

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part eighteen - Teaching #2182

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Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE IMPORTANCE OF *DEFINING* WORSHIP BEFORE YOU MAKE THE DECISION TO *BE* A WORSHIPER

Romans 12:1-2 - “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

It is fascinating to me that Paul’s instructions regarding the renewal of the mind include more than just what we would call our ***mental*** activity. The ***fruit*** of the renewed mind is always the ***sacrificial devotion of our material, time sensitive, bodies*** with all their ambitions, priorities and desires - “....***present your bodies as a living sacrifice....***”(1).

Renewed minds manifest themselves in ***service rendered - work done***. Renewed minds ***spend themselves*** through the activities of the bodies. And the primary manifestation of that in our activities is the ***joyful non-conformity we demonstrate to the watching, enticing, self-worshiping world.***

Then we noticed that renewed minds manifest themselves not just in the **work done**, but in the ***motive behind*** the work done. We stuff our thoughts so deeply and repeatedly with the ***mercies of God*** - “....***I appeal to you, therefore, by the mercies of God....***”(1) - that **gratitude** turns ***mechanical obedience*** into ***adoring worship*** - “....***which is your spiritual worship....***”(1).

All of that leads us into today's topic. When someone stands up at the front of a church and says, “Let's lay everything else aside, people, and let's set ourselves to worship God,” ***what is he or she asking you to do?*** When does worship start and when does it end? The praise time doesn't go on forever. What about the worship? Is everything we do worship?

I've actually heard Christian people say that - “***Everything I do is worship, Pastor Don, whether it's in church or at the office or on a fishing trip.***” Which sounds so much like a spiritual life not far removed from John the baptist, it begs a further question: if ***everything*** is worship, what is the difference between **worship** and **non-worship**?

It is constantly amazing to me to see the number of Christians who are all caught up in the worship movement for no other obvious reason than it's a **movement**. And when there's a movement, I want to be in it because that's what everyone is doing.

And the danger of that is when words like “**worship**” are used, and used frequently, even when there is no particular, specific meaning attached to them, you are left with nothing but a shell. And it takes a great deal of emotional energy and manipulation to keep propping up a shell by mere human effort and excitement.

If Romans 12:1-2 is true, here's what we know we can say about genuine, Spirit inspired, God pleasing worship. I have two thoughts today and one more for next Sunday:

- 1) **AUTHENTIC WORSHIP ISN'T POSSIBLE UNTIL THERE IS A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT THE MERCY OF GOD**

Romans 12:1a - “I appeal to you *therefore*, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God....”

The emotions **are** involved in worship, but they are not the **fuel** for worship. The **understanding** must be brought to bear on what God has revealed, especially what He has revealed through His Son, Jesus Christ, about His mind-boggling mercy. The **call to worship** in Romans 12 is preceded by 11 chapters describing man's horrible predicament and God's amazing solution in Christ Jesus.

When these truths are **forgotten** worship dies. In fact, where these truths are just **assumed** worship dies. The music can be great, and the lighting can be perfect. And the crowd can be emotionally touched and responsive. But worship dies.

I've already dealt with this truth in this series, so I won't take anymore time with it here. But there is a calling to us in this truth. If you feel the pull of the Holy Spirit to the full-blooded worship of God, remember that He calls you to bring your mind with your emotions. The call to worship is always a call to study of truth. It doesn't **end** with that study, but it can't properly **begin** without it.

2) **THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT TO WORSHIP IS FUNDAMENTALLY A CORPORATE CALL, NOT AN INDIVIDUAL CALL**

After about 45 years of pastoral ministry the hardest thing for me to do is preach a sermon I know most people won't like to hear. There is almost no pocket of the North American church that has a natural taste for this second point. Fight your natural response and try to let the Holy Spirit push through any prejudice you may have against this truth.

I want to spend some time with this point today because I don't think it is as broadly accepted by North American Christians as it is throughout the rest of the world. In other words, this truth would be self-evident in the church almost everywhere else except North America, and perhaps much of Europe.

And we don't accept it as readily here because we are busier and more materialistic and will have more at stake if we do bow before God's Word at this point. In other words, we're heavily invested **not** to hear God speak to our hearts on this point.

Statistics abound proving that something absolutely unique is happening in North America. There are more people than ever claiming "**born again**" Christian experience, while church attendance is in sharp decline across almost all denominational lines. In other words, people see less and less connection between their **personal relationship** with Jesus Christ (words **never** used in the New Testament) and their **corporate participation** in the Church, he Body of Christ.

Perhaps the way to picture the way we tend to think of the church in Canada would be to see it as a large Home Depot for our personal lives. We come down the aisle on Sunday morning and evaluate what takes place by the way it ***meets our needs***. I'll pick up something that will ***help me build my personal life*** - perhaps something that will help me ***build my marriage***, or ***help me with my kids***, or perhaps ***rid my personal life of fear and worry***. If I find what I'm looking for I'll put it in my cart, lift up the trunk of my car, and take it home with me to use at my discretion.

This approach to church is so common that no one even seriously questions it anymore, yet it's miles from the teaching of the New Testament. Paul never ***did*** and never ***would*** ask people just to "***have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ***." In fact, we ***know*** what people committed to when they were converted in the early church:

Acts 2:41-47 - “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Notice, to “***receive his (Peter's) words***” didn’t mean to agree with them in the heart or mind. To receive Peter’s words meant to ***be baptized***, which was primarily the visible means of showing a switching of allegiances - a changing of one’s fundamental ***community*** - “It used to be that I would be identified with ***this*** group. Now my identity is linked to ***another group - the Body of Christ.***”

To receive Peter's words meant to enter into a **fellowship of teaching**. This is where Christians **corporately rehearsed the "mercies of God"** Paul described in Romans 12:1. To receive Peter's words meant to enter into a **committed circle of fellowship and accountability**.

The church could actually **call people to accountability** for how they lived out their vows. To receive Peter's teaching meant to enter into a fellowship of **united prayer**. To receive Peter's teaching meant to enter into a fellowship of **caring for the material needs of the others who had need**.

The central point is that **all of these practices were communal. Not a single one was private or personal.** No one got saved and ran home, had a personal quiet time and gave up smoking. They were attached **organically** to a new society, a new network. And this attachment manifested itself in a string of new commitments that were never even dreamed to be optional. No one in the early church would have even understood our "**unattached, personal relationship with Jesus Christ,**" where Jesus came into the heart and simply forgave sins and gave a home in heaven. No one.

Here's the New Testament picture of the church:

1 Peter 2:9-10 - “But you are a chosen race, [corporate] a royal priesthood, [corporate] a holy nation, [corporate] a people [corporate] for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. [10] Once you were not a people, [corporate] but now you are God's people [corporate]; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

Receiving God's mercy is a ***social experience***, not an ***individual experience***. Say all of Peter's terms over in your own mind - “***race***,” “***priesthood***,” “***nation***,” and especially “***people***,” which he uses twice. This is the fundamental identity of any Christian.

And the point is there is no ***solitary Christian identity***. Christ is formed in our lives by making us, not a group of ***persons***, but a single ***people - one*** people whose very existence and identity can only be found ***corporately***, not ***individually***. Most North American Christians don't get that.

Because of our natural resistance and dullness to this truth, the Bible piles up many other texts that won't let our minds escape the importance of the ***participation of community*** for spiritual growth and vital faith:

1 Corinthians 3:9-17 - “For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.[10] According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. [11] For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. [12] Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— [13] each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. [14] If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. [15] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.[16] Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

The verses I want to discuss are **16-17** - “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? [17] If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

And the common way people ***misread*** those verses is they're almost always quoted without the context of the surrounding entire chapter. People frequently take Paul to mean that we - you and I - ***individually*** - are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

And certainly the Bible ***does*** teach that the Holy Spirit indwells all believers - **Romans 8:9** - “**You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**”

But that is ***not*** what Paul is talking about in **1 Corinthians 3:16-17**. What isn't as easily spotted in English is every time Paul says “***you***” in those two verses it is ***plural***, not ***singular***. In other words the “***you***” Paul is referring to is that ***congregation*** at Corinth, not the ***individuals*** in it. Paul says that the ***corporate congregation*** at the city of Corinth is a temple of the Holy Spirit in a way that none of the people is ***individually***.

So there is a ***communal necessity*** in the renewal of the mind. It's not just ***thinking right*** (though it certainly beings and included that), but it's ***relating right*** and ***submitting right*** and ***forgiving right***.

All of which is to say, it is the beginning of spiritual dementia to beg off the regular, sometimes unexciting, discipline of meeting with the rest of the local congregation as you prepare for heaven. More is at stake than you could even imagine.