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WHAT IS WORSHIP

As I look at the state of the church today. I am at a crossroads as to what really constitutes the state of worship. Within the past fifteen years, the church has seen the concept of worship come from a couple of Integrity Hosanna cassette tapes into a phenomenon that rakes in millions of dollars for the Christian retailing industry. We have seen Integrity Hosanna grow from an upstart company in a garage into one of the leading distributors of praise and worship music. We have seen modern church groups such as Calvary Chapel (Maranatha Music) and Vineyard place their own personal tastes in this area. Where Contemporary Christian artists once did Christmas music because it was the "in" thing to do, we now see contemporary Christian artists now do worship CD's because it's the new "in" thing to do. We are now seeing many of the revival "hot spots" release their own worship CD's to complement their teaching series and to complement their "formula" of renewal. According to many within Christian music, the praise and worship genre of Christian music is the fastest growing genre of Christian music. Praise and worship music sales are growing faster than other forms such as the contemporary and urban music forms of Christian music.

The worship music that was brought forth in the mid 1980's was considered at that time to be both "revolutionary" by some and also as "heresy" by others. We saw churches split up or almost destroyed as the battle of "out with the old, in with the new" raged internally as the battle lines were drawn of hymns versus praise choruses. The hymn lovers took the narrow perception of "Nobody writes songs better than Fannie Crosby nor sings it better than George Beverly Shea", "Not of God", etc. while lovers of this new music looked at hymns in a narrow perspective as "obsolete", "out of style", etc. As music ministers wrestled with obtaining pleasing worship to God versus losing the financial base of the church versus losing the new generation, we saw tensions rise as this new music (most at that time were actually Bible verses put to music) began to be merged with the old music. In this early time, we saw music written about basic fundamental doctrines being replaced by music taken directly from the Scriptures. Many music ministers did an about face turn and dropped the hymns for the praise and worship, which to say I believe was wrong while other churches bucked the trend and continued in hymns. We even heard sermons from music ministers comparing hymns as "Moses" and praise and worship as "Joshua" justifying a drop change from hymns to praise and worship. I too fell into this trap without realizing that some hymns do reinforce sound biblical doctrine.

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I have fond memories of this time within Christianity when I first heard a sample cassette tape from Integrity Hosanna entitled "Glorify Thy Name" with Kent Henry (who I met later on and found him to be a genuine man of God). At that time, it was the most revolutionary type of music I had ever heard. I remember experiencing the worship I was supposed to feel while singing hymns as I listened to this tape in my car. I remember later on listening to more of Integrity Hosanna's products and also being introduced to this new breed of worship leaders such as Lamar Boschman, Martin Nystrum, Charlie LeBlanc, etc. for I wanted more of this music and also more of the personal intimacy with Jesus the music helped me obtain. At that time, this music was primarily bible verses (usually Psalms) put to music. This was a great way to both experience personal intimacy, worship, and to memorize the Word of God in my heart. The other beauty of this worship music was that the first recordings were done live and you heard the praises and the worship of the audience in the background as the worship leaders and musicians played and lead people to worship. In the past, recordings of hymns and Christian artists were done in a studio setting with the musicians singing out to the listener. Integrity Hosanna's recordings of live worship brought out the interaction of worship team, congregation, and God and the bi-directional pathway of both man communication to God and God communicating back to man.

As the 1980's progressed, many cutting edge churches shifted their musical worship from the hymns to the new praise and worship music. Some churches had a delicate even balance of the hymns and praise and worship to keep both sides happy while other churches went to a mixture of hymns and praise and worship at the worship leader's discretion which was supposed to be based on his prayer time with God. We also saw the shift from the part-time minister of music or a volunteer piano player who led the weekly choir practice to the worship leader placed on full-time staff and a worship team concept of three to five singers and musicians. This shift in thinking showed the commitment of the church to obtain a balance between the Word, worship, and prayer. The focus of going to a church started to change from "That pastor is a fireball" to "The music is great and the pastor is anointed". Churches who grew in memberships did so with the addition of worship as an integral part of the church service and church life. We also saw this trend show distinct generalities of hymns lovers subscribing to pentecostal theologies while praise and worship lovers adhering to a more charismatic theology base. The Bakker and Swaggart scandals and the handling of the scandals of the late 1980's helped institute a mentality of "Gee, all the ministers who sin are Pentecostal."

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Therefore, many people left the pentecostal churches in droves and either never went to church again or embraced the Charismatic churches and the new praise and worship music. Therefore, the shift from hymn to praise and worship began in the lives of many believers.

In the early 1990's things began to change in the area of praise and worship music...

The 1990's arrived and praise and worship hit a dead spot in it's development. Integrity Hosanna continued to produce praise and worship CD's for their customers. However, there was a feeling that we were receiving the same music over and over again even though the lyrics were different. From it's trademarked white covers and unique art style, the overkill of electronic beat box drum sounds, and the feeling of listening to over perfected and over rehearsed vocals (many people I met that participated in the later sessions told me that it really got to this point), Integrity Hosanna reached a paradigm in it's music, it's marketing, and it's ministry. Integrity Hosanna continued in this paradigm of releasing it's product for many years while Vineyard Music took the live worship setting popularized by Integrity Hosanna and made it more modern sounding. While continuing their concept of promoting their worship leaders who wrote songs based on the Scriptures, Vineyard music removed the electronic beat boxes and the over rehearsed feel Integrity Hosanna gave their listeners. The music came out fresh, more natural, and more spontaneous than Integrity's products. In fact, music as a whole was moving from a "Synthesizer" mode back to more natural and acoustic settings and Vineyard Music recognized this as it released praise and worship to reflect this musical trend. In fact, Integrity Hosanna did not break out of this rut until 1993 when Ron Kenoly released "Lift Him Up" with his dream team of Chester Thompson, Alex Acuna, Abraham Laborei, and Justin Alamaro formerly of the band Koinina. If it was not for this CD and this change in thinking, I wonder where Integrity Hosanna would be right now.

As the musical sound in praise and worship went from sounding like "Christian Devo" to a more natural and acoustic sound, the praise and worship movement regained popularity and had a new energized focus. We started to see a shift of priority in the local church meetings on Sunday mornings. Worship had an equal amount of time when compared to preaching. People were using worship and music as criteria when selecting a church whether it was loving the worship or having a chance to play an instrument in worship. Worship was being used as the bait to draw people into the church. As this shift in thinking occurred, the lyrics of worship started to show this shift where the lyrics went more from Scriptures being sung into the personal experience of worship.

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It was in this personal experience of worship that the focus went towards how one could both personally and within the church body offer up praise and sacrifice unto God. We started to see the word "I" be used more and more in the lyrics as people searched to be personally intimate with a holy God.

We also saw many new concepts of worship appear. The worship revolution helped reinstitute the drama and the arts in general back into the church. Drama became a ways and means of not only exposing faults within the church, but also used as evangelism. We also saw the art form called mime re-appear in the worship realm and the dancers appear trying to recreate the Old Covenant dance back into the New Covenant worship. We even saw new forms of worship of "Warfare worship" where worship was used as a means of spiritual warfare and clearing out the 'heavenlies' for God's blessings to flow. We saw "prophetic worship" where worship was used to bring forth prophecies or in some cases, went as far as "prophetic worship leaders" enter a service with no planned song set and sing what was on their hearts and in some cases singing new songs for the first time. We had musicians who wanted to teach us the "proper" chords for guitar and piano in worship as well as "proper" tones of drums in worship. We had dance troops who wanted to tell us that a certain dance step always meant in God's eyes "repentance" in the Spirit. Mimes telling us that a certain mime gesture always meant the Holy Spirit, etc. Worship therefore, went from a personal intimacy with God to a formulistic exercise to rise up an emotion calling it "the move of God". The dancers, mimes, musicians, etc were not bad in and of themselves, but the formula's created, implemented, and practiced placed the worship music into another rut and paradigm like the Integrity Hosanna ruts of the early 1990's.

In 1993, praise and worship music went through another upheaval, revolution, and change...

In late 1993, many churches experience a new move of God like they had never experienced. Revival became renewal as churches in Toronto, Pensacola, and Brompton experienced a move of God and begin to write new songs about this new move of God. In many churches, worship became the primary and only focus as hours of time became devoted to worship while minutes were devoted to the reading of the Word of God. The now captive people could focus for hours with music but when the Word was preached, somehow these people turned attention-deficit in nature. People began to migrate to "river" churches as "weekend warriors" to hear great sounding music, dance to their heart's content, and say "God moved" but face the harsh realities of Monday morning when the dancing, yelling, shouting did nothing to feed the inner man and help the inner man die daily to his flesh to where "He must increase, I must decrease". We went from songs that dealt with personal intimacy and worship into songs that dealt with exalting the person and not Christ.

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From page 4 of my article "Going Beyond The River":

It was at this time when I had to question the worship music, written in it's own "Christianese" slang with words and phrases non-Christians can not understand. It got to where the only songs being sung at many of the renewals were songs about the river, getting drunk in the spirit, the wind, the rain, etc. The faster the pace, the better and more the people ran around the church, waived their flags, and created a party atmosphere in the house of God. In fact, I began to wonder if we were beginning to shift from worshipping Jesus Christ into worshipping "worship" itself. I knew people who had gotten to the point where they could not worship until "Hop on The Bus", "Mercy is Falling", or "The River of God" was played in the worship services. I met people who literally chased after revivals to the point of becoming "Weekend Warriors" spend their weekends going from one revival church to another driving as many as six hours each way to the next renewal service. Many of these people did not belong to a local church, but instead, opted to go around their area where they live and look for revival hopping churches. We became addicted to renewal when Jesus stated that He wanted his people free and not addicted to anything. It was the search for a constant high that drove some of these people to revival and not the redemptive grace of Jesus to experience what Jesus had to say, offer, give, and save our souls from.

We went from worshipping God to "worshipping worship". We went from hearing songs that exalt and mention the words God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit to songs that describe more of the reaction and gifts of God and not God himself. Many of these songs that a friend and I coined as "metaphorical metaphysics" we sing today reflect that. Instead of songs that offer up praise to God, thanking God from delivering us from our enemies, pouring out our heart to God expecting nothing in return, we sing songs about "I climb the mountain of mercy with the pickaxe of grace then swim in the River of God cooled off by the Wind and warmed by the fire" or songs of "sitting on daddy's knee", etc with no direct mention of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Father God. Many of these songs cater to our inner cravings and also deal with getting the things we want instead of focusing on Jesus, the giver of it all. Worship in many churches today is nothing more than a self-exalting re-fried high school pep rally where the cheerleaders hoop and holler and lead others to do the same thing. Then at the end of the pep rally, the principal called preacher has his ten minute speech and we all leave. I find it amazing that in many churches today, most of the songs sung in the service are written by the worship leaders themselves where the more chaotic it appears, the more of God they call it.

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We go to church not to learn how to fulfill a Great Commission, but to worship. If the worship is not fast paced, then God somehow did not move. If the preaching is longer than the worship, then there was breakdown in communication. The Word has now become second place to the worship. I have to now ask "What's next? Churches who have all worship with no Word and expect people to be ministered to, and fed the word by worship?" I have to wonder now.

It seems that we are out to evangelize worshippers to join us in "running in the river", "experiencing the fire", "cooling off in the wind", and "getting drenched in the rain" instead of evangelizing souls, fulfilling the Great Commission, and making disciples of men. Worship today appears more to be us talking to God and not allowing God to talk back to us. The bait of worship has now been turned into the "bait and switch" as we used the bait of worship and switched the focus from the God and his Holy Word to the experience and frenzy of worship. There are some good worship music out there from the likes of Hillsongs Australia, Matt Redman and others. However, where is the focus? Is it on Jesus? Or is the focus directed towards an experience.

Have we allowed how hard we danced, how fast the music was, how well we waived flags affect the heart of worship? It appears so, worship has become a formula that many of the "renewal" churches plug into their other formulas and call it "God". We are guilty of taking an intimate encounter with God and marketing it to the masses and stripping out the power of God. We have seen more Christian artists do worship CD's because it's in and the record companies make money capitalizing off the worship demand. We see worship CD's entitled and dedicated by the names of books that the Bible itself. We now see "tribal drumming in the Spirit" come forth as people drum to open up windows in the heavenlies like the pagan drum tribes do. And now, 24 hour "worship radio" both online and in many radio markets today that only play worship music. Have we cheapened the worship experience of intimacy in the name of marketing? Yes, worship music has gone from the uplifting music that led us into the throne room of God to a multi-million dollar money making scheme that is repeated every day to the point where it has gone from the anointed to the blasé.

Instead of worship being the avenue we express ourselves to God to clean out and consecrate the Temple of the Holy Spirit, worship has become the totem pole we dance around praying for "Rain" or paying homage to a "fertility" of new worship. The holy fire that is supposed to purge us from above appears to be slowly replaced by Nadab and Abihu's strange fire in an attempt to go upwards to God as sweet smelling incense. We have lost the purpose of worship in the name of appeasing our flesh and a "if it feels good, do it" experience. The experience does not consecrate you, the reality of the blood of Jesus washes your sins and the fire of the Holy Spirit purges out the impurities.

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So what is worship? Worship is really our acknowledgement and establishment of Jesus Christ as the King of King and Lord of Lords who went to the Cross to die for our sins to rise again from the dead on the third day. Worship is when we come and boldly approach the throne room of God in both spirit and in truth per John 4:19-24. Worship is when we offer up praises and sacrifices unto God and really expect nothing in return. Worship done in the attitude of the previous sentence shows the humility and submissiveness to a Holy God and shows reverence to God. Worship is not an experience, it is a reality lifestyle. Worship is not a pep rally, worship is the out pouring of one's hear to God. Worship is not begging and saying the right words to get something. Worship is one of many ways we give back to God praises realizing that we can not pay back God and Jesus for what they have done. Worship is our expression to God where we acknowledge His mercy, grace, love, peace, righteousness, and dominion over all other gods that try to exalt and plant their totems in the place God designates as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

We are very guilty of altering the focus of worship. Instead of saying catch phrases, doing charismatic two-steps, Christian aerobic movements, wearing fancy dress, recreating the Old Covenant temple, and waving flags that inspire our flesh and appears to look cool in God's eyes, worship should be done with a complete focus to exalt HE and not me. I believe that the dance, the mime, the music, the flag waving is and can be used as an expression of what God has done, the physical actions of dancing, mime, flag waving, etc is not the reason nor the focus behind the worship. True worship all boils down to one thing:

Who is exalted here? HE or me?

If the answer is me, then we have created a totem of self that we worship, a tower of Babel that we think can reach to heaven, and a strange fire from Nadab and Abihu that appears to be, but is not, the true fire from God. Worship is not a formula, worship is an expressive action realizing and proclaiming that Jesus still sits on the throne. Worship is the surrendering of the agendas, actions, and desires of me to conform them to the will of He. Worship is the demonstration and the implementation of our desires to become more like Jesus to crucify the flesh and to die daily to our flesh. The act of worship is not something to be trivialized into a circus freak show nor is it to be rigid and regimented into certain rituals. Worship is the freedom to thank God for setting us free. If you look at the Lord's prayer found in Matthew, the first thing done in that prayer is the recognition of God the father, ruler of heaven and earth and praise and worship when Jesus said "Our father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name".

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If one can not establish the praise and the exaltation of Jesus having victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave, etc. at the beginning of the prayer, then how can we expect ourselves to have faith that the rest of our prayers will be answered? If you look at the rest of the Lord's Prayer after the praise, we see the asking of God's kingdom to be established on earth as it is in heaven, giving us our needs, forgiveness and forgiving, protection from temptation and deliverance from evil, and once again at the end, more praise and worship for God's power and glory. Worship is actually the bookends that hold the prayer together as we express our desire for Jesus, our needs, our pleas for forgiveness and we forgive others, and our desire not to sin and deliverance from sin.

In summary, worship shows the attitude of the heart. Worship should be about exalting the creator and not exalting the act of worship. Worship should be about acknowledging Jesus and his victory over all, not our "we will do our thing" and twist the words of God to fit. Worship shows the surrender of our conscience to conform into the image of His likeness and not the fulfillment of our flesh calling it worship. Worship demonstrates our willingness to be obedient vessels and enforces our reality that with God, all things are possible. Worship shows the process of allowing ourselves to be a broken heart and a contrite spirit. When we realize that the purpose of worship is to humble ourselves and allow ourselves to be a broken heart and a contrite spirit and throw away our patterns, formulas, theories, dance steps, etc., then we will get back to the heart of worship, Jesus.

Father God, right now I ask in the name of Jesus that you would help us get back to the main focus and the heart of worship which is Jesus. I ask that you kill the sacred cows that we have made and called worship. I ask that you kill the feminization of worship we have made. I ask that you show us how to worship you in spirit and in truth. Lead us into your throne room to worship, magnify, and exalt you as the holy one. We praise and worship your name and thank you for being the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We exalt your name and give you all the glory, power, authority and dominion. We thank you for your Holy Spirit that comforts us and lives within us. In Jesus name I pray, Amen!