

## ***Corporate Worship: The Heart Hunger That Honors God***

**Implication #10.** The essence of authentic, corporate worship is the collective experience of heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, or a trembling that we do not have it and a great longing for it. Worship is for the sake of magnifying God, not ourselves, and God is magnified in us when we are satisfied in him. Therefore, the unchanging essence of worship (not the outward forms which do change) is heartfelt satisfaction in the glory of God, the trembling when we do not have it and the longing for it.

The basic movement of worship on Sunday morning is not to come with our hands full to give to God, as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25), but to come with our hands empty, to receive from God. And what we receive in worship is the fullness of God, not the feelings of entertainment. We ought to come hungry for God. We should come saying, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Ps. 42:1-2). God is mightily honored when a people know that they will die of hunger and thirst unless they have God.

Nothing makes God more supreme and more central in worship than when a people are utterly persuaded that nothing—not money or prestige or leisure or family or job or health or sports or toys or friends – nothing is going to bring satisfaction to their sinful, guilty, aching hearts besides God. This conviction breeds a people who go hard after God on Sunday morning. They are not confused about why they are in a worship service. They do not view songs and prayers and sermons as mere traditions or mere duties. They see them as means of getting to God or God getting to them for more of his fullness – no matter how painful that may be for sinners in the short run.

If the focus in corporate worship shifts onto our giving to God, one result I have seen again and again is that subtly it is not God that remains at the center but the quality of our giving. Are we singing worthily of the Lord? Do the instrumentalists play with a quality befitting a gift to the Lord? Is the preaching a suitable offering to the Lord? And little by little the focus shifts off the utter indispensability of the Lord himself onto the quality of our performances. And we even start to define excellence and power in worship in terms of the technical distinction of our artistic acts. Nothing keeps God at the center of worship like the Biblical conviction that the essence of worship is deep, heartfelt satisfaction in him, and the conviction that the trembling pursuit of that satisfaction is why we are together.

Furthermore, this vision of worship prevents the pragmatic hollowing out of this holy act. If the essence of worship is satisfaction in God, then worship can't be a means to anything else. We simply can't say to God, “I want to be satisfied in you so that I can have something else.” For that would mean that we are not really satisfied in God but in that something else. And that would dishonor God, not worship him.

But, in fact, for thousands of people, and for many pastors, the event of “worship” on Sunday morning is conceived of as a means to accomplish something other than worship. We “worship” to raise money; we “worship” to attract crowds; we “worship” to heal human hurts; to recruit workers; to improve church morale; to give talented musicians an opportunity to fulfill their calling; to teach our children the way of righteousness; to help marriages stay together; to evangelize the lost; to motivate people for service projects; to give our churches a family feeling.

In all of this we bear witness that we do not know what true worship is. Genuine affections for God are an end in themselves. I cannot say to my wife: “I feel a strong delight in you so that you will make me a nice meal.” That is not the way delight works. It terminates on her. It does not have a nice meal in view. I cannot say to my son, “I love playing ball with you – so that you will cut the grass.” If your heart really delights in playing ball with him; that delight cannot be performed as a means to getting him to do something.

I do not deny that authentic corporate worship may have a hundred good effects on the life of the church. It will, just like true affection in marriage, make everything better. My point is that to the degree that we do “worship” for these reasons, to that degree it ceases to be authentic worship. Keeping satisfaction in God at the center guards us from that tragedy.