

Worship Wars?

What comes to your mind when you think of the word ‘worship’? In addition to defining worship it’s also important that we ask the question “Is the worship of God important for my life?” Although I wholeheartedly acknowledge the importance of ‘all of life’ worship (Romans 12:1-2) this article will primarily focus on corporate Lord’s Day worship. Several years ago Presbyterian pastor, Sean Lucas wrote, “It’s no secret that the single most divisive issue in most congregations today—whether Presbyterian or some other denomination—is worship style.” The ‘divisive issue’ that Dr. Lucas is referring to came to be known as the ‘worship wars.’ Churches literally divided over what style of music should be played and sung during the corporate worship service of God’s people. Debates arose over whether the music should be traditional or contemporary and this became the defining issue when it came to church membership for some. Some churches that have tried to solve this issue by having two services—one for each style of music—find that it’s as if there are two separate churches and their members often don’t even know one another.

Although a number of negative things came out of the ‘worship wars’ one important positive thing was the reminder that scripture teaches us that corporate worship is absolutely crucial for our Christian lives. And what I mean by this statement is that the Lord’s Day gathering together for worship of God’s people is important—not merely for the music—but for all of the elements that make up a healthy worship service. I want to begin a series of articles on the importance of worship by looking at Psalm 33. Although we won’t be addressing the topic of worship exhaustively, I hope to show us from this Psalm that worship is the proper response of fallen people to a perfectly holy God. Let’s look at this Psalm initially under the heading...

—The beauty of the worship of God

Look with me in verse one: “Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!” The Hebrew word translated ‘shout for joy’ reminds us that we’re to joyfully come into God’s presence to give him the worship he alone deserves. It’s glorious to be a child of God and our belief of this truth should show up in our worship of Him—not only for the blessings that we receive—but primarily because of the awesome God that He is!

Interestingly, the phrase translated, ‘shout for joy’ in verse one is a command. It speaks volumes to our sinful condition when we who have been so blessed by God should have to be commanded to worship Him. One of my seminary professors at Covenant Theological Seminary, Dr. Jack Collins, once wrote these words: “And what of corporate worship—when the maker of the universe invites His redeemed people into His presence...to receive His love, and His word of grace, and His very presence, the things our souls yearn for—God has given it to us out of His overflowing goodness....I suppose it shows you how foolish we are that we have to be commanded to do this—but it also shows how devoted God is to loving us, that he stoops to

our foolishness.” Obedience to God’s commands at every point—and certainly when He commands our worship—is always for our good and His glory.

The next phrase of verse one is, “Praise befits the upright.” The Hebrew adjective translated ‘befits’ literally means ‘that which is beautiful or becoming’ or ‘that which is fitting and appropriate.’ It’s a beautiful thing to give joyful praise to God. It’s always the appropriate response for all fallen mankind and most certainly for those fallen men and women saved by God’s free grace—those whom the Psalmist calls ‘the upright.’ Proper heart worship is beautiful, appropriate and pleasing in God’s sight.

The Christian gospel teaches us that only Jesus Christ obeyed perfectly. Christians rest in the finished work of Jesus not in our imperfect obedience. Those of us who’ve been forgiven of our sins and redeemed by Jesus Christ—rather than being divided over worship styles—have every reason to joyfully gather with God’s people on the Lord’s Day to give him the worship that he alone deserves!

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