



Towards the True Nature of Worship “Toward a deeper understanding”

By Chris R. Hansen

In an attempt to understand the true nature of worship we can look at Philippians 1:20-21. In this passage we will be reminded that worship is so much more than singing and even meeting together.

Just prior to this passage Paul is sharing that some preach Christ out of selfish ambition and some from pure motives. He rejoices that either way Christ is proclaimed. He continues:

20 according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (NASB)

John Piper in an exposition on this passage reminds us that Paul is in prison not knowing what is to become of him. He does not know whether he will live or die. But he is not concerned at all. Such a state that we all should strive to be in should we ever face the same challenge. Paul's major concern and desire is that God would be honored or magnified. The Greek word translated “honored” here means to make large; we might say “make much of”. Mary uses this same word in her song of rejoicing at the house

of Elizabeth found in Luke 1:46.

Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

This same word is often found in the Old Testament. For example Psalm 70:4 says...

Let all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; And let those who love Your salvation say continually, “Let God be magnified.”

With this context in mind Paul is in fact rejoicing and “being glad” in God regardless of what faces him. He desires that God be magnified and glorified always in his life and even in his death.

We all know that the goal of the church is to bring “Glory to God” by being the body of Christ. Here Paul is actually fulfilling the purpose of the church even while he is in prison.

John Piper reminds us that the implications for worship are found in verse 21.

Since this verse begins with the word “for”, it explains why v. 20 is true. Let's consider how this explanation works for each of the two possibilities, life and death, in turn. Paul says,

“It is my hope . . . that Christ will be honored in my body . . . by life . . . for to me to live is Christ.” And Paul says, “It is my hope . . . that Christ will be honored in my body . . . by death . . . for to me . . . to die is gain.”

Paul says that his death will honor or magnify Christ because he knows that dying is gain – even far better than life (v.23) At the very end of his life Paul will be confident that he will be ushered into the very presence of Christ to live with Him for all of eternity. He will see Christ “face to face, to know even as he is fully known.” Paul can go to his death honoring Christ by taking no account of the loss he is suffering. This is so much better than anything the world has to offer. In this way Paul honors Christ in death.

Now what if Paul lives? He goes on to say in Phil. 3:8 that “to live is Christ.”

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

Absolutely nothing else matters to Paul other than knowing Christ Jesus. Again Piper reminds us that...





“Paul was a man of considerable accomplishment and influence; he had been to the best schools, he was on a career track to be a leader of the Jews; indeed, there is some evidence that Paul was already on the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, at the time of his conversion. He likely was a man of some wealth also. But Paul threw all that away in order to follow Christ.”

Never for even a moment does Paul “weigh the two in balance – knowing Christ vs. all his worldly accomplishments.” Paul knows that all he once held dear is but “rubbish” (human excrement) to the surpassing knowledge of knowing Christ. One of my favorite choruses is “Knowing, You, Jesus” taken from this passage. There is no comparison. The value of Christ far surpasses the value of everything else. For Paul, to live-- is Christ!

As we continue to look at worship at Fair Haven this should help remind us again that worship in its truest form does not refer to a regular religious event, but rather to the attitude of our hearts and the continual outward expression of that attitude.

We’ve been reminded of the Samaritan woman at the well who

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tries to divert Jesus from his pointed statement concerning her life by asking about the right place to worship. Christ always comes back to the ‘right place’ of worship which must include an honest internal heart attitude.

“true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (John 4:23).

Again I am reminded of Romans 12:1 where Paul says...

In view of God’s mercies you are to “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship”

Our act of worship is a spiritual act that has at our very core an attitude that is always moving us to think, act and live in a way that is pleasing to Christ. In 1 Cor. 10:31 Paul says that..

“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

We are to make our whole life an act of worship! We are to value Christ above all and display His value in all of our outward actions.”

In our recent discussions regarding the 10 commandments I am moved that they are simply reminders again to do that which pleases

God. All 10 are a reminder to put God first or simplify our life and rid our hearts, minds and lives of distractions that keep us from experiencing the “surpassing value of knowing Christ;” Oh, to be in the state that Paul was in when in prison. May we all be like him and all be able to say...

... with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

© Chris R. Hansen
www.hansencharts.com
harkup@gmail.com

