

## More Precious Than Anything!

The Apostle Paul was an incredibly brilliant and intelligent man. Many scholars consider the book of Romans the most complete theological treatise in the New Testament. He had a fine education. And when the time came for him to become a convert to Christianity you could almost picture him being convinced by clever argumentation and logical reasoning to believe in Christ. But that simply isn't the case! It is of utmost importance to note that initially it wasn't argumentation or intellectual discussions that convinced Paul to become a believer and follower of Jesus Christ! It was an encounter with the living Christ!!

In the letter of Paul to the Galatians Paul proclaims that,

*" I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that I preach is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."  
(Galatians 1:11-12)*

Of course Paul's dramatic encounter with Christ is perhaps not the norm for everyone, but there is a valid point to what Paul shares that is most relevant to how Christ is revealed to us, and how we respond to this encounter. Paul, on several occasions, referred back to his "Damascus Road" experience and the life changing effect it had on him. Those who view the subjective experience as, "overly-emotional" will have to concede that without the encounter with the presence of Christ, Paul would have kept persecuting Christians and even have them killed!

I am not trying to imply that emotional feelings about God are to be valued more highly than our thoughts about Him. But may I point out that every time there is an emotion felt the mind is there to record it! No way the mind can be absent when you are feeling different emotions!! Not unless you are unconscious or in a hypnotic trance!! ( Even then the mind is still engaged!)

You see, there is a subjective as well as objective side to everything. There is, "head knowledge" as well as, "heart knowledge" and I believe they are both equally valid and important to the human experience.

Many churches emphasize the emotional/subjective side of worship as all-important while others value most highly the preaching/objective aspect when they gather together. The truth is both are important and a healthy worshipping church will need to achieve a balance in both these areas.

However, when we consider the subject of worship, there is much more to it than just sitting passively and listening to a speaker. How can the Psalms be read, recited, or listened to without emotion? The book is full of exuberant praises and drenched with emotional exclamations! In the light of God's tremendous works, the Jewish people responded with worship that involved emotional, even physical expressions of praise. The Psalms are full of encouragement to the congregants to sing and joyously participate in worship of the living God!

But the mind must also fully engaged and is equally crucial to worship as well! "*Oh give thanks to the Lord for He is good*", is just one of plenty of reasons why we should joyously worship Him. When we consider and reflect on the miracle of life and existence it is hard not to be awe-struck and overwhelmed. Worship is simply focusing your mind and feelings upon God. By focusing your mind and thoughts upon the giver of all that is good, feelings of gratitude and thankfulness are sure to follow! In this way both the mind and heart can be actively engaged in worship. But as you experience joy, peace, and thankfulness, the mind is just as important as the feelings. You wouldn't know what you were feeling without the mind!

In my own personal life I can truly say that out of all the experiences that I have encountered, the greatest experience I have ever had is an encounter with the presence of God! There have been many times in my life, (sometimes most un-expectantly), when the presence of God has visited me and touched me down into the deepest parts of my heart, mind, and soul! And the indescribable joy, love, and refreshing sustenance I have received make any other experiences simply fall flat in comparison. His presence is more precious than anything!!!! Being embraced by the presence of the Eternal Creator God is absolutely unforgettable!!!!!!

The Bible refers to experiencing the presence of God as drinking living water. Experiencing the presence of God is energizing, invigorating, and more satisfying than anything else! But there is a certain amount of

personal mystery involved because the experience can go beyond objective descriptions. Listen to the great thinker Blasé Pascal describe his encounter with the presence of God!

*“The year of grace 1654. Monday, 23 November. . . From about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past midnight. Fire. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Not of the philosophers and intellectuals. Certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace. The God of Jesus Christ. My God and your God. Forgetfulness of the world and everything except God.*

Pascal also said, *“The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.”* May we never try to become believers, who rule out the personal and emotional aspects of faith, in favor of a lopsided emphasis based solely upon an intellectual approach to knowing God.

Pastor Kevin Bidwell shares how he had a desire to see his church more involved in “heart-felt” worship. But he realized that there had to be a change in him before there could be a change in his congregation! Pastor Kevin says,

*“My faith was cerebral. I grew up in a stoic family that went to a stoic church. Faith had to do with reason. If someone were to ask me, “Do you love Jesus?” I would have said yes, though with little emotion attached. I had the “if you love me you will obey my commands” down cold. I would love Jesus as long as doing was as far as it went. I didn't want him messing with my emotions. Worship was an hour on Sunday morning. While I had passion when it came to my wife and children, I had none when it came to expressing my faith through worship. I was opposed to the “hand-raising, oil-slinging” crowd because I mistakenly thought their faith was all about emotion. I failed to see that my own faith had swung too far in the opposite direction. “*

But later after several encounters in a graveyard where he began to pray and worship Pastor Kevin shared his life changing insights,

*“As a worshiper I also gained something else: communion with God. There is no way I could have pastored several churches through radical change without it. Times in the presence of God gave me the emotional strength to carry out the tasks at hand.”*

It is very exciting to note that the Hebrew word for Spirit is **'ruach'**! The very essence of the word means strong wind or breath. It always implies something living compared with something dead, something moving, the opposite of something stagnant. God's Spirit is the **divine energy of life!** That is why the experience of the Spirit is described as a rebirth to true life, a drink of living water, a foretaste of glory divine! The presence of God's Spirit in our lives is the energizing life-giving Spirit of God!!

The Bible states that the whole earth is filled with His presence. His presence is not to be experienced just when we are gathered together and the music is crankin'! Sometimes I think we are praying and worshipping a God whom we think is very far away in heaven. But He is everywhere and He can be right with you in your car or at home. Don't limit your worship times to Sunday mornings only.

Bruce Shelley states that,

*"True worship was never intended to be dull and emotionless, but there are spiritual risks in making it an escape from life. Before God we must make promises to one another, assume responsibilities, and respond to our failures by repenting and obeying."*

We should never worship God just to obtain a spiritual high or to escape reality. Jesus...he's much more than a feeling! But He is also much more than a concept!!

I believe what churches need to do today is to fight the tendency to gravitate towards either extreme...too much emphasis on emotions or reason just isn't healthy. Instead we should say with the Apostle Paul, "I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with my mind also. I will sing praise with the spirit but I will sing praise with the mind also." (1 Corinthians 14:15 ) In this way we can become truly balanced and wholesome in our experience with God.

*"In His presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore!"( Psalms 16:1)* And my prayer is that as we live out our lives, that we experience joy in His presence, commune with Him, and know Him as much as we possibly can. May we never take His presence for granted...*His presence is more precious than anything!*

**Written by David Arivett**

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**Songs Of David**