

TEACHING NOTES

'Anchored in Christ' Part Seven: Wising Up on Worship – Five Myths

A myth is something that may contain a lot of truth – but not absolute truth. What makes it appealing is that there is enough to entice the unwary to believe it *fully* and herein lies the problem. When it comes to worship there are indeed a great many myths within Christian communities, and today I explore some of these myths that might not be expressed as directly as I am stating them but are nonetheless fairly prevalent.

MYTH 1: 'Worship = Music'

Worship is defined as 'giving worth to something' usually a deity, but possibly also an object. In our times of being together we give worth to God in musical expression and singing. This is totally proper, and we need look no further than the Psalms, as the hymnbook of Scripture, to see this. All emotions are present as the occasion and circumstances warrant. Martin Luther once said: "Next to theology I accord music the highest honour". Well said. God formed us in His own image and caused the airwaves to sound. The word 'muse' means to reflect on the source of our inspiration, and the proper object of this are members of the Godhead: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All through history, music of some shape or form has been the response of God's people in worship. It's a checkered history, however, with debates over certain instruments, and whether or not the Bible prescribes particular content and styles. Luther's quote also reminds us that theological understanding precedes worship because we need to know who it is we are worshipping and why.

The American writer A. W. Tozer was very discerning when he said, "Worship is no longer worship when it reflects the culture around us more than the Christ within us." The focus must be Christ not performance, individual talent, or entertainment. Those things are not to be confused with the best possible standards and preparation, but Tozer's main point is that music and song are vehicles for expressing thanks to God for His work of Christ in us. That's the starting place.

MYTH 2: 'Worship is only part of our life'

Scripture sees worship as *our total response to God*. Not just music, which is, in reality, only a small part – still important, but certainly not the main focus. We see in our 2 Kings reading that Josiah, king of Judah in 640 BC was one of very few monarchs to honour God after the northern kingdom had fallen to the Assyrians. Josiah and his great grandfather Hezekiah, however, stand out as men of integrity. Josiah ordered the temple, the centre of the nation's worship to be restored, he renewed the authority of the covenant, he cleansed the nation of idols and idol worship, and he attacked the causes of sin. He was overwhelmed by God's holiness and immediately set to exposing the people to that holiness – and they responded in worship, which sadly, was neither entirely heartfelt nor sustained. They attended to the external rituals but not in full repentance.

It's easy to attend to externals: going to services, singing, and doing other church-related activities, etc., but not allow God into all areas of our life. But worship is the sum total of our lives – it's not compartmentalised because it's an attitude, a heart and mind disposition.

Thinking worship is on Sundays, while from Monday to Saturday I live my own life is dualistic and a legalism which is really unhelpful.

In Romans 12:1-3 Paul speaks of offering our full selves to God. Our bodies, our behaviour, and the renewing of our minds. This is tough because the mind and the heart are private domains. Others can't fully discern what is occurring there in terms of attitudes, motivations, and desires. Paul emphasises a transformation from the inside out - which is truly a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit.

MYTH 3: 'Worship = Fellowship'

Fellowship with others, good and important though it is, is not the same as worship. Worship comes when in Christ, we are open to that transforming work of the Spirit - the inside aspects of the self - and then belonging and working together in Christian community assumes its proper place. In John 4:20-24 a woman brought up the issue of the correct place to worship before Jesus, but he directed the conversation to what was really important: *where* we worship publicly is not the main issue; the *attitude* of the worshipper is what's really important. It's who and how we worship that matters and that means a personal faith response to Christ, with the Holy Spirit's help (Romans 8:26), who teaches us the words of Christ (John 14:26), and reminds us we are loved by God (Romans 5:5).

MYTH 4: 'Worship must be reverent and solemn'

True worship is a whole-being response to God and his goodness to us in Christ. Several Psalms exhort us to respond with exuberant even spontaneous joy, so worship involves all our emotions. The gentler instruments, the harp and ten-stringed lyre are mentioned along with the noisy drums, cymbals and trumpets. But it's not the instruments, or even the song, but the heart response of the people God requires. A quiet and solemn tone will be appropriate on some occasions, while on others, joy and exuberance will be fitting.

MYTH 5: 'Worship occurs on Sundays'

One would hope it does, but it needs to occur every other day as well! The gathered people of God, the *ekklesia*, is a central New Testament concept. We come together not out of ritual, to feel good, or just to sing - *we join together to worship the living God*. The first and most important reason we gather is to give God the glory for what he has done for us in Christ.

Questions to ponder

1. Music has indeed a special role in bringing us into worship. It can bypass the intellect and reason and capture the emotions and imagination very quickly. However, to avoid 'worshiping worship' what must we always be aware of?
2. Why is it so easy to fall into that dualistic and legalistic division of 'worship on Sunday' and see the other days as 'ours' (a secular-sacred division)? What can we do to counter this tendency?