

## Defining Worship Part 2: Worship As Expression

Last time, we began our series on different aspects of biblical worship. We saw that worship is first and foremost exalting God - His works, His character, and His nature.

One way we do this is by declaring truths about God that He has revealed to us in His Word. But the Bible makes it clear that worship involves more than acknowledging facts about who God is. We must respond to what He has shown us.

Therefore, another aspect of worship is expression. In his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, C.S. Lewis explains how he came to see that we naturally respond to what we value. "The most obvious fact about praise - whether of God or anything - strangely escaped me.... I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise...lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside...My whole, more general, difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we cannot help doing, about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment." (John Piper, quoting C.S. Lewis, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, pp. 23-24)

In other words, to truly enjoy God, to truly worship Him, we must express what is in our hearts towards Him. Psalm 62:8 commands us, "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us." Expression in worship is an act of faith that God hears us and that he delights in our response to His self-revelation.

Expression can be both physical and verbal. Physical responses include singing, clapping, kneeling, bowing, shouting, and lifting hands. (We took a more detailed look at these in my previous series on *Physical Expressiveness in Worship*). Along with exaltation, verbal expression involves communicating to God our love and desire for Him, our need of His grace, our gratefulness for His mercy, or our fear of His holiness. Sitting quietly in God's presence is also an appropriate way to express true worship before God.

Corporate worship is not unlike a conversation in which God speaks to us and we respond. Of course, God can speak to us at any time, and we can walk into a meeting overflowing with a desire to express our love for God. But many times, God will give us a fresh view or impression of His character while we are singing to Him, and in that moment the most natural thing for us to do is communicate our response. That's why the best songs and services allow room for both objective truth and subjective response - exaltation and expression. Psalm 95 is one example of that kind of progression.

The forms expression takes in worship vary from culture to culture, denomination to denomination, church to church, and even from person to person. How do we know that what we're doing is pleasing God? Here are some important questions to ask: Is the focus of my expression God as He has revealed Himself in Scripture? Does my expression have biblical precedent and support? Am I offering this expression through faith in the finished work of Christ? Answering "yes" to these three questions assures us that our expression is bringing glory to God.

When God is truly exalted, when hearts are fully engaged in expressing devotion to Him, it typically leads to a third characteristic of biblical worship, encounter. We'll take a look at that next time.