

Why Do We Worship?

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A few years ago, I heard a guy on the radio mock the notion of worship. He said that if we are to believe what the Bible says about God, we must necessarily come to the conclusion that God has a pathological need for compliments. In other words, God must delight in hearing us say, "Nice world you made, God", or "How swell of you to make the beaches over in Hawaii." God must also be incredibly worried about his rival to get so overjoyed hearing us describe what a jerk the Devil is. In this view, worship is a great pep rally – "Yea God! Go, go, go!" and "Down with the Devil! Booooo!"

The guy's comments stayed with me for a long time and bothered me. I mean, why *does* God need our worship? What could worship from the likes of us possibly do for the Creator of the universe? We live for seventy years on the average. We have enough brain capacity to eke out an existence, to invent a few things before death comes and turns our lights out. Most of us will quit learning anything significant by the time we are twenty-five. Most of us will rarely contemplate much on the meaning of life or even our hope for eternal existence. We will work, sleep, mate, eat, get old, and die.

God, on the other hand, has such infinite intelligence that He knows everything – everything that has been, everything that will be, everything that is, and even everything that could be but is not. What joy could a God like that possibly get from hearing us gather once a week and sing or say something to the effect of "For He's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny"?

No, if we look at worship as something that God needs, then we must seriously consider that the impious remarks the guy made on the radio make a lot of sense. Obviously, God does not call us to worship because He needs our adoration. He calls us to worship because we need to adore Him. Worshiping is not something God needs, it's something we need.

Christians believe that we have been caught up into the love of God. Now we don't know why He loves us but we believe that He does. Because He does, He has chosen to transform us into a new kind of creature, much like the old story of Geppetto and Pinocchio.

Pinocchio, you remember, was a wooden puppet who wanted to be a real boy. Like him, we want to be changed. We are presently temporal and limited beings but we long to be eternal, to put on divine nature, as St. Peter puts it in his little epistle. Not only do we want that but, evidently, God wants it, too, and worship is the process by which it happens. As we worship, we begin to become like Him – to put on His divine nature.

Worship has three main ingredients that call us to a higher order of being: transcendence, community, and transformation.

Transcendence is the quality of worship that alerts our spirit that we are in a different environment than the bank or Wal-Mart. It is what we call "awe," that sometimes scary part of worship that can make our hair stand up on end and remind us that we are creatures of eternity. When worship is transcendent, we recall that "this world is passing and all it contains but that he who does the will of God lives forever."

Community is the part of worship that we acknowledge with the first word of the Lord's Prayer: "our." By saying *our* Father, we are recognizing the fact that we have spiritual siblings. So we pass the peace, or give a hardy handshake, or hug someone's neck. Worship is not only about God. It is also about recognizing our neighbor.

EXPERIENCE WORSHIP

Transformation is about deep, radical change. It is about seeking to leave behind the pettiness and sinfulness of life and choosing to walk in the ways of God.

In worship, we hear the scripture read and preached, we enter the presence of God, and we pray for transformation. That's why we worship: to become like the Lord. That's why He invites us to worship – not because He needs it, but because we do.

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