

REVERENCE

by David E. Moss

There is quite a variety of worship styles these days - all the way from very quiet to very excited. Some prefer the more formal atmosphere while others insist that excitement during a worship service is much more appealing. The illustration is offered of a football game.

"If we can shout and cheer and jump up and down and wave our banners in support of a ball team, why shouldn't we be just as excited about our salvation and our God?"

Is this analogy Biblically correct? If it is, we might have to ask the question then, "What about the tail gait parties before the game? Are our activities before worship like a tail gate party?" Unfortunately, I think they are. Our church auditoriums (or sanctuaries, if we can still call them sanctified places) are often as noisy five minutes before service time as a football stadium during warm-up exercises. I guess we are stirring up the adrenalin so we are ready for our sanctified cheers.

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I do not mean to belittle the sincere spiritual sacrifices that people offer to the Lord. My concern is not really one of volume or emotion. Both may very well have appropriate places in a worship context. My concern is one of motive and objectivity. It seems that even our worship has become man centered rather than God centered. So many aspects of worship that are excitable to human emotions are used not because God necessarily benefits from them, but because they help us feel good about ourselves and about what we are doing. On the other hand, what is it that **God** wants most from our worship?

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This is the serious question we must consider: Is worship about what we humans get out of it, or is worship about what we humans are giving to God? The Hebrew word for worship, Shachah, means to "bow down" or "prostrate oneself before." The Greek word, *Proskuneo*, means essentially the same thing. It even adds the humble imagery of the bowed individual kissing the hand in the same fashion a dog would lick the hand of his master. Noah Webster said way back in 1828 that worship was

"Chiefly and eminently, the act of **paying** divine honors to the Supreme Being; or the reverence and homage **paid to** him in religious exercises, consisting in adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving and the like."

It appears to me that the predominant, if not the exclusive, thought in the concept of worship is giving - not getting.

KEY WORD

If there is one word that can summarize this for us, it is the word "**REVERENCE.**" Both the Hebrew and Greek concepts of reverence consist of fear, an overwhelming sense of awe, shamefacedness and bashfulness, none of which lends itself to the showmanship so often a part of contemporary "worship." Psalm 89:7 says,

"God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and had in reverence of all them that are about him."

When we come together in one place as the Body of Christ, it is an opportunity for us to demonstrate the unity of our faith to Almighty God who deserves our corporate praise and adoration.

The antithesis to this key word is "**ENTERTAINMENT.**" As a society, we have become immersed in the desire to be entertained. Our heroes are those who can perform spectacular feats and thrill us with their talent or their courage. This has so completely been soaked up in the Christian community that the church with the greatest "show" gets the biggest crowd. We advertise our newest innovation in the Newspaper or on Radio vying for our portion of the floating congregation waiting to be teased with the most enticing "performance" of the week.

CONFESSION OF AN OLD FASHIONED PREACHER

I have a confession to make. I happen to believe that the type of format we use for our Worship Services at the North Hills Bible Church is the kind of format conducive to reverent worship. I am committed to preserving this format. This includes the use of the old hymns that glow with reverence as well as doctrinal substance and wonderful harmony.

Granted, this is not very progressive. It may not be appealing to the unchurched masses and it may not be very entertaining.

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But while I am confessing, let me go a step further. I believe it is wrong for the church to change so that we will be more attractive to people who are reluctant to attend church services. It ought to be the other way around. The church ought to be that place of stability, demonstrating the awesome unchangeableness of the Almighty whose name is holy and reverend (Psalm 111:9): to which wayward souls pursuing the restless and unfulfilling pleasures of the flesh can turn for refuge. Instead, the church has chosen to appeal to those same useless instincts of the flesh to draw the unsuspecting in hopes of capturing their hearts.

CONCLUSION

When we come to church on Sunday, it ought to be our desire that God receive the greatest benefit from all that transpires. Let me suggest some ways we can work to this end.

1. Begin preparing for worship on Saturday. Pray throughout the day for cleansing so that you can be a vessel capable of beautiful sounds on the Lord's day. Saturday evening, think about what you will be doing the next day and ask God to prepare you.

2. Set your alarm early enough for Sunday morning so that you do not have to be frustrated by the rush of getting ready on time. During that pre-church time, concentrate on the worship that is to come and practice spiritual Christian character toward everyone with whom you have contact.

3. Between Sunday School and church, practice quietness. Go into the auditorium, be seated quietly, read over the Scripture passage for the morning and pray.

Then, when it is time to worship, you may be surprised at the high level of emotion within you. But it will be different - selfless, giving, adoring, reverent. You may discover real fulfillment for the very first time.