

October 8, 2006

“CPC: A Worshipping Body of Believers”
Malachi 1:6-14

FCF: Confusion as to who worship is for

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because our great God is so greatly worthy of our worship,
(magnet) our gatherings together must be chiefly focused on pleasing Him.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Loss of focus is a tragic thing. Case in point – soccer parents. They wanted their children to learn a sport, the benefits of discipline and teamwork, to make friends and get exercise. But something happens along the way. Before they know it, they are yelling at the officials, the coach, the other players, and even their own. It’s sad, distressing when you compare how things were supposed to be with how they end up becoming.

Could we be guilty of such a thing? The last two messages have been introductions to our new vision statement. Now we enter into the heart of what the Lord is calling us to be and to do – to worship Him. With that in mind, we’re going to look briefly at Malachi 1 – not a thorough exegesis but a summary. Malachi has much to say on “worship.” He reminds us we are God’s chosen people. God has taken us as His own and His clear passion for us is to know the radical implications of His grace.

SCRIPTURE READING: Malachi 1:6-14

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Ptolemy was an ingenious man, a 2nd century astronomer and mathematician whose theories and ideas dominated scientific thought until the 16th century. His was the “Ptolemaic system” – a model of the universe with the earth at its center, stationary while the sun, moon, and planets moved around it. No one had put forward such a detailed explanation of planetary movements before. It was quite ingenious. And quite wrong. Fourteen centuries later, Nicolaus Copernicus disproved this idea by showing that it was the sun at the center of the solar system with the earth and the planets revolving around it. And, in time, this view led to what has since been dubbed the “Copernican Revolution.”

On the topic of worship, we need just such a revolution today, a shift in our way of thinking. That which should be at the center is too often on the periphery. That which should be in “outer orbit” is too often at the center. We need a revolution, a returning to first things. Worship is fundamentally an expression of God’s worth. That said, it is ultimately for Him and His pleasure and not for us and our own pleasure. There are indeed other components, other necessary components, but ultimately there can be but one fundamental emphasis – the adoration and exaltation of our great Creator and Savior.

I. OUTREACH – PRESENCE OF SEEKERS

But what other elements might there be, worthy of our consideration? Outreach, a recognition of the presence of seekers here in our gatherings. It is a necessary component. And vital if our worship is to be pleasing to God. Now, why do I say that?

A) A Necessary Component

1. Invitation

Consider the invitation that is to go out. We are God’s priests (**READ 1 Peter 2:9**). There is an audience around us that needs to hear what we’re saying. The psalms are filled with this theme of invitation (**READ Psalm 96:1-3; 100:1; 105:1**).

2. Expectation

As we worship, we should long for others to join us. We should expect seekers, inquirers, those with questions to be here. And we should make room for them, make

certain adjustments for their sake (**READ 1 Corinthians 14:23-25**). Typically there is so much focus on the mention of tongues and prophecy here, we fail to see what is clear regarding the relationship between worship and evangelism. What is Paul saying? That nonChristians in our midst will be repelled by that which is unintelligible and reject the gospel. And that that should not be! So clearly outreach must be a necessary component.

B) But Not the Fundamental Emphasis

But, that said, it can never be a fundamental emphasis. We are to make the message intelligible. But that does not mean we make it comfortable. How can we?

1. The gospel is still proclaimed

For the gospel to be proclaimed, there will be offense (**READ 1 Corinthians 1:22-24**). For the gospel to be proclaimed there will be offense. That is always the case. Hear me.

2. God is still the focus

For our worship to be pleasing to God, outreach must be a necessary component. But it must never be the fundamental emphasis. He, The Seeker, must always be our focus.

Application:

What then are the implications of this for us? For starters, we should be inviting people we care for. And perhaps we should care for more people. And we must, all of us, make strides towards making our worship comprehensible to anyone in our midst. It is a crass and false dichotomy too often drawn between “pleasing God” and asking what our neighbors think or feel about our worship. We must love people more here.

And we must expect them to come under conviction and be converted through worship made comprehensible. We must trust the Lord will use it. We do not simply communicate the gospel to our neighbors but celebrate the gospel before them as well.

But, that said, these gatherings are not about them. It’s not about any of us. If you’re here seeking, asking, questioning the claims of Christ, we’re glad you’re here. This is a good place for you to be. But let me say, also in love, this is not about you. It’s not about any of us. It’s too big for that. It’s about God. It’s about Him and Him alone.

II. INREACH – PRESENCE OF BELIEVERS

That’s the first of the necessary but not fundamental components. “*But what about us?*” some of you are asking. What about the saints? Here we need to move from outreach to inreach, from the presence of others to the presence of believers.

A) A Necessary Component

Again, awareness of this is a necessary component.

1. His invitation to us

Consider God’s call to us (**READ Isaiah 55:1**). With such invitations in mind, St. Augustine said (**READ Augustine**), “*You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.*” Or Psalm 84 (**READ Psalm 84:1-2**).

2. Our deepest yearning within

God has designed us to come and bids us to come. And a mark of Christian maturity is a yearning to be among fellow believers in worship to Him. Look with me at Psalm 63 (**READ Psalm 63:1-4**). The context is Absalom’s rebellion. David is in exile, on the run. What does he miss the most? The special presence of God that comes in public worship from which his circumstances have cut him off. What does he expect and long for more than anything else? Not relief but being able to worship God again in the tabernacle. David shows us our highest priority is our highest privilege – worshipping God.

B) But Not the Fundamental Emphasis

So awareness of this invitation and this yearning must be a part of all we do in our gatherings together. A necessary component but, again, not the fundamental emphasis.

1. We must still bow

We must still bow before the Lord as the source of Truth, as the Giver of life and the commands we have broken, as the Savior of His people and the Equipper of the saints.

2. God is still the focus

Hear me. An awareness of our longings, our struggles, our need for answers and the re-crafting of our questions is a necessary component of worship that is pleasing to God. But He must always be the focus. He, our bowing before Him, and all that that requires.

Application:

What then are the implications of this for us? Well, for starters, we should come, even when we don't feel like it, knowing we need this and were made for it. We come and we come with empty hands, knowing this is the place to be filled. We come longing to express or even to awaken genuine, heartfelt, satisfaction in all that God is for us in Christ. We come with all of that in mind for He has called and we must come.

But, that said, these gatherings are not about you. And they're not about me. It's not about any of us. It's too big for that. It's about God. It's about Him and Him alone.

III. UPREACH – PRESENCE OF GOD

Which brings us to the third component – the one that is both necessary and fundamental – upreach, the awareness and recognition not just of the presence of others or ourselves but God Himself. Think with me back to Malachi 1. There are elements of the first two components we've talked about – the outreach and the inreach. But fundamentally, the concern is over the compromised upreach. Listen to what He says (**READ Malachi 1:6, 10-11, 13a**). Their worship was pitiful, careless, and dishonoring.

A) The Who of Worship

The “who” of worship is not about us or anyone else but the true and living God.

1. Not about us

(**READ Zechariah 7:4-6**) Did you catch it? This is not to be about our pleasure, what we “get out of it.” It's to be about God, His pleasure and what He “gets out of it.”

2. But about Him

(**READ Haggai 1:7-8**) An astonishing text for its implications. God is passionately interested in the pleasurable worship of His people. That which honors Him pleases Him.

Illustration:

It's for Him. It's not for us but for Him. Think of a child's birthday party. The plans for the party are made according to who it's for, right? Not according to the preferences of those who were invited (though we're glad they're there). Not according to the wishes of other family members (though they play an active role). No, the plans are made according to who the party is for – the “guest of honor.” It's the same here.

B) The War of Worship

Which brings me to the worship wars. We've talked about this before. The wars over what churches do on Sunday morning and how they do it are really not wars in the pews or the parking lot. These are wars fought in the heart. That's where the real war is.

1. The cause

And they've been going on a long time (**READ Genesis 4:2b-8**). This is the first fatality in the worship war. But not the last. And it begins with the Fall and sin's effects.

2. The result

And the results? Distractions in worship. No, not the person clipping their nails or getting up repeatedly or whispering too loud or opening another candy wrapper. The real distractions from worship are thinking we can come on our terms without regard for the Lord's desires. The real distractions from worship are coming with a utilitarian mindset, making a god of worship, asking "*What did I get out of it? What's in it for me?*"

Illustration:

And God is not pleased with such a farce – not our obsession with ourselves nor our bickering over the details. Back to the birthday party. Perhaps you've witnessed the unconscionable behavior – the fighting of the guests at the expense of the one they're ostensibly honoring. At such times, it would be better if there'd been no party at all. It's much the same here – the way we can grieve the One we ostensibly came to honor.

Application:

What does this mean for us? It means we must seek the things He is looking for, get comfortable with certain tensions that must be present for our worship to be pleasing to God. An informed mind and an inflamed heart. Loving Him as individuals and as one. Stressing law and gospel. The assurance He accepts us as we are but is determined to change us. Praising Him in worship here and now and out there all through the week.

To worship well we need to get comfortable with such tensions. To focus on what is pleasing to Him and not to us. To stop acting like consumers. And we all do this. "*I don't like the hymns. I don't like the choruses. We need more music. We need less music. I like the extemporaneous prayers. I like it when they're written out. It's good you don't dress so formally. When are you going to start wearing a robe? Sometimes you preach too long. We need to give you more time to preach.*" Again, we all do this.

But such things are not cheap commodities sold to make us happy. They are high callings to make us holy. And so there comes a whole new set of concerns. "*Lord, our souls long for You. Your love is better than life. How can we honor You? What is your pleasure? What is your delight? What would bring you joy?*" We need to ask such questions. And then be ready for the answers. There are times when such worship greatly comforts us. But there are times when it greatly discomforts us. Well, what did we expect? Who did we think we were meeting with? I mean, after all, this is for Him.

CONCLUSION:

A well known quote from C. S. Lewis comes to mind ([READ Lewis quote](#)):

The Christians who did the most for this present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have begun thinking less of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you get neither.

Which is to say, in the case of worship, aim at God and you get all other things thrown in. Let it be to Him and for Him, with His pleasure in mind – upreach. May it not be fundamentally about outreach or inreach. May it not be preoccupied with the presence of others or ourselves. May it be preoccupied with the presence of the true and living God.

For the gospel addresses both the seeking of the inquirer and the struggles of the believer. God-oriented worship puts forward what needs to be heard by all. But only as those emphases flow as byproducts, as fruits, of a greater aim. Ours is to focus on first things and let Him take care of the rest. Oh, for this Copernican revolution! May we grow in the conviction that though our worship should speak to the inquirer, it is not about making it palatable. May we grow in the conviction that though it should build us up, it is not about our preferences. May God be the center. And may He be pleased.

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