

The Joy of Worshipping God Together

Mankind, as God's creation, has no higher tribute than that God "visitest him" (Hebrews 2:6). Similarly, man is never more noble than when he responds by lifting up his hands and heart to worship God.

There is an aspect of the spirit of man that can be fulfilled only by worshipping God. As the eye is designed to behold beauty, and the ear is fitted to listen to harmonious sounds, so is the spirit of man created to worship and serve God (Acts 17:24-28). "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:1-2). Men fulfill their reason for existence only when they "seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him" (Acts 17:27).

God, in infinite wisdom and boundless love has provided that we should worship Him in those ways that both exalt Him and edify us. When we can understand that the worship which pleases God and that He accepts is also that which fulfills our own greatest need, then we shall be able to worship Him with a greater depth of gratitude.

Worshipping together.

While effective worship should, at times, be rendered in the privacy of one's own closet (Matthew 6:6), God has directed also that His people join together sometimes to share in worshipping Him. The company of other people strengthens us in whatever we do, either good or bad. Even as "evil companionships corrupt" (1 Corinthians 15:33), so also the fellowship of others in the true worship of God serves to "provoke unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). When our Lord directed that His worshippers come together "upon the first day of the week... to break bread" (Acts 20:7), He was giving us the benefit of this reinforcement. If one neglects this appointment, or even joins with a church where this weekly communion is not practiced, he not only disobeys Christ, but prevents his own spiritual development.

Singing together.

Christians are admonished, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God. (Colossians 3:16). Words of praise, thanksgiving, hope and admonition are all the more powerful when set to appropriate cadence and melody. Such is the value of music. When we sing together with others whose hearts are similarly stirred and attuned to God, our own soul is enlarged in its upward reach toward God and in its outward reach to embrace, in love, our brothers and sisters.

Breaking bread together.

Only in the privacy of his own heart can the worshipper "discern" that he is not merely eating bread and drinking the juice of the grapes, but is participating in "the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27). Yet Christ, through His apostles, instructed that this supper be eaten by disciples who have come together (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20, 33). While we are eating the bread and remembering the body of Jesus, sustained as it was by "bread," in which He fulfilled all righteousness and overcame sin in the flesh, we can look around at others and be impressed that we are not alone in communion with that body. Likewise, as we drink the fruit of the vine, we are reminded that Jesus' blood was truly shed "for many unto the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Such worship helps us become more fully "one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

Public prayers.

We do not have to pray aloud to be heard of God for "he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit" (Romans 8:27). Yet, from the earliest days, Christians have been taught to unite in prayer (Acts 2:42; 4:24; 12:12, etc.). Joining our fellow-Christians in prayer about their burdens helps us overcome the temptation to be self-centered in our own prayers. It is also a humbling experience to hear others praying earnestly for us. Those who lead prayers in the assembly would do well to prepare for them as carefully as for a sermon or a class lesson.

David was "glad when they said unto (him), let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Psalm 122:1). We, too, should learn to rejoice at every opportunity to join our brethren in faithful worship to God. "For the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23).

- by **Bob Crawley**

Forgiveness (6th / final in a series)

Since we are to forgive others "*just as God in Christ also hath forgiven you*" (Eph. 4:32), it seems very appropriate to study how God forgives. We've learned that He 1) is willing to forgive, 2) is 'aggressive' in forgiving us, 3) places conditions on us in order to be forgiven, 4) forgives absolutely, 4) forgives permanently, and 5) forgives repeatedly. We should imitate Him in all these ways when others sin against us.

Finally, let us observe that forgiveness does not always remove all the consequences of our misdeeds. Some examples will illustrate our meaning:

1) A man is abusive of his wife and children. For years he is negligent and mean. Finally he 'comes to himself', repents, and asks their forgiveness. They forgive him, but it is unreasonable to imagine that his family will ever be rid of the terrible scars that have been inflicted. He is forgiven, by his family and by God, but that family has been changed forever by his wrongs.

2) Another man cheats on his wife. Thankfully he realizes how horribly he has sinned against her and God. He begs forgiveness, and it is granted by both. But things are not the same as before he made those wicked choices. She decides to divorce him (her rightful choice). He is forgiven, but he must live alone the rest of his life.

3) In a moment of uncontrolled rage a man strikes another. The blow inflicts a mortal wound. He is arrested, convicted, sentenced. He mourns, repents, and seeks forgiveness. Can he be forgiven? Of course! But he must still suffer the consequences of his deed.

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing - but, how much better to live so as to limit the need to approach God and man seeking it.

- by **Greg Gwin**