

The Worship of the God of The Bible

Part 2

Is Preaching a major part of worshipping God in spirit and in truth?

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The greatest worship service in the New Testament was on the day of Pentecost.

This worship experience was spontaneous and yet the whole event was directed from Heaven by “remote control”.

Philippians 3:3 [NIV] *“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh...”*

All that took place in Jerusalem at that time was “by the spirit of God”.

Acts 2:1-4 [NIV] *“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”*

The Holy Spirit fell on the people of God in the upper room and their sudden ability to speak in different languages attracted widespread attention.

Acts 2:5-8 [NIV] *“Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?”*

They knew that Peter and the other apostles were speaking in their own Aramaic tongue, yet these visitors were hearing the words in their own native tongues.

Acts 2:14 [NIV] *“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.”*

Peter preached the Inaugural Sermon of the Church.

Peter presented to the people an explanation of these spirit empowered supernatural events.

This was spontaneous, unplanned and without notes. But remember this was the original powerful spirit-led event. I don’t recommend that every preacher follows such a guideline. I suggest we take the wise advice of the great preacher Charles Spurgeon: *“Prepare your message as if it all depended on you, then as you present it, give total response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.”*

The sermon Peter preached was “*expository preaching*”. Peter quoted Old Testament scriptures [New Testament not available at that time] and gave meaning to them in the light of what was happening at that moment.

Joel 2:28-32 [NIV] *“And afterwards, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my*

servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” ... “And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”

A very relevant prophecy for then and now.

Psalm 16:8-11 [NIV] *“I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”*

This prophecy had just been fulfilled before their very eyes, with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Psalm 110:1 [NIV] *“The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”*

All the apostles had just experienced this event personally at the ascension of Jesus Christ into the heavens. What we have here is powerful spirit-led preaching expounding God’s written Word and including personal experience of God working in their own lives.

Acts 2:37-41 [NIV] *“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.” With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”*

The immediate result of this spirit-led preaching was about 3,000 conversions.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 [NIV] *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”*

Spirit-led preaching of God’s Word is the tool that God has chosen to use to bring His chosen people to conversion through conviction by the Holy Spirit.

If ever there was an “*optimum level*” of the Holy Spirit in the church, it was at this first day of Pentecost and the weeks that followed.

When the Holy Spirit is present in great measure, the results of spirit-led preaching is amazing

What was the immediate and natural response to this great outpouring of Holy Spirit?

Acts 2:42-47 [NIV] *“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Note the order of what happened in the church fellowship.

a) **Teaching of the apostles**

The expounding of God’s Word through spirit-led preaching was what people just convicted and converted were eager to hear.

b) **Fellowship**

Fellowship was a spontaneous by-product of what God did through spirit-anointed preachers. The new converts desired to express their newly-given love for one another.

Remember, love is the first and major fruit of receiving the Holy Spirit into our lives.

c) **Breaking of bread**

Whether this means the communion service or a common meal is not clear; both could be included. One is a close fellowship with Jesus Christ and the other a bonding of the fellowship between Christians. It was the custom to break bread before a meal as a type of “*grace*” before you ate the meal.

d) **Prayer**

The more the Holy Spirit is present, the more we will want to pray. This prayer may have started as a spontaneous act but may then have developed into a corporate time of prayer.

Acts 3:1 [NIV] *“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer, at three in the afternoon.”*

What have we learnt so far?

- a) The high priority the Holy Spirit placed on preaching. Luke takes the time to give us some of the contents of what was preached. The gospel accounts do not “*waste words*”, every word counts, so this shows just what priority the spirit-inspiring Luke gave to the act of preaching.
- b) The converts were the response to spirit-led and inspired preaching.
- c) The new converts then worshipped God together.
- d) Supernatural events were part of this spirit-led worship.

Preaching the Word of God through human personality

- a) There is a parallel between true preaching and the Incarnate Word [Jesus].

Jesus was God as though He were not man, and yet He was man as though He were not God.

Spirit-led preaching is the Word of God as though no man delivered it, and yet it is a man speaking according to his own gift, intellect, accent and personality.

b) The major thing about spirit-led preaching is that it must bring a sense of God with it. Spirit-led preaching is not just the Words of God but God Himself speaking it through a human instrument.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5 [NIV] *“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.”*

1 Thessalonians 1:5 [NIV] *“...our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.”*

We will never truly worship God through preaching if this does not happen.

Spirit-led preaching that represents true worship will be characterised by certain things.

a) **Sound doctrine**, that is good theology must be the solid foundation of what is being preached.

b) **Urgency**, that is the preacher constantly fears that his hearers will remain unmoved.

c) **Relevance**, what is taught is applicable to the day-to-day lives of the listeners, the preaching must make a *“stir into action”* element within it.

d) **Grippingly presented** in such a way that the words get past defensive barriers the listeners may put up.

e) **Effectual** – this is only going to happen, as it did on the first day of Pentecost, when the hearers lose sight of everything but God's voice, externally or internally. The proof of this is a change of mind and change of life within the hearers. The end result will then be worship.

The human preacher may be involved in one of three ways while he is preaching.

1) He may feel nothing at all, yet the people sense the presence of God.

2) He may enjoy preaching but no-one else does!

3) Both preacher and hearers are simultaneously filled with a sense of God.

Worship and listening

We only worship to the degree we hear God speak [externally or internally].

Revelation 3:6 [NIV] *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

Psalms 95:7-8 [NIV] *“...for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...”*

We only worship to the degree we recognise and respond to the Spirit's impulse.

“We can have as much of God as we want.” A.W. Tozer.

One way we can get more of God in our lives is to come to worship services or our personal study with positive expectancy.

There are two kinds of listening

1) **Active listening**

This is when we listen with eagerness. This leads to true worship.

Active listening is characterised by:-

- a) An open mind, all pre-conceived ideas are set aside.
- b) A willingness to be vulnerable, the truth can hurt, but remember it is only our pride that is being attacked.

Hebrews 4:12 [NIV] *“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”*

- c) A willingness to be chastened.

Hebrews 12:4-6, 11 [NIV] *“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” ... “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

Jesus never said that anyone who followed Him would have an easy, pain-free life, He told us *“to take up our cross”* if we were to follow Him.

Matthew 16:24 [NIV] *“Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*

But Jesus also told us to be yoked with Him and we would be led and helped in whatever trial we faced in life.

Matthew 11:28-30 [NIV] *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

- d) Obedience in dealing with any defect in us that the Holy Spirit exposes.

1 John 2:4-6 [NIV] *“The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.”*

Active listening also includes active repentance and change.

James 1:22-25 [NIV] *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.”*

Listening to God’s Word but not acting on what we hear is pure self-deception, and bears no fruit in our lives.

2) Passive listening

This is when we barely listen to what is being preached; God may manage to break through unexpectedly at times, but our defensive shell is very thick, difficult to penetrate.

The religion that such a person has is only an outward show of righteousness.

Matthew 23:27-28 [NIV] *“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.”*

Jesus did not have many good words to say about such people, they may look religious and righteous but are spiritually dead inside, their spiritual heart has stopped beating.

James 1:27 [NIV] *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

True worship of God involves practical action on our part, a willingness to respond to the words of God that we hear preached.

What we perceive objectively will determine how we worship subjectively

1 Emotional worship

We feel good when in certain places or atmospheres that pertain to worshipping God. This good feeling may be sheer nostalgia and have nothing whatsoever to do with true worship.

- a) We like the place where we have come to worship: stain glass windows, high altar, candles and gold utilities.
- b) We like the sound of the organ or the music.
- c) We like the preacher's voice or his accent.
- d) We like the ethos of the place, Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal, Reformed and so on.

2 Elitist worship

When we like a sophisticated style of worship, often appealing to the intellect rather than the heart.

This style is often found in a *“high church”* in which worship is mainly tied to liturgy.

3 Entertainment worship

This is where singing has become a performance before an appreciative audience.

Often the glory of God is far from being paramount. Audience appreciation is the goal rather than God's approval.

True worship only comes when we seek and love to glorify God

The focus of the worship service must be away from those conducting, pointing only towards God, and His Glory.

God's Glory is the sum total of all His attributes.

All that is sung or proclaimed must seek to remind us of what God has done for us or to appreciate God's attributes.

The preaching, as the major part of the worship service, if it is spirit-led, will be God-centred.

True worship will help us "see God" and to "feel" God's presence naturally, not in a "forced" way.

True God "seeing" and God "feeling" is found in part of the recorded life of Isaiah. Isaiah saw the Glory of God objectively.

Isaiah 6:1-4 [NIV] *"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."*

Isaiah then responded to that worship received "seeing" of God.

Isaiah 6:5-8 [NIV] *"'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'" Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"*

Note:

As a fruit of true worship, Isaiah was used by God in the same way we are expected to be used.

Isaiah 6:9-13 [Living Bible] *"And he said, 'Yes, go. But tell my people this: 'Though you hear my words repeatedly, you won't understand them. Though you watch and watch as I perform my miracles, still you won't know what they mean.' Dull their understanding, close their ears, and shut their eyes. I don't want them to see or to hear or to understand, or to turn to me to heal them.'" Then I said, "Lord, how long will it be before they are ready to listen?" And he replied, "Not until their cities are destroyed-without a person left-and the whole country is an utter wasteland, and they are all taken away as slaves to other countries far away, and all the land of Israel lies deserted! Yet a tenth-a remnant-will survive; and though Israel is invaded again and again and destroyed, yet Israel will be like a tree cut down, whose stump still lives to grow again."*

Matthew 28:18-20 [Living Bible] *"He told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore go and make disciples in all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and then teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you; and be sure of this-that I am with you always, even to the end of the world."*

Conclusion

Our aim in worship is to glorify God and edify ourselves. While everything in our lives is to be involved in our worship, it is important to realise the prominence given to preaching of the Word. Yet it is not enough to have only preaching; what is needed is worship by the Spirit. This way our worship pleases God and prepares us to be His ambassadors.