

## Heart of Worship

Eph. 5:18-21 and Col. 3:16-17

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### ① [Slide 1. - Title]

### ① [Slide 2. - Introduction]

What is worship? We speak of its character in terms of emotion and experience. And we tend to measure its presence by external indicators of passion and expression. Corporate worship is often thought of primarily in terms of music and singing. Unfortunately it has been the source of painful conflict over traditions and preference. What are sadly referred to as "worship wars." But what is true biblical worship?

Psalms 96 speaks of worship in this way. *"Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!"* Worship is ascribing, attributing, or assigning to the Lord the glory and value He is due.

But worship is more than just a mere exercise of the church to declare the glory of God. It is a spiritually rich activity full of blessing. Our gathered worship brings together personal expression, participation with one another, and engagement with God in a singular release of gladness and devotion that is enabled by Christ through His Spirit. It has many forms that function to serve and minister to the body of Christ. It is an essential part of the Church's function. Worship is another word for the sphere of ministry at the Chapel we refer to as Exaltation that seeks to magnify the supremacy of God in genuine expressions of love and praise.

Worship is not exclusive to the sphere of exaltation. It overlaps with both Edification and Evangelism. As we grow in faith, as we receive and respond to the Word, we worship. And as the lost are drawn to Christ, profess His name, and follow in baptism, we worship. Inversely, worship can be a means of encouragement and edification as it expresses our faith and ties truth to melodies that are easily remembered. Worship can also serve in the sphere of evangelism as it points the lost to Christ and the gospel and as our gathered worship evidences a supernatural meeting with God that is outside their ability to experience.

Yet it is interesting to note that exaltation and worship is the only sphere that endures into eternity. Edification and Evangelism will dissolve with the end of the present age. But exaltation and worship will remain as the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom resounds with the majestic praise of the redeemed throughout all eternity.

But even with the right understanding of worship, how do we know what true biblical worship looks like? What guidance and direction do we have from scripture in terms of our individual and gathered worship? What does God command and what falls into

areas of wisdom? These are all good questions that will define and shape our worship as a local church. I would like to look at two passages this morning taken from Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. Even though they are contained in separate letters, these passages closely parallel one another and speak in different ways to worship in the Church.

My purpose this morning is to get to the core of the heart of worship; to hear God's word as it speaks to the essence and character of our gathered worship. As the Lord allows, I hope to preach a few more times on this topic and further develop a biblical view and theology of worship. I must say that I am indebted to men like Bob Kauflin, David Peterson, and others who have written helpful books and have provided great insight that both challenged and encouraged me in my understanding and practice of worship. It is a delight this morning to share with you what I have learned and I pray that our time this morning will be a challenge and encouragement to you as well.

[opening prayer]

### 📌 [Slide 3. An Essential Expression]

Let's begin by working through the first of these two passages this morning. Please turn to Ephesians 5 and verse 18. We are picking up in the middle of a passage, so let's briefly review. The greater context here is that of living and walking in the body of Christ the light of wonderful truths of who we are in Christ. In other words, all that we are and all that we have in Christ transforms who we are both individually and as a community of believers. It is in fact, to change us even in every facet of our relationships together. As Paul begins his instruction on walking in Christ in community with one another we have several verses that speak to the nature of transformed worship.

Please follow as I read verses 18 through 21. Here is God's Word to us. *"18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."*

While verse 18 begins with a prohibition against being controlled by substances such as alcohol or drugs, I believe the point of this verse is found at the end of the verse. Rather than being under the influence of wine the believer is to be filled with the Spirit. Our identity with Christ means we will be filled and moved by the Spirit in a way that freely releases our hearts and our voices to worship. In Christ we have been freed to worship and boldly express our affections for Him. Worship is to be an essential expression of our gathering together. As we will see, there is to be a melody of praise and adoration that is pours out of us like water out of a fire house. Authentic worship should flow with such a force of gladness, joy, and passion that it cannot be constrained to this physical realm.

The first aspect of our expression of worship is its trajectory. The flow of our gathered worship begins with addressing one another. I confess that I have not often thought about worship as being to one another. While our worship is directed at and about our Lord, it is also to be aimed to one another. This does not make our worship about each other. True worship makes much of our Lord and all that He has done even as it strengthens and ministers to the body.

As we proclaim the glory of God and His truths in song, we proclaim it to one another. The unity of our voices joined together over the truths of His word reminding us of redemption's power brings comfort, strength, joy, and encouragement that rains back down upon us through His Spirit. Authentic worship flows to one another woven together with the power and grace of spiritual blessings. It is far more than just an experience or feeling. It is the work and movement of His Spirit among His people that enables, inhabits, and courses through our gathered praise.

Our expression of worship has another trajectory. Paul writes to the Church that our worship is singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. The other aim of our worship is to the Lord with all that we are. While we are to address one another we must make the Lord the sole focus and object of our worship. He alone deserves the praise for the sake and glory of His name. We join in worship together to extoll His perfections and beauty, to affirm His greatness and faithfulness, and exalt Him for his grace and marvelous works.

Note the ending verse of this passage in verse 21. Our walking with the Lord in community together is to be characterized by submission to one another out of reverence to Christ. As we will soon see, our worship has many forms. But in every form of worship it must be first and foremost about Christ. He is to be the sole object and attention of our worship. He are to come into His presence with reverence and awe that He is due.

I believe we would do well to be warned here to be careful that we do not take away or distract ourselves or others from giving ourselves fully to that focus. Whether it is singing together, special music, offertory, or public reading of scripture, we are not to take our attention or the attention of others from Christ. In doing so, we submit to and prefer one another out of reverence to Christ. Worship is about revering our Lord and making our worship about Him.

What does this look like practically? It means being careful not to draw attention to ourselves. To be clear, I am not saying that we should avoid any form of physical expression during our worship. To the contrary, I believe that this passage encourages us to freely express our affections and we should do so without being afraid of what others might think. But we should also be conscious and considerate of those around us and we should we not expressive in a way that intentionally draws attention to ourselves. Remember that God knows our hearts.

Submitting to one another in reverence to Christ during worship also means keeping our hearts and minds engaged with God in every aspect what we do. As we make the

Lord our focus we encourage others to do so as well. Especially during quieter times during our gathering it is important to be aware of talking, sounds, movement, or other distractions that takes our gaze or the gaze of others off of the Lord. If you are in doubt, ask yourself whether what you are doing is bringing attention to God or to yourself. I pray that at the Chapel, a reverence for Christ will consume us even more with a passion and character that is clearly visible to all for the sake of His great name.

#### **① [Slide 4. An Essential Expression]**

Another aspect the essential expression of our worship seen in this passage is in its types. Paul writes in verse 19 that we are to address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The sense of this verse seems to point to the variety of musical expressions in worship. But I believe this verse also illustrates three uses or types of music in the worship.

The types Paul lists here are not meant to exclusive. Rather, he is speaking to the nature of worship and our freedom to express it in many ways. I should also point that while music can be helpful and serve the goals of authentic worship, not all of our gathered worship must be around music. Our worship must always be centered around Christ and His word. As long as that essential element remains intact we are free to express ourselves in various forms and styles.

The first of these types are musical psalms. While we think of psalms as poems, the word in the original text here can mean both the striking of chords on a musical instrument or a reverent song. Music by itself, when performed to the glory of God, is worship. It is not exclusive to style of music or a particular instrument. Psalm 33 says to play skillfully on the strings. And Psalms 150 says to praise the Lord with loud clashing cymbals. The word psalms here may also refer to the singing or reading of poetic words or scripture as a means of worship. In fact, we see from biblical patterns of worship, that the use of scripture in our gatherings is an important part of our expression of worship.

Paul also speaks of hymns as a second type of expression. The word hymn here is used of songs of praise or sacred lyrics. Whether in song or in spoken word, the Lord's praise is to be a part of our worship. We are to make great the name of our Lord. We are to sing of His mighty works. Our worship should be expressed in songs that lead us to remember the greatness of our God. While music often helps us to express and remember these truths, it is secondary to theological truth. Our goal as a worship team is first about great lyrics based in scripture. The music exists to serve the lyrics.

Lastly, Paul speaks of spiritual songs. This last type appears to be more of a catch all. It represents any form of music or song that is spiritual in nature. That is, it is music or songs that serve and are governed by the Spirit. These may take various forms and have different purposes. So is our morning offertory just filler music? No, it is spiritual in that it is meant to draw our attention to the grace and goodness of the Lord in allowing us to give together for His kingdom. Similarly, special music is not entertainment or a performance. It is worship that may be a song of praise, a story in

song, or encouragements of a spiritual nature that remind us to be faithful, obedient, or forgiving as God's people.

### **① [Slide 5. An Essential Expression]**

One final aspect of our expression of worship is found in this passage. Verse 19 ends with the phrase "singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." I believe Paul is speaking to the transmission of our worship. When we gather together to worship the Lord we are communicating the fullness and unity of our communion in Christ. We reflect that transforming power of Christ's death on the cross and the wonder of the Gospel. We release praise out of affections that are ours in and through Christ. Not based upon what we have done, or how musically talented we are, nor how physically expressive our praise; but based only upon the grace and mercy that allows us to boldly enter His presence and makes our worship acceptable to a holy God.

This transmission of worship is first described as a melody of music or song. God created music not only for our enjoyment, but perhaps first and foremost as a means to enable worship. Music has the power to engage our emotions with truth. When combined with great lyrics it moves us to worship in a release of affection and devotion to God. It is the natural expression of a believer. If worship consistently does not move you, if it does not engage your emotions, if it does not compel you to rise or bow down then something is wrong.

From the worship we see in the book of Psalms we are to sing a new song. We are to sing and make melody to the Lord. We are to shout and sing. We are to sing with all our strength. We are to sing of His word, sing of His name, sing of His greatness, and sing His praise. Music and singing are a unique and essential part of our gathered worship as God's people.

The second transmission of worship is described as a melody of heart. You see it's possible to express our worship in music and song without it reflecting what is true in our hearts. Authentic worship is not just a melody of music; it is a spiritual melody of the heart. We can stand and raise our hands and look like we are engaged in worship. We can have a great voice and sing loudly without any real affection in our heart. We may be able to fool others, but we cannot fool God.

This applies even greater to every member of the musical ministry team. Worship is neither a performance to gain the attention and praise of others nor is it to be served cold and stale without the emotion and expression of a glad and humble heart. Our purpose as a ministry is to point you to Christ, to make much of who He is, and provide music and lyrics that give rise to great worship. From the reading of scripture at the beginning, to songs of praise, to offertories and special music, we can provide you opportunities and vehicles for worship. But true worship is expressed from your heart. And when it is released from a heart that reverberates and resonates with the chords of truth and delight in our Savior, it becomes a joyous and beautiful melody unto the Lord.

Let me add a final, but important thought. There are times when it is hard to worship or we do not feel like worshipping at all. Every Sunday I lead worship I come with differing degrees of feeling or desire to worship. It's ok. It is part of living in a fallen world with the hearts that are prone to forgetting our Lord. Let me say two things about this. First, even when we are distracted and lack feeling or emotion we should come with a desire to worship. A follower of Christ will have a yearning in his heart to be with God's people and worship the Lord. Second, when we lack the desire we must confess it and ask Him to fill us with His Spirit and give us a heart to worship Him. Regardless, we must always remember our complete dependence upon Christ to worship. Worship is not about us or what we do for God; worship is about Him and what He has done for us.

### 📌 [Slide 6. An Essential Element]

We must move on. As I mentioned earlier, the Ephesians passage we just looked at and Colossians 3:16 and 17 are related passages. There are a number of similarities in structure and wording that tie them together. But while they are similar, each has a different focus. While Paul's letter to the Ephesians focuses on the essential expressions of worship, his letter to the Colossians speaks to the essential elements that are at the core of worship.

Let's review these two verses. Paul writes this to us in Colossians 3:16 and 17. *"16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."*

For the sake of time I am going to focus in on verse 16. What's important here is the connection Paul is making with the Word of Christ and our ministry together as a gathered community. Just as in Ephesians where Paul connects our expression worship with Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled worship, here in Colossians Paul connects worship with the essential element of the Word.

There is no worship without the indwelling of the Word in our hearts. You cannot worship what you do not know. And you cannot know Christ fully without an understanding of who He is and what He has done for you. Can you imagine the ridiculousness of someone saying that they deeply loved a stranger? Someone whom they barely knew? Yet there are many who come to gather each Sunday, singing songs of praise and adoration to a God they hardly even know. This is not worship.

Here in the middle of this verse on the Word dwelling fully and richly in the believer Paul interjects worship. We are to be singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Do these words sound familiar? They are the same words Paul used in Ephesians 5.

The first essential element of the word indwelling or worship is in its thankful reflection. If the Word is a necessary element of our gathered worship, than it must be present within our hearts. Music in and of itself is not worship. You can turn on the radio and

hear music. You can pick up your iPod and listen to your favorite playlist to get an emotional fix. But for it to be worship it must reflect the truths of the Word, the character of God, the power of the Gospel, and the hope we have in Christ.

It is important to remember that worship starts with the internal; it is first a spiritual expression. Now, the Word dwelling in us should be reflected on our faces and in our body language as we worship. But external appearances may or may not reflect internal realities. Hopefully when we worship, the external reflects what is going on in our hearts and minds. But we must be careful not to judge others based solely on outward expressions of worship and praise.

I think it is helpful to categorize our reflections into three areas. As God's word dwells and controls our hearts we reflect on these general categories in a way that frees and fuels our worship. The first area is reflecting on our God and all that He is. As we proclaim his greatness, goodness, faithfulness, holiness, righteousness, and might we worship together. He is worthy of our praise and we will exalt his name in worship both now and throughout eternity.

The second area is to reflect on His truth. As we bring to mind His eternal promises, our dependence upon Him, His sovereignty in our lives, and our place as strangers and aliens in a foreign land, we worship. Lastly and more personally, we are to reflect on the Gospel as the Word dwells in us. The beauty and power of the Gospel moves us to the cross and focuses our gaze at Christ. It reminds us of our inability to save ourselves as we reflect on the sacrifice of the lamb that paid the awful price of our rebellion and sin that we could never pay. As we bow our hearts together in thankfulness to our Redeemer, we worship.

### **📌 [Slide 7. An Essential Element]**

We also see in this verse the second essential element to our worship. This is in its thankful response. In essence, as we hear the Word and grow in our understanding there is to be a heart full of thanksgiving in worship to our Lord. This is a natural and necessary response of the transformed heart of a believer. The Word prepares our hearts, it gives rise to praise, and it reflects the mighty work of God in creation and in our hearts. But then it humbles us as we hear of the grace and love of our Savior. And as we reflect, we respond, and the Word is reinforced and strengthened as we sing of His mercies, faithfulness, and goodness.

Similarly, I believe there are at least three aspects to this thankful response. First, we are to be thankful for what we know out of God's word. That is, as we remember what God has done for us, as we see the story-line of redemption in scripture, and as we trust in the promises of God we respond with worship. Second, we are to be thankful for Who we know. Christ and the cross is the focal point of God's word and it must be the main point and pinnacle of our worship. As we see Him both directly and indirectly in the Word, we cannot help but respond with worship. Third, we are to be thankful for who we are. As we remember who we were and who we now are in Christ we respond with worship. As God's word dwells in us, it should be an ever-present reminder of the



grace and mercy that was extended to unworthy sinners that we would be saved by God's marvelous design and His amazing love for His children.

### **① [Slide 8. - Reflect and Respond]**

Let me close with several encouragements for you to reflect and respond to. First, let say that is such a privilege to be in a church that loves to worship. We should be thankful for God's blessing us in our worship. He has supplied musicians, singers, and a people that love to sing His praise. Our gathering in worship and Word is wonderfully uplifting, encouraging, and challenging. There is truly no place on this earth I would rather be than gathered with God's people.

Second, let me ask you to pray for our worship. There are several ways in which you could do this effectively. Pray for free and uninhibited expressions of praise and worship. I'm not asking for you to pray that everyone would be raising their hands with Pastor Dan. But I know from personal experience, that fear and concern over what others might think can keep us from fully expressing our praise. It's funny that we think nothing of raising our hands and shouting praise at a sporting event, yet we feel constrained when it comes to exalting the greatest treasure and joy of all eternity.

Also, pray that we would continue to have unity and charity towards one another when it comes to styles and preferences of music. Musical tastes are personal and it is easy to hang on to traditions and styles. As Elders and worship leaders we strive for a variety of worship expressions and musical styles. We will continue to focus on Christ centered, God-exalting worship with culturally contemporary musical styles. But regardless if you find the style too fast or too slow, enter into our worship together.

Lastly, pray for your worship team, musicians, and leaders. Pray that we would lead you in authentic worship in a way that focuses your attention on God. Pray that we would do well with the talents and abilities that God has given us. Pray that we would remain humble and make much Christ and little of ourselves as we worship Him.

One last area of encouragement; let us continue to strive for authentic worship together. Let our knowledge of God and love for Him increase and that our worship would reflect our meeting together with God. Let our worship be Spirit-filled praise directed to God that moves powerfully among us. Let it be worship that engages our hearts not just as we gather together, but throughout the week. And let us strive for worship that is saturated with the Word both in song and out of our hearts. Let the external expression of our worship match the internal reality of hearts longing to extoll the glory of our God. And in doing so, may this be a place where people would say they have met together with their God and worshipped Him in Spirit and in truth.

[closing prayer]