

## **Praise and Worship**

We do it every week. We've all probably done it some form or another in every church denomination we've ever attended. Obviously, I'm referring to praise and worship. With the numerous churches I've attended in my life, I've seen a variety of formats and displays of praise and worship. Personally, I've seen the monotonous recital of a missal (no not an ICBM), to a near Rockettes performance by a choir with tambourines and dancing in the isles. I've also witnessed folks in Immokalee singing their hearts out playing sour notes on a busted organ at the little Haitian church. So, what is praise and worship? Why do we do it and does God really hear us?

According to the Free On-line Dictionary, Praise is defined as: to *glorify, exalt, acclamation, compliment*. Worship is defined as: the reverent love and *devotion* accorded to a deity, an idol, or a sacred object. Of course, we are only concerned with praising and worshipping our Creator and Sovereign God.

### **Why?**

If we pause to think about the "why" we praise God, just hold your breath. "Then the LORD God formed man *of the* dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils

the breath of life; and man became a living being.”- **Genesis 2:7 (Genesis 6:17, 7:15, 7:22, Job 33:4)**. Beginning with Him giving us the breath of life, everything after that is a bonus. But only our God could go beyond just merely giving us life, He gave us His only Son to die for our sins adding the hope and promises of eternal life in His Kingdom. Prayer, His Holy Spirit, His Sabbaths, His Holy Days, His Commandments. He is most worthy to be Praised. “I will call upon the LORD, *Who is* worthy to be praised. And I shall be saved from my enemies.”- **2 Samuel 22:4**.

**Psalm 18:3**- “I will call on the LORD, *Who is* worthy to be praised, so shall I be saved from my enemies.”

**Revelation 4:11**- “Worthy are You, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power because You did create all things, and for Your will they were created and exist.”

This is quite a short list but I’m glad we will have eternity to praise and thank Him for the infinite blessings He bestows upon His children.

We glorify God through our praises. To glorify means to give glory, honor, high praise or exalt. **Psalm 86:12**- “I will praise You, O LORD my God, with all my heart, and I will glorify Your name forevermore,” (**Psalm 22:23**). **Luke 18:43**- “And immediately he received sight; and he followed Him, glorifying God. Now after seeing this, all the people gave praise to God.”

**1 Chronicles 16:35-36-** “And say, ‘Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather us, and deliver us from the nations, so that we may give thanks to Your holy name, *and* glory in Your praise. Blessed *be* the LORD God of Israel forever and ever.’ And all the people said, ‘Amen, and praised the LORD.’”

**Isaiah 43:21-** “This people *that* I formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise.”

Praising God is a frequent theme in the Psalms, the Hebrew title of which is "Praises." Yet praise is a theme that saturates all of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, direct and indirect praise can be found in Exodus, 2 Samuel, Isaiah, Daniel, Ephesians, Revelation, but particularly throughout the Psalms. Many of the synonyms of praise we have already mentioned (bless, exalt, glorify, magnify, etc.) are also used. Praising God calls attention to His glory.

We usually begin our fellowship by playing a few songs or hymns as music has been used for centuries, especially in the area of praise and worship. There is a book by William Law, titled “A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.” Law was an 18<sup>th</sup> century minister in the Church of England. In a brief excerpt from chapter 15, he writes: “You are to consider this singing of a song as a necessary beginning of your devotions, as something that is to awaken all that is good and holy within

you. That is, to call your spirit to its proper duty, to set you in your best posture toward heaven, and tune all the powers of your soul to worship and adoration. For there is nothing that so clears a way for your prayers, nothing that so disperses dullness of heart, nothing that so purifies the soul from poor and little passions, nothing that so opens heaven or carries your heart so near it as these songs of praise. They create a sense and delight in God, to awaken holy desires, they teach you how to ask, and they prevail with God to give. They kindle a holy flame, they turn your heart into an altar, your prayers into incense, and carry them as a sweet-smelling savor to the throne of grace. A man singing of a song though not in a very musical way, may yet sufficiently answer all the ends of rejoicing in and praising God. Our Savior and the Apostle, sang a hymn, but it may be reasonably supposed that they rejoiced in God, rather than made fine music.” God knows our heart **(Psalm 44:21).**

We will be praising God for all eternity but continuing to learn as well. **Rev. 5:12-13-** “Saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory and blessing.” “And every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and those that are on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying, “To Him Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing, and honor, and glory, and sovereignty into the ages of eternity.”

We will continue to learn forever. “*And* that being rooted and grounded in love, you may be fully able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the breadth and length and depth and height, And to know the love of Christ, which surpasses *human* knowledge; so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, To Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, *even* into the ages of eternity. Amen.”-

**Ephesians 3:18-21.**

This is an excellent focus on why we sing songs as praise unto God.

**Setting the Stage**

Music is a powerful medium, one in which we have given extraordinary regard to throughout history. It has been used in all facets of culture. Some primitive peoples thought music to have the power of the gods working through musicians, actually possessing the minds of the listeners. The Greeks and the Romans with their intellect, later scoffed at this idea as silly. They deemed music as a powerful tool, that could embody the morality and ethics of their society. Other cultures in the Orient viewed its use in more of a cosmic spiritual sense.

Music also provides a vital part in the history of mainstream Christianity. In the Middle Ages, theologians attributed to music the exclusive purpose of worshipping God. This view was held until after the Protestant Reformation in 1517, when musical composition expanded into an art form. This was seen as man's ability to participate as individuals within God's creative power. There certainly has been a focus on individuality in contemporary music although the connection to religious devotion has faded.

When we are setting the stage with our praise and worship, are we focused on worshipping God? Are we concentrating on the lyrics of what is being sung? Or are we wanting something to make us feel all warm and fuzzy within ourselves? It is critical we pay attention to what we sing due to the significance of The One to Whom we sing. So many of the songs nowadays are fixated on what God can do for us rather than paying reverence and our loving devotion to our Creator Who gives us all things. **1 Timothy 6:17-** "Charge those who are rich in this present age not to be high minded, nor to put *their* hope in *the* uncertainty of riches; but *to put their hope* in the living God, Who abundantly gives us all things for *our* enjoyment;"

I remember seeing people leave a church because their Praise and Worship service was inadequate. We would see a variety of music performed by the choir but so many thought that they were up there just to entertain them. Praise and worship are

not for our entertainment. It is to honor and worship our Heavenly Father and prepare our hearts and minds to receive God's message for the day.

If someone's motive to attend is to be entertained, they'd be better off staying at home. It was a Sunday church anyway so in either case, staying at home is worthwhile.

As we mentioned a few weeks ago, when we arrive for fellowship, we are entering God's sanctuary. Do we leave the world outside the door and focus on meeting with God? To praise and worship Him in spirit and in truth? Do we genuinely with all our hearts offer God the sacrifice of praise? **Hebrews 13:15**- "Accordingly, let us offer *the* sacrifice of praise continually to God through Him; that is, *with the* fruit of *our* lips openly professing *our faith* in His name." (**Psalm 27:6, Jeremiah 17:26, 33:11**).

I've mentioned previously of a TV Evangelist show I skimmed past one night channel surfing. They played the same song over and over again for longer than 20 minutes. During this time, one of the participants was running up and down the isles like he'd stepped in Fire Ants. Now dancing before the Lord is not wrong as King David did so (**2 Samuel 6:14**). Much like some of the Hillsong renditions of praise and worship songs, they play a continuous melody over and over again. The group of folks on stage are all playing different instruments but, I'm no musician,

they all sound the same. The guitarist is strumming away like he's playing with The Who and some of them are bouncing up and down like they're doing cross-fit. I know from the Pentecostal church Andrea and I used to attend, this is all done to "call down the spirit." It's as if the Holy Spirit of God Almighty is a genie in a bottle and with the right amount of monotonous music and bouncing antics, the bottle will be rubbed just right and someone may speak in tongues when it shows up. Again, we are blessed to have been given God's Holy Spirit when we were baptized. Our communication lines are wide open through our Savior Jesus Christ who gives us direct access to the Throne (**Hebrews 4:16**).

### **What words are we singing?**

The lyrics of the songs we sing have a tremendous impact on our fellowship with God. We need to keep in mind that God does not want us to just lift up our voices because it is a "requirement" or "procedure" but a genuine act of our devotion to Him. We know how powerful words can be ("Let there be light"- **Genesis 1:3**) and the lyrics to a song can have a significant impact on our study.

Have any of you ever attended a rock concert? Most of us have at one time or another. I'm sure we've all seen at least films of one or two if we've never been to one. People are moved by the music they are experiencing. Music has the power to



transform our mode of thinking from stress to peace, anxiety to ease, and just the opposite, calm to “wound up.” Music can be used to help heal people. It can cheer you up, it can strengthen your faith. If you need an example of music’s influence, try listening to relaxing spa or classical music when driving as compared to rock and roll. Driving in southwest Florida is stressful enough without adding Led Zeppelin to your traveling. Save that for the gym when the adrenaline is needed. It can be a destructive rhythm, and it can move people in the wrong direction. So much of today’s music has an incredible amount of satanic influence. It is reflecting an increasingly self-centered, divided, and confused nation. That is why it is so important to be mindful of the lyrics of any praise and worship songs. Even some of our most beloved tunes are not all up to par with the Word of God. Songs that sing of going to heaven, even the Old Rugged Cross contains more than questionable lyrics. Remember, God is not a respecter of persons.

In our *willing* participation we fill our hearts and minds with the sentiment of the music. We humble ourselves before God. However, because of music's significant influence, we should consider all of the music we listen to, questioning what spirit it carries and transfers. Satan has special musical talents and can confer his defiant attitudes through the art (**Ezekiel 28:13-16**). A song can be a teaching vehicle. It primarily is in the instance of our praising God. God's primary reason for having music. When we are singing, we are not to be just lip-syncing, but we need to be

thinking about the words, because the words are imparting to us knowledge that is necessary for our life. God has endowed us with great gifts for music, but unfortunately so much of it is wasted on perverted and mindless trash. Again, we must always remember Who we are singing to.

### **Does God really hear us?**

**Psalm 22:3-** “Yet You are holy, O You *enthroned* upon the praises of Israel.”

(AFV) The King James Version renders the scripture as ‘But thou art holy, O thou that *inhabitest* the praises of Israel.’ By His Word we know He hears and is *in* the praises of His children. We can also know that God provided a collection of songs that expresses His nature and relationship with us, the inspired Psalms and the Song of Songs. We will be given new songs to sing in our walk with Him.

**Psalm 40:3-** “And He has put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise to our God; many shall see and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.” We put a great value on music. So does God! A quick study of music in Scripture reveals God loves music. Music is widespread in the Old Testament as essential to life in ancient Israel. They used songs to praise and worship God.

**Psalm 66:1-5-** “To the Chief Musician. A Song. A Psalm. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth. Sing forth the honor of His name; make His praise glorious. Say to God, “How awesome are Your works! Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies submit themselves in obedience to You. All the earth shall worship You and shall sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name.” Selah. Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His deeds toward the sons of men.”

**Isaiah 44:23-** “Sing, O heavens; for the LORD has done *it*. Shout, O lower parts of the earth. Break out into singing, O mountains, O forest, and every tree in it, for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel.”

Understanding the use of music and how we praise and worship God gives us insight to the importance of the *way* we sing unto our Creator. Music can move and change us if we have the proper focus. It can transform our mental and emotional state. It can also, more importantly, unify the minds of an entire group. Just look at all the patriotic songs played around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Or how about the National Anthem played in a stadium? I remember standing at the top of the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremonies of the 100<sup>th</sup> Olympic Summer Games in Atlanta, GA in 1996. There were 85,000 people in the stadium, Presidents and Prime Ministers from 197 countries. There was a 200 member Baptist Church

choir that sang the Star-Spangled Banner, complete with a US Air Force Thunderbirds roll-over the stadium at the “rockets red glare” (accompanied by fireworks from two stadiums of course). My dear friend from Australia, who recently passed away, was crying! Why was he crying? Because music reaches a depth of feeling that is far beyond the spoken word, so far beyond that there is no comparison. Talk about music moving you!

Singing praise unto our God as we worship Him in spirit and in truth should have more importance to us, considering Who He is and what He does, has done and continues to do for all of us. For the duration of our praise and worship portion of fellowship, we can be in harmony, mentally and spiritually with God and our brothers and sisters in His family. Hopefully, when fellowship is over, we carry that unity forward throughout the coming week. If you hit a snag midweek, try listening to praise music (with good lyrics) and sing to yourself (or out loud if you're by yourself like me). Just see if God doesn't meet you where you're at and ask, “how are you, my child?” He already knows anyway.

I hope that with this insight we have a little more understanding of the importance of praise and worship as part of our devotions to God in our Sabbath fellowship. By singing praise and worship to our Father God, we are of one accord in the Body of Christ, ready to receive His message.

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

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