

Reformation
& Revival



A Quarterly Journal for Church Leadership

Volume 2, Number 1 • Winter 1993

dust from their feet” as a rebuke to those who do not accept the gospel. He doesn’t tell them to try a different method, revise their message, or buddy-up to the people in an effort to win them over. Instead they were to do exactly as Christ had commanded, preaching the gospel He had declared and ministering in His Name, no matter what *the result*. And what about Paul? Hear again Galatians 1:10: “Am I not trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Instead of seeking to be a people-pleaser, the true disciple, and thus the true worshiper, mirrors Christ’s uncompromising zeal to please the Father.

And so is our challenge. Can we hold ourselves accountable strictly to the Word of God in the areas of evangelism and worship rather than to charts of numerical growth and the response of the majority? Will we seek to please the true Object of our worship at the risk of losing our good standing with the “seeker”? Can we depend upon Christ to build His Church without abusing the purity of worship? Only those who know Christ can truly worship Him, and they will worship Him without the enticement of “seeker sensitive” tactics. To be sure, those who do not know Him need the attention of every believer as we attempt to earnestly persuade them to come to Christ. But let the focus of the saints be fully upon their holy God as they meet with Him in worship, so that when they take the gospel to the world, they will go empowered by the Seeker of men’s souls and in such a way that will please Him most.

Author

Mr. Bill Izard, a former school teacher, serves as an associate in the ministry of Christian Communicators Worldwide, North Little Rock, AR. He has assisted in leading public worship through music and teaching.

The end of all true revival of religion, and indeed of every true work of grace, is the offering to God the worship, honor, praise and glory which is due to His great name.

In terms of revival we can think of the church in two aspects: first, in its moribund condition in need of revival, and second, in its revived state in times of revival. But there is a third picture the Scriptures give us. It is of the church in its glorified condition in heaven. As we read about it, as in Revelation 5, for example, we recognize that the glorified church has as its great business and constant activity the offering to God the glory and honor that are His due. The whole of its preoccupation is with God in His infinite glory, and it cries concerning His worth, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

The significant thing is that whenever the church is quickened here on earth, that revival is marked by an increasing approximation to the worship of the church in glory. William McCulloch wrote how the revival at Cambuslang affected the worship of God’s people:

What was most remarkable was the spiritual glory of this solemnity. I mean the gracious and sensible presence of God amongst His people. Many of God’s dear children declared that they were abundantly satisfied with the goodness of God in His ordinances, and filled with joy and peace in believing. An extraordinary power of the divine Spirit accompanied the Word preached.

Another observer, Ebenezer Erskine, told how revival quickened what he called “the carcass of worship.”

Jonathan Edwards said the same thing of the revival in Northampton:

The goings of God were then seen in His sanctuary. God’s

day was delight, and His tabernacles were amiable. Our public assemblies were then beautiful. The congregation was alive in God's service, everyone earnestly intent on public worship, every ear eager to drink in the words of the minister who was preaching. The assembly in general were from time to time in tears while the Word was preached, some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors. Our public praises were then greatly enlivened. God was then served in our psalmody in some measure in the beauty of holiness. It has been observable that there has been scarce any part of divine worship wherein good men amongst us have had grace to be drawn forth and their hearts so lifted up in the ways of God, as in singing His praises in those days.

When God Comes

The cause of this effect of revival upon worship has been termed a visitation. People speak of how God came down to visit His people in accordance with Isaiah 64:1, "Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before You!" Again and again God is pictured as coming amongst His people. Formerly, they had perhaps known the edges of His ways, as they experienced His presence. There had been occasions when, in the midst of their worship, they may have found their souls soaring upward to God. But that is multiplied and magnified in days of revival, not only in the company of God's people but in the whole of a community. There is a consciousness of God which is, normally and generally speaking, absent.

When revival came to the Island of Lewis in Scotland, and some people I knew there spoke to me of it, they never spoke of *revival* coming to one area of the island or to another. Their conversation was always: "Did you hear that *God*

came to Barvas? Have you heard that *God* visited Ness?" The whole community had the impression that God had come.

I remember one of the first people who was converted in Barvas saying to me, "We often cried to God to come. My parents, I remember, cried to God that He would come. But when God comes it is an awesome thing to be there." The presence of God Himself creates worship. So in true revival we primarily discover not unusual phenomena but the manifestation of God in awesome glory. The outcome of revival is true, God-centered worship which is not contrived in the slightest but is drawn out of men and women by God's Spirit.

The Seeking Father

One of the great New Testament passages on worship is John 4, which tells of the conversion of the woman of Samaria. (Subsequently there was an awakening in Samaria as the people came in great droves to see Jesus.) John 4 deals mainly with a seeking Savior. But behind the seeking Savior, Jesus tells how there is also a seeking Father: the Father seeks worshipers to worship Him (v. 23).

It has been suggested that in John 4:20 the woman tried to distract Jesus from His uncomfortable probing of her moral life by saying, "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." However, it is not the subject of worship itself which was the diversion, or Jesus would not have elaborated on her comment as He did. In the context of the work of grace which was taking place in this woman's life, worship was the end and aim of everything. So while the woman surely was uncomfortable as Jesus began to face her with her need for repentance, worship was actually the very essence of what God was seeking in this woman's life, as it always is wherever the Spirit of God is disturbing and

awakening sinners. Behind the seeking Savior there is always the Father seeking worshippers.

God is not indifferent to whether we worship Him. He has made and redeemed us for this purpose. So whenever He revives His church, it is with this ultimate end in view. There is a sense in which there is nothing beyond this, because there is nothing beyond the glory of God for the believer. We can properly conclude, therefore, that the great aim of everything God is doing when He revives His church is worship.

God is not indifferent to *whom we worship*, nor is He indifferent to *how we worship*. In verse 24, Jesus says, "God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

When the woman asked, "Sir, I can see that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem," she was heading right to this issue. "Which is right?" she was asking. "Should it be Gerizim worship?" That is where the Samaritans were worshipping.

What was the mark of Gerizim worship? Well, it was sincere, enthusiastic worship. It seems from what we can learn that it was worship the people probably very much enjoyed. Yet it was void of truth. For this reason, the Samaritans who worshiped at Gerizim, even after their temple was destroyed, rejected the greater part of the Old Testament and therefore worshiped in unbiblical ignorance. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know" (v. 22). The Samaritans had their own priesthood, Scriptures and methods of worship. The essence of Gerizim worship was that it was divorced from truth because it was divorced from Scripture.

What was the mark of Jerusalem worship? It was precisely the opposite. It was worship according to the letter but without the Spirit, which is what Jesus meant when He

quoted Isaiah 29:13 regarding it, "These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (Matt. 15:8). This aroused the concern and even the anger of Jesus. What these Jews said with their lips, their hearts did not corroborate. They went through the formality of worship with great orthodoxy, but their spirit was abstracted from the worship. Their spirit was not in it. They were not engaged with God.

What are the two great enemies of true worship throughout history? Are they not the errors of Gerizim and Jerusalem? Zeal without knowledge, on the one hand, and knowledge without zeal, on the other. Truth without spirit, or spirit without truth. According to verses 23 and 24, both things are necessary.

The important thing about acceptable worship is not that it is acceptable to us, but that it is acceptable to God. That is the primary thing about worship. The focus of our thinking in the modern world is upon what is acceptable to us. But Jesus is speaking about what is acceptable to God.

Rational Worship

True worship is rational. Another way of saying this is that true worship involves truth and is therefore a conscious mental activity. Not all our activities have this character. We breathe, for example. We do not breathe consciously, saying to ourselves, "Now I must breathe in; now I must exhale; now I must breathe in again." Breathing is something we do without conscious effort. It is not something into which we put our mind and thinking. Acceptable worship is not like this. It must engage our minds in the sense that our minds must be occupied in thinking of God's character and glory, reviewing His works and His Word, pondering the wonder of our redemption and remembering all that God has wrought for us in Jesus Christ. Our minds are to be occupied with this. God is a rational God who has made us

rational creatures, and He has revealed Himself in His Word so that by engaging our minds we may come to know Him.

This is why the preaching and exposition of the Word of God are so closely related to worship. After Jesus said, "You Samaritans worship what you do not know," He added, "We worship what we do know" (v. 22). You will notice the reason: "For salvation is from the Jews." That is, salvation comes in the direct line of God's revelation in Scripture. Jesus was not speaking about any supposed exclusiveness of Jews as Jews. He was speaking about a revelation which God has given exclusively through His people in this manner. It is not a racial exclusiveness but a revelational fact that Jesus is speaking about. God has revealed Himself through the Jews. So worship should be according to their Scriptures.

For this reason it is a foolish thing for people to say, as some do, "I don't go to church to hear a man preaching; I go to worship God!" That sounds very superior and spiritual, but it betrays a profound misunderstanding both of worship and preaching. True preaching is not a display of a man's learning. It is not drawing attention to a man at all. Indeed, if when a man has preached the Word of God, people go out of the church saying, "What a marvelous man!", then he has failed disastrously. What they need to be saying is, "What a glorious, great and wonderful God we have! We were bowed down before Him today as the glories of His character were spread before us. We were taken up with Him. It was of God, we thought. It was His majesty and mercy, His grace and wonders, that captivated our souls." That is what true preaching does. So it is a foolish thing for people to say, "I don't go to church for preaching." If you do not go to church for preaching, your soul will never come into the glorious liberty of worshiping God.

That statement also displays a serious misunderstanding of worship, because true worship results from learning about God. Worship occurs as He reveals Himself. This is

why it is a glorious thing for us to hear about the way God manifested Himself in preaching in revival times. Revival preaching provoked and produced this quality of worship. If you are exercised about the need for revival, you and I will be crying to God for a revival of biblical, Spirit-anointed and empowered preaching.

If you are going to worship God in truth, you will need to concentrate your mind. That is why it is important that you do not come to church in a sleepy condition. Saturday night has much to do with worship on the Lord's Day morning. If you come to church in an exhausted, soporific condition, unable to concentrate your mind, you are not going to know very much about worshiping God in truth because your mind will not be able to engage in it. If worship matters to you, you will care about what time you go to bed on Saturday night.

When you come into church on Sunday morning, you will not be rushing into church breathlessly and be grabbing a hymnbook at the last minute. You will arrive quietly, wait before God and concentrate your mind upon Him. You will think of the glories of His grace. The Bible says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10).

Worship also means that we will be concentrating on the words of the hymns. Hymn singing is not an opportunity for us to stand up to see who is in church and who is not. Such worship is a travesty. We sing, "A mighty fortress is our God . . . (Ah, there is Mrs. Smith). . . a bulwark never failing . . . (There's Mr. Jones)." God cannot be worshiped in truth in that way.

Worship from the Heart

True worship is also spiritual. It must involve and engage the heart. When Jesus spoke of worshiping in spirit, He was speaking about worship which is inward and spiritual as distinct from worship which is merely outward and physical.

That is the significance of the phrase: “God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). The woman thought that worship depends on the right environment or form. But Jesus emphasized that it really depends on having a heart that is right with God. That is being in the spirit. John was referring to this when He said, “On the Lord’s Day I was in the spirit” (Rev. 1:10).

Notice that being in the spirit is not necessarily an emotional state. No doubt the worship of God will affect our emotions. But there are some emotional states in what passes for worship which are really centered on what the experience does for us, rather than on what it does for God. Similarly, it is possible to induce an emotional euphoria in our worship which is not really being in the spirit and can even be antithetical to that state. I am concerned when people say, as they do about certain occasions, “We want to have a meaningful worship experience.” Generally I find that the concern is not so much on what this worship is going to do for God, but on what it is going to do for the worshiper.

Stephen Charnock, the Puritan, wrote these words, “When we believe that we should be satisfied rather than God glorified, we put God below ourselves as though He had been made for us and not we for Him.” Worshiping in the spirit means that our spirits will be seeking God’s honor, God’s glory and God’s pleasure. As we come into God’s house, being in the spirit will cause us to say, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’” (Ps. 122:1). There I may bring Him pleasure. There I may honor my Savior. There I may exalt His great and glorious name. This is what I am here for. I am not here primarily to get a thrill.

This is like happiness, you see. If you seek happiness, you will never find it. But if you seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all these other things will be added to

you. The joy and glory of worship come when people are taken up with God. That is why, in days of revival, worship is especially glorious.

Active Worship

To worship in spirit as well as in truth, three things are necessary. First, you must be *spiritually alive*. Your spirit will never be drawn out after God nor will your heart leap up to Him in worship if you have never received spiritual life. If you have never been born from above, then you will never worship in spirit. That is why Jesus offered living water to the woman of Samaria. That is the beginning of worship. When the living water of eternal life springs up within you, you are enabled to worship. People who are spiritually dead can only engage in dead worship.

In my own denomination there are great conferences about worship. People have been concerned because so many have said, “What a dull, dead, drastic business this Sunday worship is!” They find it so boring they call a conference. They begin to scour the world for new forms of worship. They try to collect people who are “experts” in worship. They try to add color and drama to it. But, you know, it is all going to be dead in the end still, because people who are spiritually dead can only engage in dead worship. You need to be spiritually alive in order to worship God in the spirit.

Second, you need to be *spiritually assisted*. Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do nothing.” That is nowhere more true than in worship. To worship in the spirit is to know the gracious assistance of God the Holy Spirit quickening our spirit to desire Him and be zealous for His honor. Is this not what the psalmist means in Psalm 80:18, when he says, “Revive us [That is a great prayer for revival. But what follows?], and we will call on Your name?” “Revive us, and we will call on Your name.” That is why the Holy Spirit is

called the Spirit of "grace and supplication" in Zechariah 12:10. That is why in Ephesians 5:18 being filled with the Spirit is linked with singing and making melody to the Lord in our hearts (v. 19). To worship God we must be spiritually assisted. We need to cry to God for this in our worship.

Third, you must be *spiritually active*. You cannot worship God casually, carelessly or along with several other things. I was in a worship service in a church in Scotland some years ago when I discovered to my utter amazement that several ladies in the front row were knitting! To such a pass has worship in some parts of Scotland come! These women were not seeking to be offensive. They were not seeking even to be distracting. They merely thought that worship was something they could do along with other things.

You cannot do anything else and worship God in spirit and in truth at the same time. That is why we need to say to ourselves, as the Psalmist says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name" (Ps. 103:1). Everything in me. All my powers. All my energies. All the gifts God has given me. Everything within me shall praise the Lord.

Scripture tells us that in heaven the worshiping creation sings with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb!" (Rev. 5:12). Those of us who find it difficult to keep quiet when we are preaching may sometimes be tempted to use that as a reason for speaking with a loud voice, but it really refers to the whole of our energies, all our being going into the worship of God. Certainly that is so in heaven. There are no distractions in the worship of the church glorified. All creation is totally engaged in worshipping God. Why not here also? Every voice, every emotion, every energy, every affection, every gift and every part even of our body should be given to this.

What makes worship, above all, is when God comes down among His people. One of my dear friends, who was involved

in the Lewis revival and who is now exercising a most fruitful ministry in Scotland, told me that the great difference that the revival made in the church was that there was an overwhelming sense of God at the center of everything. That is what makes worship a spiritual reality. What a difference it would make if God were to manifest Himself to us! Then we would find our worship transformed. We would find ourselves prostrated before Him, and people coming in would say, "Surely God is here."

That is the ultimate in evangelism: people find others bowed before God and say, "Surely God is among you," and fall down on their faces and also worship Him. May God prepare us thus for heaven.

Author

Dr. Eric J. Alexander serves as pastor of St. Georges-Tron Church, Glasgow, Scotland. This article, from *Tenth* (1982), was an address given at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology in 1982. The conference will celebrate its twentieth anniversary in 1993, meeting in both Wheaton, April 22-25, and in Philadelphia, April 29-May 2. Write to the Editor, *Reformation & Revival Journal*, for a brochure and details.