

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 1, Number 11 ♪ November 2006

THEME: Spiritual Sacrifices

IT'S WHAT INSIDE THAT COUNTS

A Surprising Truth

When it comes to Old Testament worship, our thoughts naturally turn to the minutely detailed instructions (chapter after chapter after chapter) given for the rituals of the Mosaic tabernacle/temple system. There is such a focus on the externals that one might conclude that outward conformity to His instructions were of paramount importance to God—precisely because He went to such lengths to spell them all out.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. The Old Testament texts on pages 3-4 below give resounding testimony to the priority God placed, even in the Old Covenant economy with its complex system of ritual and ceremony, on the worship of the heart.

Not that obedience to the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law was unimportant. To the contrary: the way for a pious Jew to express a heart of love for God was by obedience to His instructions for ceremonial worship. But the Old Testament writers, and especially the prophets (see pp. 3-4), make it abundantly clear that merely outward conformity to the requirements without an engaged heart meant nothing to God; in fact such offerings and rituals were detestable to Him. C.S. Lewis warns us that it would be wrong to think that God “really

needed the blood of bulls and goats.” What He values rather is “the intention” (“On Church Music” in *Christian Reflections*, 98-99).

An Amazing Example

Psalm 63 carries the superscription: “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” This is usually thought to be referring to the time when David’s son Absalom rebelled against him, and David had to flee for his life into the desert (2 Samuel 15). This “dry and

weary land where there is no water” David sees as a picture of a life without God. His “soul thirsts for God” (v.1). He is saying in effect: “What I really need out here in the desert is not water; I need God!” We have in this psalm a remarkable expression of worship; for, as Perowne points out, in spite of David’s dire circumstances there is not one word of petition in the entire psalm—only praise. This is possible because David considers that the Lord’s “steadfast love is better than life” (v. 3). Spurgeon points

out that “there was no desert in his heart, though there was a desert around him.” The flower of David’s faith blooms and flourishes in spite of his circumstances and his surroundings. Surely this kind of perspective was one reason God considered David “a man after God’s own heart” (1 Sam 13:14).

There is another remarkable aspect of David’s praise in the wilderness. Being far away from Jerusalem and from the tabernacle, *there was no way he could fulfill ANY of the external requirements of the Old Covenant system*. Yet instinctively David knew that he could still ap-

Biblical Principles of Worship*

#9 God is much more concerned with our heart than with the form of our worship.

proach God in worship, because he knew “You are My God” (v.1). He doesn’t seek to perform a religious or ceremonial duty, but opens his heart to God, thirsts and yearns for Him, praises and worships Him from his heart.

Worship in Spirit

Jesus continues the prophets’ criticism of the Jewish leaders for their external conformity to the Law without an inward heart motivation. He calls the scribes and Pharisees “whitewashed tombs” (Matt 23:27), “blind guides” (23:16) and “hypocrites” (23:13,23), who “tithed mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God” (Luke 11:42); who “clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matt 23:25).

Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 that true worship must be “in spirit” (4:23,24). Because “God is spirit” (4:24)—that is, not a physical being but a spiritual one—then our worship must likewise begin in the inner, immaterial part of our being: it must be genuine, from the heart.¹ (1 Peter 3:4 shows the close relationship between the human spirit and the heart.) Probably Jesus had the Jewish leaders in mind when he insisted on “worship in spirit” (even as He likely had the theologically wayward Samaritans in view as He advocated “worship in truth”).

Jesus, like His Father, has no tolerance for worship which is external only, no matter how carefully and painstakingly performed. Let us take heed!

A Lifestyle of Heart Worship

In the New Testament the *heart*, “the inner life, the centre of the personality” (T. Sorg), is portrayed as the seat of sin (Rom 1:21; 2:5), saving faith (Rom 10:9-10), assurance (2 Cor 1:22; Heb 10:22), sanctification (2 Cor 4:6; Gal 4:6; Eph 3:17), commitment (1 Thess 2:4), peace (Phil 4:7; Col 3:15), love (1 Tim 1:5; 1 Pet 1:22), obe-

dience (Eph 6:6), and encouragement (Col 2:2; 4:8). As discussed in last month’s *Worship Notes*, the New Testament emphasis is on worship as a *lifestyle*; this worship in every time and place is in fact possible because it consists fundamentally of the *heart’s* response to God, rather than a set of prescribed rituals or practices.

The heart is also the wellspring of our corporate worship; Paul exhorts us: “Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your *heart*” (Eph 5:19; see also Col 3:16).

The Bottom Line

“Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). This familiar passage is not often applied to the area of worship, yet it is resoundingly applicable. Most of what we think and talk about when it comes to worship are outward forms and styles, and usually with a very narrow perception of what is “appropriate” or “acceptable” to God. Yet when we look at the scope of various worship expressions down through the centuries, and across the world (or even across

the street!) today, it is quite evident that God has a much, much broader spectrum of taste than any of us can claim to have! And it is the height of arrogance for us to presume (as most of us have at one time or another) that our own particular set of preferences just happens to coincide with what the Almighty Himself finds acceptable!

Lewis reminds us that “all our offerings, whether of music or martyrdom, are like the intrinsically worthless present of a child, which a father values indeed, but values only for the intention” (“On Church Music,” 99). God does not have a set of favorite songs or a preferred style. He is looking for *hearts* of worship.

God does not have a set of favorite songs or a preferred style.

¹ (Certainly our worship is also “in [the Holy] Spirit” [see *Worship Notes* August 2006], but that does seem to be the emphasis in this text.)

**Biblical Principles of Worship (treating twelve principles, of which the ninth is dealt with here) may be downloaded at www.worr.org/articles.*

TEXTS

on God's Priority of Heart Worship

Deuteronomy 10:12 "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul?"

1 Samuel 15:22 Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams."

Psalm 40:6 Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.

Psalm 50:13 Shall I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of male goats? 14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And pay your vows to the Most High.

Psalm 51:16 For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

Psalm 69:30 I will praise the name of God with song and magnify Him with thanksgiving. 31 And it will please the LORD better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs.

Psalm 107:22 Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, And tell of His works with joyful singing.

Psalm 116:17 To You I shall offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call upon the name of the LORD.

Psalm 119:108 O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, And teach me Your ordinances.

Psalm 141:2 May my prayer be counted as incense before You; the lifting up of my hands as the evening offering.

Isaiah 29:13 Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote."

Jeremiah 7:22 "For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. 23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.'"

Jeremiah 12:2 You have planted them, they have also taken root; they grow, they have even produced fruit. You are near to their lips but far from their mind.

Hosea 14:2 Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, that we may present the fruit of our lips."

Micah 6:6 With what shall I come to the LORD And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? 7 Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8 He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 9:13 “But go and learn what this means: ‘*I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,*’ for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 12:7 “But if you had known what this means, ‘*I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,*’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”

Mark 7:6 And He said to them, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. 7 ‘But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’*” (also Matt 15:8)

Mark 12:33 “ . . . *and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself,* is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

John 4:24 “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Romans 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Ephesians 5:18-19 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Hebrews 10:5 Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, “*Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me; 6 in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have taken no pleasure. 7 “Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come (in the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do your will, O God.’”* 8 After saying above, “*Sacrifices and offerings and whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You have not desired, nor have You taken pleasure in them*” (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, “*Behold, I have come to do Your will.*” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

Hebrews 10:22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

1 Peter 2:5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

QUOTABLES

Worship of the Heart

“Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord.”

(*Book of Common Prayer*)

“When worship is merely an empty act of going through the motions week after week, it has little meaning and vibrancy. It is all rite. As that theologian Garrison Keillor once said, ‘Going to church no more makes you a Christian than standing in a garage makes you a car.’”

(Nathan Bierma, “Worshipful Service,” *Perspectives*)

<http://www.perspectivesjournal.org/2006/06/essay-service.html>

“The all-encompassing criterion for acceptable sacrifice before God in the Old Testament was the posture and the attitude of the person making the sacrifice. Jesus affirmed this truth when he watched worshipers making their offerings in the temple (Mark 12:41-44). He pronounced His benediction on the widow who offered her two mites, the smallest measure of currency, Jesus pointed out that her gift was more costly for her than the offerings of the men of great wealth, who dropped the equivalent of \$10,000 in the offering plate. He said that because He was able to read her heart when she gave her sacrifice. The rich men gave because they wanted the applause of men or some honor in the sight of God, but Jesus knew the poor widow had a different motive.

The apostle Paul tells us that the Lord ‘loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor 9:7). We hear that verse so often we can become jaded to it and not take the time to think about what it means. . . . The term *cheerful* describes the disposition of the heart, the attitude of the soul in the giving of the gift.”

(R. C. Sproul, *A Taste Of Heaven: Worship In The Light Of Eternity*, 28-29)

“Hence it is perfectly clear that neither words nor singing (if used in prayer) are of the least consequence, or avail one iota with God, unless they proceed from deep feeling in the heart. Nay, rather they provoke his anger against us, if they come from the lips and throat only, since this is to abuse his sacred name, and hold his majesty in derision. . . . Still we do not condemn words or singing, but rather greatly commend them, provided the feeling of the mind goes along with them. For in this way the thought of God is kept alive on our minds.”

(John Calvin, “Of Prayer: A Perpetual Exercise of Faith: The Daily Benefits Derived from It,” Section 31)

“Music and liturgy can assist or express a worshiping heart, but they cannot make a non-worshiping heart into a worshiping one. The danger is that they can give a non-worshiping heart the sense of having worshiped. So the crucial factor in worship in the church is not the form of worship, but the state of the hearts of the saints. If our corporate worship isn’t the expression of our individual worshiping lives, it is unacceptable.”

(John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority*, 104)

“The nature of worship, then, is to offer God worship from the depths of our inner beings in praise, prayer, song, giving, and living, always based upon His revealed truth. . . . That is worshiping in spirit and in truth.”

(John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority*, 125-6)

“His goodness shines with brightest rays
when we delight in all His ways.
His glory overflows its rim
when we are satisfied in Him.
His radiance will fill the earth
when people revel in His worth.
The beauty of God’s holy fire
burns brightest in the heart’s desire.”

(John Piper, *Desiring God*)

“Spiritual worship involves an awareness and perception of God through faith that arises from the heart, from the innermost being of the worshiper.”

(Garry D. Nation, “The Essentials of Worship: Toward a Biblical Theology of Worship,” *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 5. 3 & 4: 6)

“ ‘By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain’ (Heb 11:4).’ It is the worshiper that makes the offering acceptable, not vice versa.”
(Daniel Block, lecture notes)

“Music has many benefits. It moves us emotionally. It helps us to reflect on, remember, and be affected by the truth. However, apart from faith resonating in our hearts, we are no closer to God when we sing than when we wash dishes or do homework.”

(Bob Kauflin, “Worship Matters” Nov. 25, 2003)
<http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/worshipmatters/columns.html>

“The lack of worship is a symptom; the lack of true worshipers is the root of the problem. . . . Making changes in the structure of the service

itself is just another attempt at dealing with art alone and not with heart. It is we who need the changes.”

(Ronald Allen & Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, 37)

“True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.”
(William Barclay, *The Gospel of John* 1:154)

“The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.”
(John Piper, *Desiring God*, 68)

“It is a mark of a spiritual barrenness in the church when Christians come to worship to fulfill a duty rather than to satisfy an appetite.”
(Eric Alexander, “Thirsting for God” [sermon on Psalm 63])

IMPORTANT RESOURCE

The Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture

This important document was put out by the World Lutheran Federation, and suggests a helpful way of seeing the interaction between worship and culture:

“Christian worship relates dynamically to culture in at least four ways.

*First, it is **transcultural**, the same substance for everyone everywhere, beyond culture.*

*Second, it is **contextual**, varying according to the local situation (both nature and culture).*

*Third, it is **counter-cultural**, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in a given culture.*

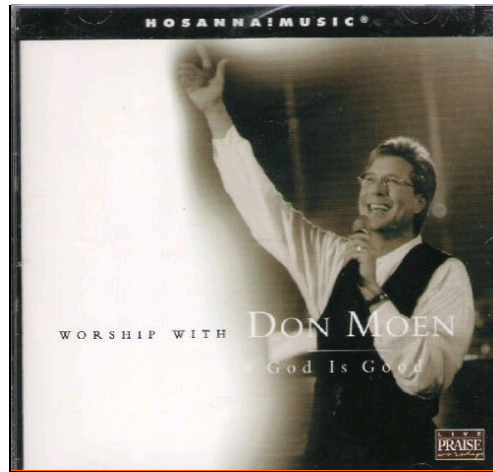
*Fourth, it is **cross-cultural**, making possible sharing between different local cultures.”*

Read the entire document at www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

chronicling unfortunate takes on worship

Marketing worship, part 2



*Notice who gets top billing,
and Who gets the smaller print!
(no offense intended to Don Moen, just his marketers)*

ONLINE RESOURCES

Worship Bibliographies

(click on links)

[Calvin Institute of Christian Worship](#) (also many online resources)

[Institute for Worship Studies \(Robert Webber\)](#)

[Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#)

[An Annotated Worship Bibliography \(Worship Resources\)](#)

REFLECTIONS ON
CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC
 (online and print resources)

Lester Ruth (Asbury Theological Seminary)
[“Lex Amandi, Lex Orandi: The Trinity in the Most Used Contemporary Christian Worship Songs”](#)

(mp3 file; click to open)
 audio of lecture given at Institute for Christian Worship
 (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
 (can also download at www.sbts.edu/icw)

See also:

Lester Ruth, [“Don’t Lose the Trinity! A Plea to Songwriters”](#) (pdf file)

Susan J. White, [“What Ever Happened to the Father? The Jesus Heresy in Modern Worship”](#) (pdf file)

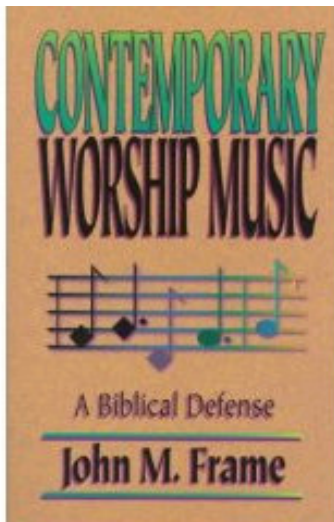
[“Worship Music: ‘I’ Tunes”](#)
 (blog.worship.com, October 29, 2006)

Joan Huyser-Honig, [“Contemporary Worship Music Matures”](#)

Contemporary Worship Music:

A Biblical Defense

by John Frame (P & R Publishing, 1997)



Frame, a Presbyterian who teaches at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, states his objective for this important work thus: “In this book I would like to try to sort out some of the issues surrounding CWM [his abbreviation for Contemporary Worship Music, in contra-distinction to the more performance-oriented category of Contemporary Christian Music] and to defend a limited use of it in Christian worship.” (p. 1) He develops throughout the book his case for his conclusion that “it would not be right to abandon traditional hymnody entirely in favor of CWM. But CWM may, and should, in my judgment, play a significant role in the worship of the church” (1-2).

Frame's contention, which he successfully demonstrates, is that the criticisms of CWM, though having some validity, are often grossly overstated and overgeneralized.

Some relevant general theological points which Frame makes regarding worship are:

1. A mixture of transcendent and immanent images and references in worship is reflective of the full scope of God's relationship with his people.
2. The vertical dimension of worship is primary (worship is for God), but it is important to recognize that worship will inevitably include also a horizontal dimension and employ human creativity.
3. "It would certainly be unscriptural to say that since worship is directed towards God, it doesn't matter whether the worshipers understand it or not. We do not glorify God if we fail to communicate on the human level" (18).
4. It is not unbiblical for worship to have an evangelistic aspect, though that is not its main focus.
5. Corporate worship should reflect both the unity *and* the diversity inherent in the body of Christ.
6. Scriptural commands to love one another and defer to one another apply to the selection and use of church music! (But of course it must go both ways!) "To be mature is not to demand one's own way" (27). "Are we seeking to have it our way or to serve our brothers and sisters?" (25). And here is a fascinating perspective: "We should resolve that if anyone in the church is to be offended over a mere matter of taste, it should be us rather someone else." How rarely such counsel (reflective of Philippians 2:3 and other passages) is followed!

Frame lists the following virtues that he finds in much CWM: God-centeredness, "scripturality" (the setting of actual Scripture texts or texts expressing scriptural truth), freshness and communication. He also fairly deals with criticisms that are often raised against CWM (as they are against contemporary worship in general): subjectivism, humanism, anti-intellectualism, psychologism, professionalism, consumerism, pragmatism, and "temporal chauvinism" (only what's new is good). Problems exist among the offerings of CWM—but Frame makes an excellent case that each song deserves to be judged on its merits. He gives specific examples which contradict every one of the criticisms which are leveled across the board at CWM as a whole. (As a colleague of this reviewer once incisively pointed out, "After all, the Hallelujah Chorus is pretty repetitious too!")

Frame has made a constructive contribution to the current worship debate by exhorting us to be honest, fair, consistent and rigorously biblical in our assessment of materials for worship. His arguments cannot be ignored. Rather than cavalierly dismissing whole categories of music as "obviously" unfit for worship, we should give them a chance to prove themselves (or not, as the case may be). While all of us have our music preferences, God is certainly accepting of a vastly wider range of worship offerings than any of us are!

WORSHIP EVENTS



January 2-4, 2007
Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church
Fort Lauderdale, Florida
www.musicexplosion.org

(see Bob Burroughs' "[Monday Morning Email](#)" for a \$25 discount)

CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



January 25-27, 2007
Calvin College
Grand Rapids, Michigan
www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos

EUROPE WORSHIP LINK 2007 Conference

April 18-21, 2007 Malenovice, Czech Republic
for more information please see ewl.shorturl.com
or contact Ron Man at RMan@gemission.com

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Unity in Worship



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