

Learning to Worship

"The preacher's eyes I've never seen, though light in them may shine; for when he prays he closes his, and when he preaches, I close mine."

If I knew who wrote it I wouldn't embarrass him by telling. Besides, if the writer had been worshipping as he should, he wouldn't know that the other's eyes are closed during prayer.

That preacher had probably made a studied effort to learn how to get and keep attention. How many of us make a studied effort to give attention? Both sides may be failing. Granting (please do, or I'll feel terrible) that absolute and unwavering attention is impossible; surely there is some way to improve single-mindedness in the public worship. Perhaps the most important prerequisite is an honest appraisal of our desire. If we do not care - are so little acquainted with true worship as to think "attending," "visiting" and "gazing about the auditorium" is all God expects of us -- there is little use in going further with this.

But people who really want to worship God can improve their efforts. . .

1. "Make not Provisions for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14); that is, do not sit where there are distractions - move toward the front of the building. Unless you are forced (small children, physical disability, etc.) you cannot afford to overlook this means of improving your attention span and enriching your worshipping experience.

2. Practice charity - hear the monotone singer as one who sings to God; and the trite expressions in prayer as the efforts of an embarrassed man, saying what he thinks is expected. (You can pray your own prayer, you know; and if you lead publicly, you can set a better example for others.)

3. Listen with a view to learning! Take notes, reason through the process, being critical in a positive fashion. Better to forsake the preacher while making a note of your own, than to drift sleepily into "limbo."

4. And, when you drift, apologize to God, right then! Ask His help, and worship will become more meaningful.

- by Robert Turner

The Power of Influence

Webster defines the word influence as "the power of persons or things to affect others, seen only in its effects." Though the word influence is only found one time in the King James Version, its meaning is on every page.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples that they are the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13-16). There are many interesting things you can say about this figure of speech. Salt is totally worthless while sitting on a shelf, it has to be applied. Salt can also lose its "saltiness." When it loses its power to flavor, it is good for nothing and must be discarded.

Paul told the brethren at Corinth they were an "epistle of Christ known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 3:1-3). Whether we like it or not, every Christian is an advertisement for Christ. It is rather scary to think the honor of Christ is in the hands of his disciples. Men of the world will judge Christ by the character of his followers.

Have you ever considered what type of an advertisement you are? One of our songs suggests that "We are the only Bible the careless world will read, We are the sinners gospel, we are the scoffers creed, We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word, What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?"

The majority of worldly people will pay very little attention to what we say, but our actions will always be scrutinized. When they think of our character and reputation, our actions will speak louder than our words.

- by David Padfield

Born Again?

In John 3:3, Jesus told Nicodemus that a person must be born again to see the kingdom of God. In response Nicodemus asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (vs 4) From this response we can see that

Nicodemus thought that Jesus was referring to a physical birth. To this misunderstanding Jesus responded, "Most assuredly, ...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (vs 5) When Jesus said, "...born of water..." He was not referring to the physical birth. The water which Jesus referred to was baptism. One is born of the water and the Spirit when he obeys Mark 16:16 and other such passages. How do we know that the baptism mentioned in Mark 16:16 was water baptism? Consider some bible examples: The eunuch in Acts 8:36 knew that water was necessary. He asked, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" In Acts 10:47, Peter asked the question, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized...?" Lest someone think that it is the water that saves a person, we must remind ourselves of what Peter said. Peter explains that it is not the water that saves a person; instead, it is his obedience to God's command. (1 Pet. 3:21) A person is saved by the grace of God when he is born again of the water and the Spirit. If you have not been born again, then please choose to be born of the water and of the Spirit.

- by John Duvall

Two Means of "Justification"

The dictionary defines the word "justify" to mean: "to defend or uphold as blameless or right; to declare guiltless; absolve; acquit." When it comes to our soul's condition, there are two very different ways to approach the business of justification. The first way is by means of the soul redeeming blood of Jesus Christ. When we humbly acknowledge our own sinfulness, and in true faith obey the commands of God, we are "justified by his blood" and "shall be saved from wrath through him" (Romans 5:9).

Those who do not find real justification by God's plan often follow another route that we refer to as "self justification." This is not new. Many men, past and present, have made such efforts (Luke 10:29). Several common tricks are employed when folks try to justify themselves. They will often:

1) Ignore the problem. Some seem to think that if they don't acknowledge their wrong, it will somehow disappear. It never does.

2) Deny the sin. Their "heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing" (Matt. 13:15). The sin remains.

3) Make excuses. When their failures are discovered, they will frequently describe the extenuating circumstance that led to their sinful words or deeds. In reality, an excuse is an admission of fault, and does nothing to truly justify the sinner.

4) Blame others. This approach is as old as the very first sin. Adam blamed Eve (Gen. 3:12), and millions have imitated his fruitless effort to shift blame. Yes, others sin - and sometimes their sins have an impact or influence on us - but such things never justify us to go against God.

5) Blame God. Adam tried this, too. He was wrong, and so is everyone who tries this. God has always desired what is best for us and His laws are designed for our benefit (Deut. 6:24).

We all need justification. Be careful not to be deceived by "self justification," but, rather, seek true justification by obedience to God.

- by Greg Gwin