

Evaluating Our Worship

John 4:19-24

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When we evaluate our worship, our evaluation tends to center on stylistic expression as we consider current trends. We take into account the cultural acceptance; the type of music; and the instruments that are employed. No evaluation is complete without a lively debate over volume. However, when God evaluates worship, He centers on the measure of our heart's involvement. Consider what the Lord said through the prophet in Isaiah 29:13, "*Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men.*"

The majority of discussions on the subject of worship tend to focus on our minds, and not on our hearts. We are often taught that true worship is centered on the mind thinking right about God. We are told we must use theologically correct language in our expressions of worship. Little or no emphasis is given to the heart's hunger for fellowship and intimacy with God.

The Call to Worship

Jesus issues an undeniable call to worship that transcends the intellect. This call presses the issues of the heart. Consider the words He spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well; "*But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:23-24).

Many people make the mistake of believing that the word "mind" is a proper synonym for the word "*spirit*." However, the word "*spirit*," is more accurately translated as "heart." The words, "*in truth*," certainly suggest the participation of our intellect in worship. However, our intellect's participation is secondary to the full release of our heart's adoration and emotion.

Some people have gone so far as to claim that since our hearts are ruled by our emotions, it is therefore more vulnerable to deception. What a foolish assessment. Who among us has not made a bad decision, or have been deceived, by our minds? To make this claim, one has to conclude that the mind is the main avenue of contact with God. The Scriptures refute such notions in Job 11:7, "*Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?*"

While it is true that human intelligence contributes to worship, it is also true that God is not looking for something brilliant ... He is looking for something broken! God is not impressed with our stellar intellects, but, He is always moved by our broken hearts. Our enlightened minds may indeed help us discover God, but only our impassioned hearts can delight Him.

The Chief Requirement of Worship

The chief requirement for worship is to realize that true worship always treasures God's presence. God welcomes those who want to be in His presence. Their quest may be driven by desperation or deep need; or, their quest may be driven by a loving hunger for His fellowship. The Lord welcomes each one who seeks Him whatever their motivation may be.

The Book of Exodus records a very powerful, yet very intimate exchange between Moses and God. The cry of Moses' heart was to know God and to walk in God's grace; *"Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people"* (Exodus 33:13).

God answers Moses' cry for intimacy by this dramatic declaration; *"My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest"* (Genesis 33:14). This answered his prayer, but Moses presses God for more; *Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth"* (Genesis 33:15-16). In essence, Moses was telling God that if He was not going to go with them the journey was not worth making.

Again God responds to Moses' plea in Genesis 33:17, *So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."* And again, this answered Moses' request, but he wasn't finished yet! Moses continues with the ultimate request of God; *And he said, "Please, show me Your glory"* (Genesis 33:18). In other words, Moses was saying to God, "I'm glad You're going to teach me Your ways. I'm thrilled that You're going to grant me Your grace. I'm comforted that You're going to make the journey with us. But Lord, more than any of these things, I want You! Please, show me Your Glory!"

God is delighted with Moses and grants his request; *Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."* *But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live."* *And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen"* (Genesis 33:19-23).

Craving the Grace of God's Presence

At the heart of Moses' request was his desire for God's presence. This desire was greater than Moses' desire for His blessings. He wanted God for more than what He could do for him. What a sharp and indicting contrast between Moses' pursuit of God and that of the church today. We are more concerned about time frames, aesthetics, mechanics, preferences, and academic theology, than about making contact with God and experiencing His glorious presence. Tragically, little or no thought is given to seeking the grace of His presence in our gatherings. We fail to realize that even the finest spiritual habits are vulnerable to the arthritis of religion's ritualism.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is content just to know that God is nearby and that He is available if needed.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is content for the pastor to become intimately acquainted with God and then teach them.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is centered on getting blessed by God and learning how to walk in His favor.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is not upset if God doesn't show up, just as long as their preference in music is honored.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is okay with God's absence as long as the pastor doesn't meddle in their personal affairs or preach too long.

Unlike Moses, most of the church ...

is content to wait for Heaven's shores to see God's glory and experience His presence.

I'm convinced that if the Holy Spirit were to be removed from the Earth, most churches would hold worship services as scheduled and NEVER KNOW THE DIFFERENCE! Far too many in the church have the attitude of "I'll get serious about God when I have nothing better to do." We desperately need the Holy Spirit to draw us back to our first love. We desperately need to renew our hunger and thirst for God's presence.

Be Honest with Yourself...

How Would God Evaluate Your Worship?

Which is Predominant in Your Worship ... Your Head or Your Heart?

Which do You Pursue More ... the Lord's Presence or His Blessings?

What do You Really Want in Your Relationship with God?

What is Your Ultimate Goal When You Worship?