

## Taking Another Look at Worship

By Santiago Lange



Soren Kierkegaard once wrote a parable that told of a community of ducks waddling off to duck church one Sunday to hear their duck preacher. After they waddled into the duck sanctuary, the service began and the duck preacher spoke eloquently of how God had given the ducks wings with which to fly. He pounded the pulpit with his beak and said, "With these wings, there is no where we ducks can not go! There is no God-given task we ducks can not accomplish!

With these wings we no longer need walk through life. We can soar high in the sky!" Shouts of "amen" were quacked throughout the duck congregation. The duck preacher concluded his message by exclaiming, "With our wings we can fly through life! WE.....CAN.....FLY!!!!" More ducks quacked out loud "AMENS!" in response. Every duck loved the service. In fact all the ducks that were present commented on what a wonderfully convicting message they had heard from their duck preacher....and then they left the church and waddled all the way home.

When we hear this story it is natural to be critical of those ducks. But, if we are honest with ourselves, when it comes to worship, at times we are like ducks. Too often would be worshipers waddle away from worship the same way they waddled in....unchallenged and unchanged. This is unfortunate because genuine worship involves our responding to God's grace by giving Him our lives. In Romans 12:1-2 Paul described worship in this way when he wrote, "Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies, your lives, as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God, this is our spiritual act of WORSHIP. And do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be TRANSFORMED by the renewing of your mind." True worship then should be a time when we welcome God to challenge and change us.

We cannot overstate the importance of worship. Worship is to the church like breathing to the human organism; it is an absolute necessity. The church must worship to live. But it must not stop with worship. Worship provides the inspiration for everything else the church does. In other words, if we are to be a healthy church, then a proper attitude about worship is vital because it will keep us strong in everything else we do: evangelism, ministry, discipleship, fellowship and, as we read in Romans 12, grace affects our worship as a church.

Misconceptions about worship abound. Worship is the response of all that MAN is to all that GOD is and does. So worship happens whenever human inadequacy is met by and embraces the grace of God. Worship is the intersection of our lives with God's presence and power. In worship we experience the truth of James 4:8 as we "draw near to God and He draws near to us." Worship then is man and God communing together.

What areas are involved in authentic worship?

### **The first area is a proper attitude about God.**

Some theologians have described God with the phrase, "wholly other" meaning that God is not one of us, nor is He like us. God is beyond anything we could imagine. He is greater than we can comprehend, more magnificent than we could ever describe. He is good beyond description, powerful beyond description, holy beyond description. He is completely independent of this world, and His involvement with humanity is purely by choice, not the result of any need or limitation on His part. He is "wholly other". So we enter times of worship with an attitude of reverence or respect for God. The prophet Isaiah wrote of a time of worship in which he learned to have reverence for God. Isaiah chapter 6 records a vision in which he went to heaven and saw God high and lifted up on His throne. When this happened Isaiah was overcome with an awareness of God's majesty and holiness. He heard the angels saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

The Hebrew language has no words to express comparison. In English (and German) we have words like "good, better, best" or "big, bigger, biggest." But the Hebrews don't have words like this, so to express comparison they use repetition. Many times in both Old and New Testaments, we will find words repeated to express intensity or comparison. If the Hebrews wanted to describe great joy, they said, "joy, joy." If they wanted to speak of great fear they said, "fear, fear." Many times in the Bible Jesus said, "Verily, Verily I say unto you..." When He said this He was saying, "What I am about to say is REALLY, REALLY, true!"

When the Hebrews wanted to express a superlative they repeated the word three times. This occurs only twice in the Bible, both times in very interesting places. One is found in Revelation, Chapter 8 where John sees the judgments of God being poured out upon the earth. A great angel in the form of an eagle flies through the heavens crying out, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth." (Rev. 8:12). The angel is saying here that there could be no greater time of trouble, no greater woe. The only other time this superlative repetition is used is here in Isaiah 6 when the angels cry, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the Lord God Almighty. The whole earth is filled with His glory!" In other words they are saying, "God is the holiest Being in all creation. Worship begins with this attitude about God, this awe, this reverence, this awareness of God's supreme greatness.

Worship begins with this attitude of reverence and respect for who God is. But it doesn't stop there because a proper attitude about GOD leads to....

### **A proper attitude about ourselves.**

When we are confronted with the holy perfection of our God, we become painfully aware of our own shortcomings. Simon Peter experienced this that time he had been fishing all night and Jesus told him to put his net in the deep water. The story is recorded in Luke chapter 5. Simon answered Jesus by saying that they had worked all night and had caught nothing and then in an almost sarcastic tone He said, "But, if You say so, I will let down my nets." And then when he followed Jesus' instructions, "They caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break." In fact, when they began to load the fish into the boat, there were so many that the boat began to sink.

All this made Peter realize that he was in the presence of not just a man, but the living Christ. In response "He fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." (Luke 5:8). When the prophet Isaiah stood in the presence of our Holy, Holy, Holy God

he exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." There is something about being in the presence of God that makes us aware of our own sinfulness. Time spent in the presence of God opens our eyes and gives us a proper perspective on our lives. Standing in the light of God's loving perfection enables us to see our lives clearly again.

When we observe a master painter at work we may from time to time notice how he or she steps back away from the canvas so as to view it from different angles. Artists do this to keep their perspective correct. If an artist only works up close to the canvas he risks losing his sense of perspective and is in danger of magnifying the less important and diminishing the more important parts of his work. When we go about our work day in and day out, we are apt to give the wrong things an exaggerated importance. We tend to emphasize the trivial at the expense of the vital. We drift perhaps into sinful actions and rationalize them away. Because of this from time to time we should step aside like a painter and take the long view, the broader perspective, and let the light of God shine on our lives so we can see them more clearly.

God designed worship for this purpose. Through worship we come to see "things" as God sees them and somehow the glamour of the material and nonessential will lose its attractiveness and a proper perspective is restored. Worship allows us to stop our hectic lifestyle long enough to re-evaluate our lives.

There is a story of a wealthy entrepreneur who went on a hunting safari in Africa. He chose a seasoned guide and hired local natives to carry the necessary gear. Aggressive and driven, the business mogul wanted to go much faster than his guide from the very first day. And every day after that, he pushed and drove his bewildered safari team from morning to night, until they could hardly stand. Finally the burden bearers stopped and would go no farther; they would not stir from where they sullenly reclined in the shade. The tycoon, used to instant obedience, was furious. "Get up, Get up!" he yelled. "Push on"! But they all just sat there not even meeting his eyes. The impatient man stormed at his guide, "What's happening here? Why won't they go on?" The guide replied, "They must stay here all day. They won't move, no matter how much you shout and bully. We have been going too hard and fast, and we must let our souls catch up with our bodies".

So often we are like that tycoon. We rush through life until crisis comes and then we learn the hard way that we are designed to stop regularly and worship our Heavenly Father, and in so doing let our souls catch up. We need time with God, time to rest in his presence, time to get His perspective on our lives. So authentic worship requires a proper attitude about God which leads to a proper attitude about ourselves which should lead to one more thing...

#### **A proper attitude about our daily lives.**

Worship must not stop with a personal mystical experience. It must lead to practical ministry. Genuine worshipers see every task of every day an opportunity to worship God. J. C. Ryle said, "The best public worship is that which produces the best private Christianity".

In God's eye worship is much more than what happens on a Sunday. It is what happens the rest of the week. Christians who want to experience genuine worship respond as did Isaiah by saying, **"God, Here am I send me. Take my life and accept it as an offering to You. Use it as You see fit."** □