for a while and a great wind comes along. The things that begin to make the most noise first are all the clanging shutters and creaky doors. When the Spirit of God begins to move if you're not careful what can happen is some elements of life that are unhinged begin to make all the squeaks and the noise and people begin to get their mind off of what God is doing and start looking at that squeaky hinge that is vibrating by the pulse of the Spirit of God. I would like through these messages to sort of set a foundation so that as the Spirit of God is moving upon us we can have those hinges preoiled to flow in the direction that is vibrant and tuned to the Spirit of God and we worship not as something we do to attract attention for ourselves. But to see it as the most powerful and most liberating thing we can ever do in this whole wide world to praise God. To open our lives to him, to be cleansed by him. To be purified. To be rejuvenated in our whole life in his presence. Worship ought to have that quickening experience for us. And it is.

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