

EXTRA! from the Creek

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This week we're passing along to you
a page from the

CountyCulture Columns

The Real Sacrifice of Praise

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Most of us know by now that there currently exists across the church something called "the worship wars." The phrase addresses the differences – and even conflict – among churchgoing people about the style and the setting and the music and the teaching that best induces their own individual worship. And like many of the conflicts that arise within churches, the worship wars have their good outcomes and their bad outcomes. They're good in that they keep us changing with the times and culture – they keep us up to date with the most suitable ways even to spread the Gospel of Christ. But they're bad in that they tend to bring out our selfish side – we want things done our way, and we don't care what others want or desire.

The selfish side comes out most in the statement I heard some time back: "I just can't worship here anymore." My most immediate – and flagrant – response was *Oh, really! Then would you mind telling me about some other areas of your life in which selfishness and the consumeristic spirit have taken over?* Later, I contemplated about how Paul and Silas might have reacted to such a statement as they sang praises to God in a dank and damp and desperate Philippian jail – and that after having been beaten and bruised and bleeding. Can you even imagine what they might say to a spoiled, selfish, American Christian who whined, "I just can't worship here" because the temperature isn't seventy-two degrees or the music isn't exciting enough or the pastor preaches too long? Or can you imagine what Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say to such a statement – this Christian theologian who prayed and worshiped even after two years in the Flossenburg concentration camp, even as he was forced to undress and walk to

the gallows where his life would be ended? Can you imagine what persecuted Christians around the world today would say to such a complaint?

Maybe as selfish American Christians we need to be reminded about a couple of things regarding our worship of the Lord. For instance, it simply cannot be selfish. It's not about me; it's not about the preacher or the worship leader or the musicians; it's not even about the church; it's about God. Another thing: Worship is a verb. It's something that you do; it's something that you give; it's not about what you get out of it. The Bible multiple times calls it "the sacrifice of praise." Sacrifice! Get it?

Four more things to know and remember about true worship: One, true worship treasures God's presence. God welcomes those into His presence who want Him. The quest may be one of desperation or of delight, of frantic need or of a loving hunger for fellowship, but the motivation is clear – and so is His pleasure with it. Two, true worship humbles the heart. Not only will it quite often injure our pride; if we really worship as we ought, it just might kill our pride altogether! Three, true worship sacrifices (there's that word again) – and only then expects something from God. But we must first and foremost present something of ourselves to God. And four, true worship extends God's love. If God-pleasing worship addresses human need, it also will extend God's love to others. The vertical mandate – to love and worship God – is also horizontal – to love the neighbor. Worship is about love.

Sources

Jack Hayford. "How God Evaluates Worship" in *Leadership* (Spring 1999)

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