

Charge to the Candidates
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Peter Briggs

INTRODUCTION

In recent weeks the elder of Foothills Fellowship have begun to discuss the theology of worship. This evening I would like to share with you some thoughts and insights that are emerging from our conversation.

In a paper entitled *Let the Nations Be Glad!* John Piper states the following:

Missions exists because worship doesn't.

In other words, the purpose and plan of God is that His worshiping community shall encompass all nations, tribes, and peoples; therefore, the object of missions is to bring that global worshiping community into being through the preaching of the gospel, the making of disciples, and the planting and establishing of churches.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins by stating that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Clearly our glorifying God and enjoying Him forever entails worship. In fact, I believe we can accurately represent our eternal state as an *endless Sabbath filled with endless worship*. Thus, our worship experiences in this life should be a *representative microcosm* – tantamount to a first fruits offering – of our eternal worship experience.

In Romans 12:1-2 Paul states the following:

Therefore I plead with you, brothers, in view of the aforementioned mercies of God, that you present your bodies unto God as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice – *a service of worship rendered with the mind*. And do not be conformed to this present age by allowing it to press your thinking process into its mold, but rather be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

One point that I derive from this passage is that worship should be the focus of *all that we are and do*. In other words, worship of Yahweh should permeate our entire lives, and all our acts of piety, devotion, obedience, and ministry should be subsumed beneath worship.

However, I am convinced that the meaning of worship is not well understood in our day. In fact, I would say that much of the evangelical community, at least in the west, has strayed far from a biblical representation and understanding of worship. Because of the central importance of worship in the global purpose and plan of God, *this is an extremely critical issue*. In fact, I would suggest that the preaching of the prophets of Israel, which was so scathing against idolatrous worship, applies in our day and time to much of what we falsely represent as worship.

And so my purpose this evening is to derive from Scripture three parameters of a *biblical representation of worship*. Obviously, in these few minutes I cannot do justice to this vital subject. Instead, I can only hope to point the direction for our further study, inquiry, and research.

I have organized my thoughts on the subject of worship according to the following three-point outline:

- ◆ The tangibility of worship
- ◆ The progression of worship
- ◆ The glory of worship

THE TANGIBILITY OF WORSHIP

A little over one year ago the elders of Foothills Fellowship came to recognize that our church was on the brink of bankruptcy. *How* we came to that recognition is story for another day. The point of my bringing this up is to share *how* God directed us to address this issue, and *how* he responded to our obedience.

Consider the Book of Leviticus, which we could accurately represent as the *worship manual* for the nation of Israel. As we read through this book, our eyes tend to glaze over with the seemingly endless discussion of offerings, things which are unclean, and so forth. It is easy for us to fall prey to the conclusion that Leviticus doesn't apply to us who view ourselves as having been freed from the Law. However, are there, in fact, theological principles in Leviticus that are normative for all peoples, periods, and places? Regarding this question, I am mindful of Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:19 as follows:

Whoever then deprives of its authority one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

So, if Jesus were standing here before you this evening, what normative principles would *He* have us derive from the Book of Leviticus in regard to worship? I believe there are at least three:

1. *The principle of divine ownership*. Yahweh owns all that we are and have by virtue of creation and redemption; we are *stewards* of the material assets with which Yahweh has blessed us.
2. *The principle of tangibility*. True worship of Yahweh must, *of necessity*, include a tangible offering component.
3. *The principle of first fruits*. By offering back to Yahweh a *representative portion* of that with which he has blessed us, we enable him to consecrate the rest for our use within the sphere defined by his commandments.

Reflecting on these three normative principles, we observe that they are all present in the teachings of Christ and the apostles. Therefore, they are, indeed, normative. Returning to the financial dilemma faced by the elders of Foothills in the summer of 2007, we came to recognize these normative principles from the Book of Leviticus. Our response was to teach our people that so-called worship which is entirely intangible is *not worship*, and the presentation of our tithes and offerings is a *necessary part* of our public worship experience.

The response of Yahweh to this act of obedience has been *glorious*. From the state of impending financial disaster only one year ago, we are now substantially ahead of budget – a state that I have never before seen in over ten years as a member of Foothills Fellowship!

THE PROGRESSION OF WORSHIP

When I was 16, I was asked to participate, along with other young people, in the leadership of a worship service at the Presbyterian church where my family and I attended in Middletown, New York. In particular, I was asked to read Isaiah 6:1-8, which, for that reason, is a passage of Scripture that has been precious to me ever since. Allow me to share it with you right now:

Isaiah 6:1-8: ¹ In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw Adonai sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe

filled the temple. ² Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of His glory!” ⁴ And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth.” ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” ⁸ Also I heard the voice of Adonai, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me.”

In this passage we observe the second parameter of worship, which actually derives from the first – that is, *the progression of worship*.

That this was a worship experience for Isaiah is unmistakable. In fact, through this vision he was invited by Yahweh to participate in a worship experience that was taking place in the temple of Yahweh. While this worship experience was real, it was taking place in the spiritual realm rather than the physical. That is, it was invisible to all human eyes.

In the vision, Isaiah sees Yahweh being worshiped by two seraphim – that is, by two angels – who proclaim the absolute and unapproachable holiness of Yahweh. Isaiah’s response to what he sees was to recognize and confess his own unholiness. Yahweh responds to Isaiah’s confession by dispatching one of the seraphim with a live coal taken with tongs from the altar. As he touches Isaiah’s lips with the coal, the seraph proclaims, “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” What happens next is most noteworthy. Isaiah hears a call

to service from the lips of Yahweh, expressed not as a command but as a *pleading question*, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Isaiah’s response entails a transformation of this question into a command: “Here am I! Send me.”

Isaiah’s worship experience teaches us the normative principle that true worship *always entails* the recognition and confession of the following in progression:

- ◆ The absolute and unapproachable holiness of Yahweh.
- ◆ One’s own sinfulness.
- ◆ The fact that by virtue of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice our iniquity is taken away and our sin is purged.
- ◆ The call to service in ministry from the lips of Yahweh and the eager response, “Here am I! Send me.”

This is the progression of worship. Lest we casually allocate what I have just shared to the “Old Testament,” and therefore as not being applicable to us, I direct your attention back to Romans 12:1-2, which I quoted for you at the beginning and in which the progression of worship is confirmed. Our reflection upon the grace of God as unfolded through Paul in the 1st through the 11th chapters of Romans *necessarily motivates* the rendering unto God the offering of our bodies as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice – a service of worship rendered with the mind.

THE GLORY OF WORSHIP

As I prepare to draw this message to a conclusion, allow me to quote an adaptation of Revelation 5:10-12 as follows:

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, and who redeemed us unto God by His blood, and made us a kingdom of priests unto our God, to receive blessing and glory and honor and might and power and riches and strength and wisdom.

I have represented our eternal state as an endless Sabbath filled with endless worship. What will be the content and focus of our endless worship? I believe the Apostle John has captured that content and focus in the Book of the Revelation. The worship scene recorded in the 5th chapter is that which unfolds as the Lamb takes the scroll and is about to open its seven seals. It is a cosmic worship experience, for it encompasses all of the creatures of God according to the 13th verse. This may be the same worship experience as the one referred to by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-11 as follows:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as an thing to be grasped and held onto at all costs, but rather Himself He emptied, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself to the extreme and became obedient to the point of death, even such a death as that on the cross. Wherefore, because of this supreme act of self-emptying, God the Father also has highly exalted Him and conferred upon Him The Name which is above every name, that at the name of Jeshua every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jeshua Ha Mashiach is Yahweh, to the glory of God the Father.

The glory of worship is the declaration and adoration of *The Name* which is above every name – that Name which is inexhaustible in its beauty, splendor, and majesty.

The Apostle Paul adds to the representation of this aspect of worship in the following passage from Ephesians 2:4-7:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit

together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, *that in the ages to come He might show forth the exceeding riches of His grace* expressed in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Thus, the glory of worship is to declare the exceeding riches of the grace of Yahweh, whereby He has redeemed us from bondage to sin and death by the atoning sacrifice of His Son, has made us to be a kingdom of priests, and through the endless ages of eternity will showcase through us His glorious grace.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, and who redeemed us unto God by His blood, and made us a kingdom of priests unto our God, to receive blessing and glory and honor and might and power and riches and strength and wisdom.

Amen!