

Worship - Part One *by Charles E. Wigg*

WORSHIP DOES NOT FLOW FROM SELF OCCUPATION:

Worship does not come from occupation with ourselves, or with our sins. It flows from our hearts as we are occupied with God, whether it be the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit.

I have found so often in the time of worship, that believers are thinking of their sins, of the things that they have done, of all that they have been forgiven. They are remembering all that Christ suffered because of their sin and guilt. This can be a subtle form of self-occupation.

In true worship I am not occupied with myself or with my sins, but with my Lord and Savior, or with my Heavenly Father. In true worship I speak to Him about Himself. An example of this can be seen in Psalm 45. There David says "I will speak the things which I have made touching THE KING". As a result of his thoughts being occupied with THE KING, his heart was welling forth with a good matter.

By way of contrast, in Psalm 32, David is thinking of his sins and what he has confessed and been forgiven. But Psalm 45 is so much richer in response and worship than Psalm 32.

We are told to forget the things which are behind, Phil.3;13. We are told that God will remember our sins no more, Heb.8;12. Then let us not seek to remind God of the things He does not wish to remember. Let us go on to maturity, Heb.5;12 to 6;3.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP:

There are two aspects of worship, (a). Individual or personal worship. (b). Collective, when we worship as a company of God's saints, gathered to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(a), Individual or personal:

Individual or personal worship is what I offer to God, when alone in His blessed presence. I offer to Him my personal appreciation of Himself, of His Person, of His worth, of His gifts, of His grace and of His work. This is a sweet and wonderful experience. It enriches our souls, changes our lives and sometimes like Moses, makes our faces to glow with happiness. This is to be encouraged. However when we are gathered together it is a little different.

(b), Collective worship:

When in assembly, though the worship and response comes from my heart, yet when I worship and praise God audibly and publicly, I am expressing the feelings and adoration of the whole assembly. It is not just my own feelings and thoughts, but I am leading the assembly. By the Holy Spirit I become their voice.

So then in collective worship we should generally use the plural pronouns; we, and us, instead of I, and me. Our and ours, instead of my or mine. We see this in Rev.4;11, "O OUR God, and in chapter 5;9 & 10, "Thou hast redeemed US to God....made US kings and priests". When we do this, and the saints respond with AMEN!, they are saying "it is so", "what he has said is just what we feel and would say".

THE USE OF HYMNS:

The intelligent use of the hymn book is also important.

Hymns, wisely chosen and sung with joy and feeling, contribute so much to the richness of collective worship. We should get to know our hymn book better and learn to use it wisely.

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It would not be intelligent or wise for one brother, (as is done in some places), to announce all the hymns. Neither is it desirable to sing all the hymns at the commencement of the meeting. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to prompt and to lead us.

When we gather to remember the Lord Jesus, it not the elders or the evangelist who are in charge, it is the Holy Spirit. We must give Him His place and allow Him to preside and to lead. This emphasizes the need for each of us to be in personal communion with the Lord throughout the week. Then when we gather the Holy Spirit will be not be grieved, He will be in liberty and we will be in communion with Him and sensitive to His leading.

If this is not so, our sisters will feel frustrated, because the thoughts and feelings of their hearts, (which the Holy Spirit knows), will not be given expression to. (We will explain this more fully later).

Sometimes numbers of hymns are sung at the commencement of the meeting, to allow the late-comers to arrive. The lack of punctuality, shows a lack of interest & a lack of self-discipline and organization in our lives.

When the Lord and His disciples gathered to keep the passover we read, "When the hour was come He sat down". He is never late. Should we be late?. If we had an appointment with the Prime Minister, or the President or the Queen, would we dare to be late? How much more then should we be punctual when it is the King of Kings whom we come to meet?

The remembrance meeting is not a time for the singing of our favourite hymns, or Gospel hymns, but hymns should be chosen and sung, that are suited to the occasion. If we are in communion with the Lord, often a hymn may be brought to our minds even before coming to the meeting. We may even be singing it over to ourselves. The rich thoughts and lovely language moving my heart. Thus I come to the meeting prepared and there will not be a long pause when the meeting is to begin.

When a hymn is sung in the Spirit, He may use the thoughts that the hymn expresses to move another brother to worship. The thoughts that brother expresses, or the particular glory that fills the vision of his soul, may stimulate another brother to worship, or bring to his mind a hymn that expresses the same thought. This emphasizes the importance of our knowing the hymn book.

It is a profitable thing for us to gather in groups in each others homes, and to spend time, accompanied by a keyboard or some instrument, to learn the hymns, the tunes and how to sing them. Usually God places in an assembly a person who has a good voice and an understanding of singing and of music. Such should be encouraged to help the believers to sing better, and to sing to the glory of God. This will assist in enriching the time of worship, and indeed all of the meetings. It will help in our outreach meetings also, because good singing attracts people. It will bring more glory to God and be profitable to His people.

Often there are rich and beautiful hymns in the book that are forgotten and never sung. They are sometimes replaced by short and repetitious chorusses, of little depth and little value.

THE LEADING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:

What we have discussed in the previous chapter will help us to understand the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8;14 & 15, show that the characteristic of the sons of God is that they are led by the Spirit of God. He gives liberty and utterance, producing a sense of relationship, enabling us to cry "Abba Father"!

However it must be pointed out that this leading and communion does not only happen when we are assembled to remember the Lord and to worship Him. If the Holy Spirit is grieved within me by my allowance of sin, or by carelessness in my daily life during the other days of the week, then I cannot expect to experience His leading when we gather.

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Because of this, the liberty,(or the lack of it), and the quality of the worship, when we gather, is often a reliable indication of the spiritual state of the saints individually, and also of the state of the assembly.

But let us suppose that we are in a healthy spiritual state and are filled with the Holy Spirit. Then in my personal Bible readings and devotions, and in our family Bible reading, prayers, and meditation, God's Spirit will reveal to us the glory of Christ and of the Father, John 16;14 & 15. Then when we gather, our "golden bowls" will be full of incense, and our harps (hearts), will be in tune, Rev.5;8.

But though our hearts are full, we will not be clashing with each other, or all be worshiping, singing, shouting, at the one time. The leadership of the Holy Spirit brings in the beauty of order, not confusion and chaos. You will find that the hymns and praises will compliment each other, and a beautiful theme will run right through the meeting.

Our sisters too will have their part in worship, but not audibly, for a woman is not suffered to speak in the assembly, 1 Cor.14;34. Sometimes our sisters feel frustrated because of this, especially when the brothers, (who have the priveledge of speaking, praying and worshiping audibly), are silent and have nothing to offer to the Lord. But as incense is sweet, permeating all, yet is silent, so the fragrance of the adoration that is in the hearts of the sisters, should be expressed by the brothers. This will be so, if we are led by the Holy Spirit.

For example: a sister who enters into the spirit of the meeting, may have a hymn occupying her mind. She may even think to herself, or silently say to the Lord, "If I was a brother I would anounce that hymn". Imagine her joy when a brother announces the very hymn that is in her mind. This is how the Holy Spirit leads. It is her hymn, it is being sung, yet she has not spoken or breached the Lord's commandment.

This applies to worship as well. The very thoughts that are in a sister's heart will be expressed by a brother, almost as if he knows what is there in her mind and heart. All this makes worship, when led by the Holy Spirit, a rich and thrilling experience. Yet we have not come to seek thrills, but to remember and to worship the Lord.

In July 1992, I was in the Montazh assembly in Heliopolis, Egypt. The language spoken was Arabic and I knew only a few words of that language. But after the meeting a sister came to me and said, "We were in heaven this morning".

Sometimes I have had sisters come to me and thank me for anouncing their hymn, or for offering their sacrifice of praise. This is so thrilling to the sisters, and encouraging to the brothers, but more importantly, glorifying to God.

THE LORD'S SUPPER, AND WORSHIP:

Over the centuries, the Lord's supper has been shrouded in mystery and superstition, until in some churches it is no longer the Lord's supper, but the practice of a sad form of idolatry. Even in our assemblies, sometimes through ignorance it is regarded as a means of grace. Many would not miss the Lord's supper, lest they miss a supernatural blessing. This is just another form of superstition.

Some mistakenly think that when they take part in the Lord's supper, that in eating the bread and drinking of the cup, they are performing an act of worship. no where in the Bible does it teach this. The purpose of the Lord's supper is double. Firstly it is to cause us to remember the Lord Jesus himself, "This do in remembrance of ME". Secondly it is to enable us to show forth His death, until He comes. The first is inward, the second is outward, but niether remembrance, or showing forth His death is worship in itself.

However the remembrance of the Lord, the calling of Him to our minds, will surely move our hearts to worship. In most of the assemblies the Lord's supper is celebrated at the end of the time of worship. In this case it becomes the climax to which the worship and praises of the saints lead up to. In other assemblies it is celebrated at the beginning of the meeting, in that case it sets the tone of the meeting, and the calling to mind of the Lord Jesus, (if we are right with God, and in the Spirit), will surely move our hearts to worship and adoration.

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Both could be correct, there is no explicit command given in the word, as to where in the meeting it should be celebrated, at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end.

In Acts 20:7, we are told that it was on the first day of the week that they assembled to break bread. However the Lord's supper was not partaken of until after mid-night. It was preceded by ministry, and followed by fellowship, discussion. However we should not take this example as a pattern to be rigidly followed, because the circumstances were special. It was Paul's last visit to Troas, he was about to depart on the morrow and perhaps would never see them again. It was his last opportunity to speak with them and this would explain why he spoke for a long time, until mid-night.

It is not my intention to expound on the Lord's supper in this paper, but just to show that to partake of that supper is not an act of worship, but of remembrance.

One other thing should be said. The worship offered publicly while we are gathered, should be offered in such a way as to be heard by all of those assembled. If it is not heard by all the saints, then it is not understood. If it is not understood, then how can the saints say "Amen", see 1 Cor.14:15 & 16. This means that those who do take audible part, should do so in a clear voice that is loud enough for all to hear. Often the saints are frustrated and disappointed when they can't hear what the participating brother is saying.

Sometimes it would help if the table was placed in the centre of the gathering, instead of being placed at the front, as if it is some kind of altar. It also means that large gatherings (for worship) are a mistake, for these help to create such problems.

Large gatherings tend to produce a more formal atmosphere and to discourage the more timid of the brothers from taking part audibly.

THE USE OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP:

There is nothing in scripture, (to my knowledge), to tell us that it is right or wrong to use musical instruments in the time of worship. This has become a contentious issue in these days.

Some want to bring in all kinds of instruments, and to change the time of worship into a time of entertainment, to change it into a kind of sacred concert, (or in some cases, a not so sacred concert). Others are greatly offended by the very thought of introducing an organ.

I am sure of this, that if the Holy Spirit is free, if He is not grieved and is given His proper place, then music is not necessary.

I am also quite sure, that if the Holy Spirit is grieved, and the hearts of the saints are not right with God, then no amount of music can ever make up for this. Some will argue that musical instruments were used in the worship of God in the Old Testament, and that they are mentioned in the book of Revelation.

My answer to this is that in the Old Testament musical instruments are typical, and that in the book of Revelation, they are symbolical. I am sure that if what the scripture teaches us, (as we have sought to bring out in these suggestions), is followed, then musical instruments will neither be needed, nor will they be desired.

IN CONCLUSION:

As we conclude, let me state that this small paper is not meant to be a "Handbook of worship Practice". It should never be regarded as such. These are suggestions only, but suggestions that in practice have been blessed of God over generations of Assembly experience.

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Let us, like the Bereans, demonstrate spiritual nobility by accepting the word with readiness of mind, but then let us search the scriptures to see if these things are so. Acts 17;11. My only desire is that God may be glorified and the saints may be enriched.

May there be a revival of true spiritual worship, (John 4;23,) that the offering of the saints, (Judah and Jerusalem), may be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in the former years, (Mal.3; 3 & 4.)

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