

O Come, Let Us Worship – III

Incarnational Worship

Introduction – Jesus did say that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. He did not say, however that our bodies didn't matter. We are taught that we have come to Mt. Zion, the city of the living God (Heb 12:22) and that we are to come and worship Him *'with reverence and godly fear'* (v28). But this addresses more than just our attitude. Worship from the heart is expressed with *our bodies* as well as *our minds*.

The Bodies of the Body of Christ – Gathering together in the name of Christ, we do not simply bring our minds, our confessions and our devotions. We bring our bodies, our hands and feet, our sicknesses and physical needs. Coming as incarnational beings, we worship our Risen Lord, the Incarnate Son of God. And in one sense, it is wrong for us to think that there is no longer a physical temple or offerings of sacrifice by a priesthood. There remains a service of worship for the people of God.

We are the Temple (1 Pet 2:5) – Our persons, body, soul and spirit, are the stones of the new temple.

We are the Priesthood (1 Pet 2:9) – Together, we are the new priesthood, serving the Lord at this worship service with our bodies.

We are the Sacrifice (Rom 12:1) – Our worship is a physical act of service and sacrifice. Our bodies, not simply our ideas, are living sacrifices to God.

Principled Posture – If we worship with our bodies and minds, we should let the scripture teach us how. We should be conscious of our actions as well as the corporate actions of the united body. Many particular postures are described throughout the scriptures.

Standing Before God (Neh 8:5) – We are giving our attention physically, showing due respect for, and preparing to receive the Word of God as it is delivered to us. This is appropriate during prayer as well (2 Chron 20:5-13).

Kneeling Before God (Psalm 95:6) – Standing isn't the only way one prays. Jesus kneels (Luke 22:41), as does Paul (Acts 20:36, 21:5). It may be particularly appropriate during private or familial prayer.

Sitting Before the Lord (Matt 14:19) – Jesus instructed the group to sit, and then He prayed. It may be appropriate when receiving (food or an extended message).

Implications – We need to think of our bodies in our worship. We are not to be like the children of the Enlightenment, acting as though worship were simply a matter of thinking the correct rational propositions. Spiritual worship is not in opposition to bodily worship. Whether I am laying prostrate before the Lord, or standing and lifting my hands, I am to be worshipping Him from the heart and with my mind and body.

Lifting Hands Before God (Neh 8:6) – Here is a particular application I think we should consider. Notice Ezra is leading a doxology of sorts while all the people (together as one body) bless God. The lifting of holy hands before the Lord, while it may feel 'funny' to some of us, appears normal throughout the Old and New Testament.

Solomon and the People (1 Kings 8:22, 38, 54) – Solomon prays with hands raised, and he teaches that the people will do so as well.

All Through the Psalms – In times of great praise (63:3-4) and in times of great need (88:9) men lift holy hands (24:4).

The Men in Prayer (1 Tim 2:8) – Washed in the holy fountain of God's grace, holy hands are to be lifted to God in prayer 'everywhere'.

Corporate Worship – There could be many times, then, where individuals ought to pray with their hands lifted or stretched out. But remember, in the corporate worship God's people approach Him as one body in Christ. Liturgically, there ought to be a time for us to approach God this way in good order (Col 2:5) and obedience.

What We Are Not Saying – We are not encouraging an individualistic response to God, nor disorderly spontaneity. We are not trying to become like our charismatic brethren, but we must not spurn 'whatever they do' because we believe they have doctrinal errors at some points. We must respond to what the Word teaches. In fact, many would regard an ordered, planned and corporate lifting of the hands as insincere. But lifting hands to the Lord does not have to be a sign of having lost control of oneself, as much as of disciplining the body (individually and corporately) to obey the Lord and to respond to Him with *'reverence and fear'*.

Application – The particular applications for us as individuals are many. Before you eat your food you wash your hands because of what your hands may have been doing. Before you come and lift up those hands as holy, what kind of spiritual washing needs to take place because of what your hands may have been doing? (1 John 1:8-9)

The Doxology – We have a tradition of singing a doxology to the Lord, a blessing to His name, at the close of our service. This comes at the end of a service where He has summoned us and we have come. Having renewed His covenant with us, having declared His glory and mercy to us, having fed and revived us by His Word proclaimed, we stand to give our 'Amen, Amen' and bless His name. How appropriate it would be for us, His body incarnate, to lift our hands in praise to God.

Timing – The elders desire for you to consider these things with your family, and to prepare yourselves to thoughtfully make this transition and application in the near future.

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