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the Essence of Worship

By Terry Dashner

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Faith Fellowship Church...PO Box 1586...Broken Arrow, OK 74013...Pastor Terry Dashner

"Essence of Worship"

Is there a difference in the form of worship and the essence? Yes, as a matter of fact, many churches today are struggling with the proper form of worship. So widespread is this problem that many churches have divided into two services on Sunday mornings. In one service the form of worship is traditional music. Only hymns, piano, and organ are used while in the other service only contemporary music is used. One service is youthful, dressed down, loud, and "rock-and-rollish" music bursts. In the other, well you guessed it. The music is softer, older, and church hymnals are used to reflect on the words while they are being sung.

I want to speak to you today about the essence of worship. The essence of worship is imperative for "true" worship in the church, or any place you worship God. Jesus predicted the demise of worship form when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in John chapter four. You may remember the scripture, "Jesus said to her, `Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:21; and 23-24 NASB).

The New Testament reveals a stunning silence about the outward forms of corporate worship and a radical intensification of worship as an inner, Godward experience of the heart. The silence about outward forms is obvious in the fact that the gathered life of the church is never called "worship" in the New Testament. Moreover, the main Old Testament word for worship is virtually absent from the New Testament letters. Its usage clusters in the Gospels (26 times) and in the Book of Revelation (21 times). But in the Epistles of Paul it occurs only once, namely, in I Corinthians 14:25 where the unbeliever falls down at the power of prophecy and confesses God is in the assembly. It doesn't occur at all in the letters of Peter, James, or John.

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The Old Testament idea, captured in the Greek word *proskuneo*, implied a physical falling down in reverence before a visible majesty. This happened as people came to the visible, incarnate Christ in the Gospels. And it happened in Revelation as the saints and angels and elders were actually in the presence of the visible, risen Christ. But in the age between the ascension and the second coming Christ is not visibly here to worship. Therefore, worship is radically internalized and delocalized. In Matthew 15:8–9

Jesus says, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me." Worship that does not come from the heart is vain, empty. It is not authentic worship.

Consider what Paul does to some of the other words related to Old Testament worship. For example, the next most frequent word for worship in the Old Testament (after *proskuneo*) is the word *latreup* which is usually translated "serve" as in Exodus 23:24, "You shall not worship their gods, nor serve

them" (NASB). When Paul uses this word for Christian worship, he goes out of his way to make sure that we know he means not a localized or outward form for worship practice but a nonlocalized, spiritual experience. In fact, he takes it so far as to treat virtually all of life as worship when lived in the right spirit. Here's another example, in Romans 1:9 he says, "I serve [or worship] [God] with my spirit in the gospel of his Son." And in Philippians 3:3, Paul says that true Christians "worship" [God] in the Spirit of God...and put no confidence in the flesh" (NASB). Then again he says in Romans 12:1, for Christians to "present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Paul sees all of life and ministry as an expression of that inner experience of worship.

To be continued...keep the faith. Worship the Lord with everything in you, any time, any place. Pastor t.

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The Essence of Worship (part 2)

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"Essence of Worship" (continued)

The essence of worship is where it's at. I think you will agree with this statement if you read the first part of this document. So let's move on. We've been talking about the localized and institutionalized worship of the Old Testament having been delocalized and deinstitutionalized in the New Testament because the saints worship God in spirit and truth. We see further evidence of this in Paul's ministry. Paul calls his own ministry a "priestly service (of worship)," and he calls the converts themselves an "acceptable offering (in worship)" to God (Romans 15:16; cf. Philippians 2:17). He even calls the money that the churches send him "a fragrant aroma and acceptable sacrifice to God (in worship)"

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(Philippians 4:18 JP). And his own death for Christ he calls a "drink offering" to God (II Timothy 4:6).

This is what it means when we read things like, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). And "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:17 NASB). This is the central New Testament action of worship: to act in a way that reflects the glory of God—to do a thing in the name of Jesus with thanks to God. But the New Testament uses those greatest of all worship sentences without any reference to Sunday worship services. They describe life. Again, the essence of worship is not external, localized acts, but an inner, God ward experience that shows itself externally not primarily in church services. The fundamental reason for this is probably that the Old Testament was mainly a "come see" religion and the New Testament fulfillment is a "go tell" religion.

Now let me address the question: What is the essence of that inner experience which we call worship? Worship, whether an inner experience of the heart or an outward act of the body, or of the congregation collectively—is a magnifying of God. That is, it is an act that shows how magnificent He is. It is an act that reveals or expresses how great and glorious He is. Worship is all about consciously reflecting the worth or value of God. Paul's passion is that what he does with his body, whether in life or death, will always be worship. In life and death his mission is to magnify Christ—to show that Christ is magnificent, to exalt Christ, and demonstrate that He is great. That's plain from verse 20, that Christ shall be "exalted in my body, whether by life or death." Paul knew in his heart that God willed his life to continue after his Roman imprisonment, he would be more determined than ever to minister to the saints. That would be good for all the churches that Paul ministered to. But, on the other hand, if God called him home that would be gain also. Death would take him into a deeper intimacy with the Lord. And that is especially good.

Therefore, the inner essence of worship is cherishing Christ as gain, indeed as more gain than all that life can offer—family, career, retirement, fame, food, and friends. The essence of worship is experiencing Christ as gain. It is savoring Him. It is naming Him as the end of your search. Jesus is the object of your faith. John Piper, whom I quote often, brings this topic together in one sentence. He says, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Christ is magnified in my death,

when in my death I am satisfied with Him, when I experience death as gain because I gain Him. Or another way to say it is that the essence of praising Christ is prizing Christ. Christ will be praised in my death, if in my death He is prized above life. The inner essence of worship is prizing Christ. Are you satisfied in Jesus Christ? You can by receiving Him as Savior and Lord and walking with Him daily through prayer and praise. Tell Him often that you are thankful for Him. Tell Him often that you are glad in Him. He's waiting to hear from you. Start talking to Him and enjoy the fellowship of worship.

Keep the faith. Stay the course. Jesus is coming again. I believe it's time to WORSHIP!

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