

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 3, Number 6 ♪ June 2008

THEME: Theology and Doxology

The Principle of Praise Theology Serves Doxology

After eleven chapters of the most profound theological thinking ever penned, the Apostle Paul ends the didactic part of his epistle to the Romans with a response praising God for the wonder of His Person and His ways, as they have been seen in the incredible truths which Paul has just been presenting. These truths have not remained lodged in his head alone, but have filled his heart as well; and he apparently cannot contain himself as he bursts forth with a song of praise to the God who has made these things possible. Paul has dug deeper into the depths of the divine mystery than anyone ever had, and there is still plenty of cause for standing and wondering at the still unplumbed depths of God's wisdom and understanding and grace and love:

*Oh, the depth of the riches both
of the wisdom and knowledge
of God!*

*How unsearchable are
His judgments and unfathom-
able His ways!*

*For who has known the mind
of the Lord, or who became His
counselor?*

Paul was
not just a
great theo-
logian; he
was also a
great
worshiper

*Or who has first given to Him
that it might be paid back to
Him again?*

*For from Him and through Him
and to Him are all things.
To Him be the glory forever.
Amen!*

(Romans 11:33-36)

Paul was not just a great theologian; he was also a great *worshiper*. For Him, theology was not an end in itself; it was a means to the infinitely greater end of knowing God better and hence being able to praise Him more fully. He understood that it was for that purpose that He had been made and saved and called into ministry.

J. I. Packer once wrote: "The purpose of theology is doxology. We study in order to praise."

That is the heartbeat of Paul's theologizing. He doesn't stop with the recognition that "Great is the Lord"—though he magnificently demonstrates that, to be sure—but rather completes the circle as did the Psalmist: "and [therefore] greatly to be praised" (cf. Psalm 96:4). The two parts fit together like hand in glove; they are *revelation and response*; God shows us Himself, and we respond in worship. (See [Worship Notes 1.5 \[May 2006\]](#) for more on this foundational biblical theme of "Revelation and Response.")

We dare not miss the obvious application to ourselves: We are not done studying (or teaching) until we're at the point of glorifying

God (and leading our students to glorify God) for the truths we have handled. There is a great danger, in any forum where study of the Bible is carried out (seminaries, Bible colleges, Sunday School classes, church services, Bible study groups, daily life!) of handling the word of truth in too casual a manner—as an object of intellectual pursuit, rather than as life-transforming truth.

Most of our education has focused on the acquisition of knowledge as the end goal of our academic pursuits; yet this dare not be our purpose and goal in the study of the Bible. God is not looking for walking Bible commentaries! He is seeking worshipers (John 4:23). We must close the loop, complete the process, bring the means to its intended end.

This means that we must be aware of our tendency to walk away from revelation without having truly done business with it; and we must then commit ourselves consciously and intentionally to letting the Word sink into our hearts and have its way with us. Other writers have spoken to this need:

[We should] turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God. (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 23)

But worship must be added to study to complete the renewal of our mind through a willing absorption in the radiant person who is worthy of all praise. Study without worship is also dangerous, and the people of Jesus constantly suffer from its effects, especially in academic settings. To handle the things of God without worship is always to falsify them. (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 362-63)

There should be no theology without doxology. There is something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God. God is not an appropriate object for cool, critical, detached, scientific observation and evaluation. No, the true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our

faces before him in adoration. (John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, 311-12)

(Stott adds too that there likewise should be “no doxology without theology”: the Scriptures must inform and infuse our private and our public worship—see [Worship Notes 1.6 \[June 2006\]](#) on “Worship and the Word”).

Let us take our cue also from the biblical record itself; the following passages all speak of a genuine and heartfelt response to revealed truth, of a direct cause-and-effect relationship between revelation and worship:

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. . . . And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. (Nehemiah 8:8,12)

His delight is in the Law of the Lord. (Ps 1:2)

As is Your Name, O God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth. (Ps 48:10)

Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. (Ps 150:2)

Going back to Romans, let us notice that Paul first of all expresses his profound doxological response in 11:33-36 to what has gone before, and *only then* does he turn in chapter 12 to give instructions about other applications to life of the foregoing truth. Wonder and worship must precede and undergird all service if it is to be truly God-directed and -empowered. So too preaching must progress from truth about God to a worshipful response to the glories of His nature and ways, as a foundation and context for dealing with life and its challenges from a perspective of power and hope sourced in God Himself. “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen!”

QUOTABLES

Theology and Doxology

“The purpose of theology is doxology.
We study in order to praise.”
(J. I. Packer)

“It is important to note from Romans 1–11 that theology (our belief about God) and doxology (our worship of God) should never be separated. On the one hand, there can be no doxology without theology. It is not possible to worship an unknown god. All true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, and arises from our reflection on who he is and what he has done. It was the tremendous truths of Romans 1–11 which provoked Paul’s outburst of praise in verses 33-36 of chapter 11. The worship of God is evoked, informed and inspired by the vision of God. Worship without theology is bound to degenerate into idolatry. Hence the indispensable place of Scripture in both public and private devotion. It is the Word of God which calls forth the worship of God.

“On the other hand, there should be no theology without doxology. There is something fundamentally flawed about a purely academic interest in God. God is not an appropriate object for cool, critical, detached, scientific observation and evaluation. No, the true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our faces before him in adoration.

“As I believe Bishop Handley Moule said at the end of the last century, we must ‘beware equally of an undevotional theology and of an untheological devotion.’”
(John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, 311-12)

“The purpose of the theologian is to serve the church so that the people of God worship Him more faithfully. . . . Theology is by definition not an ivory tower discipline. It is not merely a form of academic discourse. When rightly conducted, theology is the conversation of the people of God seeking to understand the Lord whom we worship and how He wills to be worshiped. . . . Our confused worship corrupts our theology and our weak theology corrupts our worship.”

(Albert Mohler, “The Whole Earth Is Full of his Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship, Part One”

http://www.almohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-02-06)

“True theology is done in the presence of God in the midst of the worshiping community.”

(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 10)

“Real theology, which means the knowledge of God, finds expression in thanks, praise and adoration. And it is what finds expression in doxology that is real theology.”

(Jürgen Moltmann, cited in Christopher Cocksorth, *Holy, Holy, Holy*, 12)

“[We should] turn each truth that we learn about God into matter for meditation before God, leading to prayer and praise to God.”
(J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 23)

“We are called to live in the light of the gospel a life that honors and glorifies God, a life in which theology (our belief in God) and doxology (our worship of God) are beautifully blended together. . . . *No doxology without theology.* That is, no worship of God is possible without a knowledge and an understanding and a doctrine of God. Worship is not a mindless exercise. . . . Worship is evoked, informed, enriched, inspired by the vision of God. . . . Hence the essential place of Scripture, both in public worship and in private devotion. . . . It’s the Word of God that evokes the worship of God.”

(John Stott, sermon: “Worship” at www.sbts.edu/icw/)

“Insofar as we know now, when we enter the heavenly realm we will not be engaged in reasoned discourse about God. Rather we will be adoring and glorifying God in some sort of exalted unending song. Then and there the hymn—doxology, not theology—will be preeminent!”

(Hugh T. McElrath, “the Hymnbook as a Compendium of Theology” *Review and Expositor* 87 [1990]:28)

Almighty God, to Thee

 be endless honours done,

The undivided Three,

 and the mysterious One.

Where reason fails, with all her powers,

There faith prevails, and love adores.

(Isaac Watts, hymn: “We Give Immortal Praise”)

If you like this monthly segment of “Quotables,” check out

QUOTABLES: Worship & more
words of doxological wisdom

I’m always coming across great quotes in my study and reading on worship (and other areas). For many years I have gathered them in a searchable, free-form database, and have over 5,000 now.

I use many them here in the Quotables section of Worship Notes, but there I’m limited by the theme of the issue. So, not wanting to always be constrained by the monthly format or the thematic focus, or even have to wait a week to share some gem I’ve found, as my friend Chip Stam does with his venerable (and highly recommended) [Worship Quote of the Week](#), I offer these quotes as I come across them. See them at:

worr.wordpress.com

(It is in the form of a blog, so you can also use RSS readers and the like to receive new posts.)

UPCOMING WORSHIP EVENTS

Beginning Fall 2008, The Bethlehem Institute at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota will be offering a rigorous, two-year graduate apprenticeship program in worship studies.

For more information, click [HERE](#).



seventh annual
HIS GIFTS AND PRESENCE
NEW ENGLAND ARTS FESTIVAL

June 28th 2008
Windham, Maine

info [HERE](#)



July 22-25, 2008 Baylor University
Info [HERE](#)



This year's theme: "Rediscovering the Psalms"
 July 30–August 2, 2008 Gaithersburg, Maryland
 info [HERE](#)



Manila, Philippines
 info [HERE](#)



info [HERE](#)

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Praise and/or Worship? A Confusion in Terms



WORSHIP NOTES is a free monthly online digest of reflections, views, news and reviews concerning biblical worship. It is produced by Ron Man as a publication of **Worship Resources**, a department of Greater Europe Mission devoted to "strengthening the body of Christ in the U.S., Europe and around the world by promoting the priority, understanding and practice of God-centered, Christ-exalting, Biblically-based worship." To subscribe, please go to www.worr.org and click on "Worship Notes" at the top. There are many other free resources on the website also.