

Even as, musically, the evangelical Sunday-morning paradigm continues away from the now-antiquated choir, toward the direction of “Worship Teams” or “Praise Teams,” in far too many modern churches actual worship takes a back seat to other priorities, such as “fellowship.”

Because of this, modern believers effectively ignore the breathtaking revolutionary act that God the Father performed in the moment of Christ’s death. The Lord of the universe tore asunder the temple veil, thus opening the holiest spot on earth, and in heaven, to all.

A Specific Worship

First in a new series

**LIVING
SERIOUSLY**



At the temple a Gentile could pass through one of the gates in the exterior wall to enter the outer courtyard, or Court of the Gentiles. This was a large, open area—a public place, of sorts—and was as close as a non-Jew could get to the presence of God. Situated inside this vast courtyard was a second enclosure which surrounded the actual temple. The first area inside this second enclosure was called the Treasury, or the Women’s Court. This was as far as Jewish women could get. Jewish men could proceed further into the Court of Israel, and during the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) they could enter the Priest’s Court, where the altar was located. Only priests could enter the Holy Place, which was a building inside the Court of Priests, and beyond that point, behind a veil, was the Holy of Holies—the inner sanctum—into which only the high priest could enter—and then only once per year to sacrifice for the sins of all of Israel on the Day of Atonement. Here in the Holy of Holies was where (when it was in Israel’s possession) was placed the ark of the covenant crowned by the mercy seat.

Before the once and final atonement of Christ, access to God’s presence was strictly controlled—on pain of death; a Gentile passing further than permitted could legally be killed. Even a devout, law-abiding Jew could not enter the Holy Place—and certainly not the Holy of Holies. But when Jesus died upon the cross, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from everything

THE PATTERN FOR the magnificent stone temple built by King Herod between 19 BC and AD 64—as well as the earlier, portable tabernacle tents and the first stone temple built by Solomon—was based on the original built by God for Himself in heaven.

Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Hebrews 9:23-24

The plan of the tabernacle and temple was based on a rather simple, direct concept that God is holy, and the closer one gets to Him, the holier one must be.

*For I testify
about them that
they have a zeal
for God, but not
in accordance
with knowledge.*

Romans 10:2

and everyone else was torn in two by God Himself, from top to bottom. Now by His shed blood anyone—*anyone*—could worship God directly, without intermediary.

Thin Gruel

The limitations and specificity of ancient Hebrew worship stand in glaring contrast to the broad, homogenized, often unserious form found in most protestant churches today. As the veil has been removed and the Holy of Holies expanded to hold its many new worshipers, the once-rich feast of that worship has been diluted to a thin gruel.

It is true that the Hebrew and Greek words commonly translated “worship” in the Bible can include a broad spectrum of activities in the church. Any service performed in the name of the Lord can conceivably be termed a form of “worship” or devotion. It is possible to show up on a Saturday to help paint the exterior walls of the church and consider it “worship”—if, that is, the painter is performing the task with a full heart, and in the name of the Lord. If so, he or she is doing that rather mundane task as a demonstration of their love for God.

But as we have broadened the definition of worship to include just about anything that transpires within the four walls of the church building, we have lost sight of the wonder and awe of—and necessity for—that more *specific* worship: that which is performed on our knees, bowed before the throne. We have settled for an insipid, emaciated version of worship, conducted from a distance, in the outer court only, and more often than not we no longer bother to proceed deeper into the Holy of Holies—even though God has intentionally invited us in.

We remain outside with the “Gentiles,” when, as believers, we have been granted access to the most holy place.

A Specific Worship

Let us consider what a more specific worship—worship that occurs in the “Holy of Holies”—in fact, is. First, however, let us consider what it is not.

- It is not just showing up on a Sunday morning. That is not worship. That is attendance.
- It is not shaking hands and being friendly with each other. That is not worship. That is, at best, fellowship.

- It is not drinking coffee and eating doughnuts. That is not worship. That is a *kaffee klatsch*.
- It is not just the singing of choruses or hymns. That is not worship. That is singing.
- It is not listening to a teacher or preacher with an open Bible on your lap. That is not worship. That is instruction.
- It is not serving on a committee, painting the bathrooms, or baking a casserole for the potluck. That is not worship. It is service.
- It is not some forms of prayer, for they are not worship, but supplication, entreaty, or intercession.

To be sure, any of these activities *may* on occasion include specific worship, but they are not in and of themselves a type of specific worship. You are not worshipping by just mechanically doing these.

Today, in this age of the church, we enter the Holy of Holies by way of the heart. We do not pass through heavily gated openings in stone walls. We do not don ornate raiment and headpieces and slaughter innocent livestock. We do not sprinkle blood on a golden mercy seat. Instead, we enter the presence of God with an attitude and thoughts of reverent adoration. In that supernatural joining of our spirit to His, we focus all of our attention and affection on our Maker and Lord.

Specific worship is always—*always*—directed upward. This is not negotiable. It is the humble, reverent believer directing his or her thoughts to and on God. It is not singing *about* God (that is testimony), nor is it singing about the benefits of salvation to the unsaved (that is evangelism). It is not even singing *about* worship (that may be a *call* to worship, but is not the worship itself).

Specific worship is adoration. It is one person, or a single-minded group of people, telling God, *and meaning it in the heart*, “I love You.” Specific worship is also *exaltation*. That is, it is one person, or a single-minded group of people, declaring that God’s eternal and supernatural attributes raise Him higher than anything else in their lives. Specific worship is the humble, reverent believer looking upward to the throne and declaring, “You are *God!*”

*You, O God, are holy!
O Lord, You are pure and righteous!*

A Moment of Worship

Let us draw from the very words of God Himself for a moment of specific worship. First we call ourselves to worship:

Come, let us worship and bow down,
Let us kneel before the Lord our
Maker.
For He is our God,
And we are the people of His pasture
and the sheep of His hand.

Psalm 95:6-7a

Now, standing before His throne in the Holy of Holies, with open and truthful hearts let us fall down and worship the Lord:

Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord my God, You are very great;
You are clothed with splendor and
majesty,
Covering Yourself with light as with
a cloak,
Stretching out heaven like a tent
curtain...
O Lord, how many are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all;
The earth is full of Your
possessions...
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 104:1-2,24,35a

Continued...

