

Decently and In Order

‘After attending church with his father one Sunday morning and before getting into bed that evening, a little boy knelt at his bedside and prayed, “Dear God, we had a good time at church today, but I wish You had been there”.’ Have we ever felt that way, too? Maybe even far too many times? When we attend church on Sunday morning, we should expect to come away from it feeling that we have heard God’s word for us, or felt His presence, or been blessed by His love directly or for having been in fellowship with His people. If one or more of us doesn’t sense any of those things, that doesn’t necessarily mean that God wasn’t there at all. It might, but far more likely, the fact that some did not sense His presence at all indicates that those few hadn’t come with an attitude of humble worship to begin with.

Way too many who call themselves Christians approach worship as a way to get something from God. They think, I need such and such, and so I should go to church, and then I can pray for God to provide such and such. Because I’ve attended church x many times, God “owes” me one or more divine favors. Folks, it doesn’t work this way at all. This is works-righteousness thinking. And it stinks. It smells, for it’s a rotten, decaying, dissolving corpse of a prideful, sinful, quivering body of flesh deceiving itself

by thinking it has something God desires, enough for Him to condescend to granting it a wish or two, now and then. It's a horrible, revolting picture! Indeed, this thinking is universal the world over. And it's infected the church from the beginning, perhaps worst of all in the days of Martin Luther, which, in reaction, caused him to unknowingly launch the Protestant Reformation.

Remember in Isaiah 64:6 God tells us, "We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags". For without Holy Spirit living and working in us, constantly, continuously, our very best efforts at righteousness fall as far short of being acceptable and beautiful to behold as is the height of ant standing beneath a redwood sequoia tree. Actually, more like the difference between that ant here on earth and the farthest star in the farthest galaxy. We somehow think that we have enough goodness within ourselves to outweigh all our badness. But Jeremiah 17:9 reads: "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Yet our progressive politicians claim that decriminalizing crimes results in reformed, law-abiding, productive citizens! Fools, they need to read the Bible. For, in people's self-centered, self-focussed minds, we somehow seriously entertain the notion that we truly matter to God, independent of how He thinks of us, if we believe in Him at all. We somehow completely forget that we are creatures. And that the only reason we're still alive is that He is allowing it.

Most Americans intellectually know that God loves us. But most people stop there. Yes, He loves us. But that doesn't mean that He approves of any and everything we do. By no means! If He is God, and we are His creations, then He knows what's best for us in every respect. And we don't. We can't see the lay of the land around us. Only He can. Like if we're driving about and suddenly find the road ahead blocked by an unmoving traffic jam. We think there's an accident ahead or mishap. But in actuality, there's a secret, unannounced transport of deadly materials going through the city many miles ahead of us, and security forces have stopped all traffic for umpteen miles around. Only the people involved know what is really going on, while everyone else complains and badmouths their situation, ignorant of the real circumstances affecting their commute, to say nothing of their very lives.

That poor example paints a picture of just how minuscule, impotent, frivolous and trivial people truly are in the grand scheme of things. When we're without God, that is. Without Him, we're truly less than nothing, of no more weight than the chaff a gentle breeze invisibly carries away. But with God, everything changes. If we're in Christ, everything is different. For only in Christ do we begin to live into what God created us to be, designed us to be and do from before time began. Only then, each of us take on a weight and responsibility for the wellbeing of God's creation and kingdom that is far heavier and mightier than the most powerful potentate who's ever ruled on earth! The key that unlocks our

real potential, our true identities, is none other than Christ Jesus. Only in union with Him are we complete human beings. Without Him, we're like super cars with no transmissions. We can look and sound awesome, but can't actually move even an inch!

So how do we get our "transmissions", and then, how do we put them in gear? Lord Jesus isn't physically here on earth anymore, not for over 2,000 years. How can we be "in Christ" now? Well, He said that it was good for us that He left, because then He could send Holy Spirit. The Spirit is His very presence, everywhere on earth and in all creation, simultaneously, and in each and every believer on the earth. Holy Spirit is like the oxygen we breathe, Who enables us to be alive spiritually and eternally—the only way that matters. Holy Spirit within us gives us the very life of Christ, bubbling up within us, day after day after day. And every day slowly but surely transforming our physical lives into everlasting, unending spiritual life, forever and once and for all reversing the curse brought down upon the entire human race by Adam and Eve's disobedience of God in the Garden of Eden.

While we were indwelt with Holy Spirit at our water baptisms, yet the baptism of Holy Spirit is a separate, ongoing, repeating wonder of divine work in our souls and spirits. The most common outward indicator that someone has been baptized with Holy Spirit is what's usually called "tongues", speaking in unknown languages as Holy Spirit enables people and leads them along. It's a common gift of Holy Spirit, so common in the early church that

some thought that without it, believers weren't really Christians. That thinking still persists among some Pentecostals and Charismatics. When I was applying to seminaries, I remember considering one application with a question asking the approximate date I began speaking in tongues. At that time, I hadn't been blessed with that gift, but the implication from that seminary was that any applicant had to have that gift to even be considered.

In today's extended passage from I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul addressed several issues in the Church of Corinth. While not all had received the gift of tongues, many had, and, in the sin of pride, somehow thought they were therefore higher ranking Christians. To prove their point, they would rattle off in tongues when the church met for Sunday worship. Practically in competition with each other, several would sound off babbling at the same time, creating a chaotic cacophony that all but precluded others from experiencing the blessed presence of God's Holy Spirit. So Paul told them to exercise their will and speak in turn, and even then, only two or three each worship service, and only when someone who had the separate gift of interpretation could "translate" what had been spoken in a tongue to everyone else so that all would know what had been said and be blessed and encouraged by that testimony of Holy Spirit in that particular person's life. But even better than tongues was the gift of prophecy, which benefits the whole church, not just a few.

Paul then summarized a first century worship service in

verse 26: “When you meet together, one will sing, another will teach, another will tell some special revelation God has given, one will speak in tongues, and another will interpret what is said. But everything that is done must strengthen all of you”. We here also sing and hear teaching. We sometimes hear a personal testimony or revelation, but rarely. We don’t hear any tongues, for no one currently here can interpret, so, following Paul’s instruction in verse 28, “if no one is present who can interpret, they must be silent in your church meeting and speak in tongues to God privately”. Also to be silent in church are women, well, many men might wish that were so. But that’s not what Paul meant. His admonition was intended to stop women from “talking in class”. They were more apt to talk because the sexes were separated and few women were literate in those days. Therefore they asked many more questions and had many more comments. But they were to respect men’s spiritual authority, and not interrupt while men taught, unless the men themselves were in doctrinal error.

The point of worship is to praise God, give Him thanks, and exalt His name in prayer, in words, music and actions, in whatever ways we can give ourselves in humble adoration of Him. In those acts, we will experience the presence of His Holy Spirit, as we open ourselves up to Him, always seeking to humble and make ourselves lower than others, so that the glory of Christ Jesus is lifted higher and higher in our midst. That, in just a few words, is really what “decently and in order” worship is all about.

