



# Bible & Life

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## Worship & the Evangelical Church

by A. W. Tozer

Christian churches have come to the dangerous time predicted long ago. It is a time when we can pat one another on the back, congratulate ourselves and join the glad refrain, "We are rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing!" It certainly is true that hardly anything is missing from our churches these days — except the most important thing. We are missing the genuine and sacred offering of ourselves and our worship to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In our Lord's message to the church of Laodicea, He said, "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing...As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent" ( Rev. 3:17). My own loyalties and responsibilities are and always will be with the strongly evangelical, Bible-believing, Christ-honoring churches. In recent years we have been surging forward. We are building great buildings for large and growing congregations. We are boasting about high standards and are talking frequently about revival.

### God Saved Us to Make Us Worshipers

Despite this growth, sometimes evangelical Christians seem to be fuzzy and uncertain about the nature of God and His purposes in creation and redemption. In such instances, the preachers often are to blame. There are still preachers and teachers who say that Christ died so we would not drink and not smoke and not go to the theater. No wonder people are confused! No wonder they fall into the habit of backsliding when such things are held up as the reason for salvation. Jesus was born of a virgin, suffered under Pontus Pilate, died on the Cross and rose from the grave to make *worshippers* out of rebels! He has done it all through grace. We are the recipients. That may not sound dramatic, but it is God's revelation and God's way. I am of the opinion that we should learn the meaning and the delight of worshiping Him.

God is trying to call us back to that for which He created us — to worship Him and enjoy Him forever! It is then, out of our deep worship, that we do His work. If we are truly among the worshipers, we will not be spending time in carnal and worldly pursuits. All the examples that we have in the Bible illustrate that glad and devoted and reverent worship is the normal employment of moral beings. Every glimpse that is given us of heaven and of God's created beings is always a glimpse of worship and rejoicing and praise because God is who He is. The apostle John gives us this portrayal of the worship of heaven in Revelation four.

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*"True worship  
does not concern  
itself with  
stained glass,  
candles, and  
incense. Rather,  
in genuine  
worship we pass  
from earth to  
heaven by faith  
and pour out our  
hearts in  
thanksgiving,  
praise, and  
homage."*

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**William  
MacDonald**  
(1917-2007)

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The four and twenty elders fall down before Him that is on the throne and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, "Thou art Worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou has created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:7). I can safely say, on the authority of Scripture that any man or woman who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.

### **Worship Should Be Directed by the Holy Spirit**

We are brought to God and to faith and to salvation that we might worship and adore Him. We do not come to God that we might be robot-like Christians, cookie-cutter Christians, Christians stamped out with a die. God has provided His salvation that we might be, individually and personally, vibrant children of God, loving God with all our hearts and worshiping Him in the beauty of holiness. This does not mean, and I am not saying, that we must all worship alike. The Holy Spirit does not operate by anyone's preconceived idea or formula. But this I know: when the Holy Spirit of God comes among us with His anointing, we become a worshiping people. This may be hard for some to admit, but when we are truly worshiping and adoring the God of all grace and of all love and of all mercy and of all truth, we may not be quiet enough to please everyone.

I recall Luke's description of the throngs on the first Palm Sunday: The whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; saying, " 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.' And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto Him, 'Master, rebuke Thy disciples.' And He answered and said unto them, 'I tell you that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out' " (19:37-40).

I do not believe it is necessarily true that we are worshiping God when we are making a lot of racket. But not infrequently worship is audible. When Jesus came into Jerusalem presenting Himself as Messiah, there was a great multitude and there was a great noise. Doubtless, many who joined in the singing and the praise had never been able to sing in the right key. When you have a group of people singing anywhere, you know that some of them will not be in tune. But this is the point to their worship: they were united in praises to God.

### **Worship Should Be Vibrant and God-Exalting**

I would warn those who are cultured, quiet, self-possessed, poised and sophisticated, that if they are embarrassed in church when some happy Christian says, "Amen!" they may actually be in need of some spiritual enlightenment. The worshiping saints of God in the Body of Christ have often been a little bit noisy.

I hope you have read some of the devotionals left us by that dear old English saint, Lady Julian, who lived more than 600 years ago. She wrote that one day she had been thinking about how high and lofty Jesus was, and yet how He Himself meets the humblest part of our human desire. She received such blessing within her being that she could not control herself. She let go with a shout and praised God out loud in Latin. Translated into English, it would have come out "Glory to God!"

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*"Spiritual tone is difficult to describe, but is nevertheless very real and can be discerned by spiritual believers. There is a sense of the presence of God, of the reality of the unseen, eternal verities, and the hush of reverent awe, that quiets the spirit and prepares the soul for worship."*

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**Alfred P. Gibbs**

(1890-1967)

*Beloved author and preacher*

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Now, if that bothers you, friend, it may be because you do not know the kind of spiritual blessings and delight the Holy Spirit is waiting to provide among God's worshipping saints. Did you notice what Luke said about the Pharisees and their request that Jesus should rebuke His disciples for praising God with loud voices? Their ritual rules probably allowed them to whisper the words "Glory to God!", but it really pained them to hear anyone saying them out loud. Jesus told the Pharisees in effect: "They are doing the right thing. God my Father and I and the Holy Ghost are to be worshiped. If men and women will not worship me, the very rocks will shout my praises!" Those religious Pharisees, polished and smoothed and polished again, would have died right there in their tracks if they had heard a rock given a voice and praising the Lord.

### **Worship and Worshipers**

We have great churches and we have beautiful sanctuaries and we join in the chorus, "We have need of nothing." But there is every indication that we are in need of worshipers. We have a lot of men willing to sit on our church boards who have no desire for spiritual joy and radiance and who never show up for the church prayer meeting. These are the men who often make the decisions about the church budget and the church expenses and where the frills will go in the new edifice. They are the fellows who run the church, but you cannot get them to the prayer meeting because they are not worshipers. Perhaps you do not think this is an important matter, but that puts you on the other side as far as I am concerned. It seems to me that it has always been a frightful incongruity that men who do not pray and do not worship are, nevertheless, actually running many of the churches and ultimately determining the direction they will take.

It hits very close to our own situations, perhaps, but we should confess that in many "good" churches, we let the women do the praying and let the men do the voting. Because we are not truly worshipers, we spend a lot of time in the churches just spinning our wheels, burning the gasoline, making a noise but not getting anywhere. God calls us to worship, but in many instances churches are in the entertainment business, just running a poor second to the theaters. That is where we are, even in the evangelical churches, and I don't mind telling you that most of the people we say we are trying to reach will never come to a church to see a lot of amateur actors putting on a home-talent show. I tell you, outside of politics there is not another field of activity that has more words and fewer deeds, more wind and less rain than churches.

What are we going to do about this awesome, beautiful worship that God calls for? I would rather worship God than do any other thing I know of in all this wide world. I would not even attempt to tell you how many hymnbooks are piled up in my study. I cannot sing a lick, but that is nobody's business. But God thinks I am an opera star! God listens while I sing to Him the old French hymns in translation, the old Latin hymns in translation. God listens while I sing the old Greek hymns from the Eastern church, as well as the beautiful psalms done in meter and some of the simpler songs of Watts and Wesley. I mean it when I say that I would rather worship God than do anything else. Some argue, "Worship is fine — but what about the really important work for God!"

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*"The church has grown very selfish. We make ourselves the center of everything, so that God and His glory are left out. It is little wonder, then, that many are confused as to what worship is, and that it has been relegated to a place of little importance."*

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**Samuel Ridout**  
(1855-1930)

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## Conclusion

The beautiful part of worship is that it prepares you and enables you to concentrate on the important things that must be done for God. Listen to me on this point! Practically every great deed done in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ all the way back to the apostle Paul was done by people blazing with the radiant worship of their God. A survey of church history will prove that it was those who were the yearning and hungry worshipers who also became the great workers. Those great saints whose hymns we so tenderly sing were active in their faith to the point that we must wonder how they ever did it all.

The great hospitals have grown out of the hearts of worshipping men. Fine evangelistic organizations grew out of the hearts of worshipping and compassionate men and women. We should say, too, that wherever the church has come out of her lethargy, rising from her sleep and into the tides of revival and spiritual renewal, always the worshipers were back of it. We will be making a mistake if we just stand back and say, "But if we give ourselves to worship, no one will do anything!"

On the contrary, if we give ourselves to God's call to worship, everyone will do more than he or she is doing now. Only, what he or she does will have significance and meaning to it. It will have the quality of eternity in it — it will be gold, silver and precious stones, not wood, hay and stubble. I cannot speak for you, but I want to be among those who worship. I do not want just to be a part of some great ecclesiastical machine where the pastor turns the crank and the machine runs. You know — the pastor loves everybody and everybody loves him. He has to do it. He is paid to do it. I wish that we might get back to worship again. Then when people come into the church, they will instantly sense that they have come among holy people, God's people. They can testify, "Of a truth God is in this place."