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# Be Still.

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION 57

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## The One True Worshipper

by Robert Doyle



### “Why We Gather to Worship”

Christians do not gather in corporate meetings so that each of us can behave based on how we feel or what we like. Nor do we gather for the primary purpose of experiencing emotion. We gather to worship God by acknowledging truth about him, but locating our faith in the historical, achieved realities of the person and work of Jesus Christ. We gather to locate our faith in him.

A good worship song, like a good sermon, directs my attention outward and upward, away from my subjective impressions and toward objective truth. As I then acknowledge objective realities, as I approach the Father through the person and finished work of his Son, my heart is freshly filled with affection.

But I do not approach God on the basis of that affection. It is not because of my affections for God, or my feelings of wonder or gratitude, that I draw near to God. I only draw near through the one Mediator he has provided. I approach the Father only, ever, and always through Christ's finished work. — C. J. MAHANEY

**“For ye are not come unto the mount  
that might be touched” Hebrews 12:18**

Worship is sometimes described as the missing jewel in the evangelical crown. It has become perhaps the major focus of a majority of Christian churches in the second half of this century. But once again, our focus reveals our sinfulness. By placing our own activities in church under special focus, we have grabbed the wrong end of the worship stick. In our concern for relevant ‘worship’ we have reversed the Bible’s concerns. For in the New Testament, worship is not so much something we do, but it is first of all and mainly something Jesus Christ does for us!

### *Jesus, our liturgy leader*

In its breathtaking sweep of his portrait of the person and work of Christ, Hebrews describes our Lord as the ‘liturgy leader’ (*leitourgos*, 8:2). In the context of the epistle’s argument, Jesus is the Minister of the sanctuary. Jesus Christ is the One True Worshipper, the Leader of our worship, who has gone ahead to lead us in our prayers and intercessions.

As such, the *leitourgia*, or worship, of Jesus is contrasted with the *leitourgia*, or worship, of sinful human beings—even at our religious best. Jesus’ activity is the worship and offering which God has provided for humanity and which alone is acceptable to God: The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man.

Somewhat surprisingly, the acceptable worship which Jesus is said to offer is not an especially pure kind of sacrifice—although it has those overtones—but is primarily his obedience. Have a look at Hebrews 10:5-10 and note how the obedience of Jesus is contrasted with the ceremonies and rituals of religious worship.

Jesus’ life of self-offering to the Father was on our behalf, on behalf of the world. This offering culminated in the one true sacrifice of love and obedience on the Cross, which alone is acceptable to God, for all people for all time. In this offering we are sanctified (Heb 10:14).

### *Worship is obedience, the obedience of faith*

Therefore it is no surprise that Romans 12:1-2 declares that all of life is now to be seen as worship:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer

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your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship (latreia). Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Here and in the following chapters Paul goes on to detail this 'offering of the body' in the practical terms of daily relationships, including paying taxes! That is, worship is moved from the 'sacred' sphere of special places and special times and made very ordinary, or secular. The worship God wants of Christians is obedience, the obedience of faith. John records that Jesus' disciples approached him and asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" "Believe in the One he has sent", Jesus replied (Jn 6:28-29). The worship God wants of us is faith, trust in his promises given to us in his Son. This is the faith which if true to the magnitude of God's promises is to underpin and drive every activity of life.

**Because Jesus Christ is the One True Worshipper on our behalf, worship is not now to be seen as something properly belonging in a building, but rather as the entire life of faith. The worship God wants is our whole life of faithful obedience, and as shocking as this may seem, it belongs more in the kitchen, the workshop and the street than in a church.** Indeed, in describing what goes on inside churches, the New Testament writers only very rarely use the worship words which abound in the Old Testament.

Historically, Christian theology and practice quickly lost 'worship' as a word to describe all of life, and reserved it to describe what happens in church—to describe our address to God. As a consequence it was re-sacralised, and church-ified, invested with a meaning quite contrary to that given by the New Testament and the person and work of Jesus Christ it witnesses to.

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### *Praise is Confession*

The characteristic activity of church in the New Testament is not 'worship' in the usual sense of the word, but edification. Ephesians 4:1-16 is a good example of this. The gifts are given by the ascended Christ to his Church in order "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up". 'Building' is the language of edification, of 'raising an edifice'. The activities the New Testament includes in 'building up' the church are Word-based ministries—Bible reading, preaching, private and public admonition and exhortation on the basis of Scripture.

Paul's instructions to Timothy are in this direction (1 Tim 4, 2 Tim 3:1-4:8). And importantly, these activities are to produce praise.

Praise is not just an extra to these activities, but integral. Why? To answer that we need to remember that teaching the Bible—formally from the pulpit or informally in private conversations with each other, ought not be the dry activity it is sometimes caricatured as being. How could this be the case when God promises to be present with us in person as we meditate on his Word? That is the marvellous promise God gives to Joshua as he stands on the edge of the Promised Land at the head of a rag-tag Israel. A promise which is constantly re-echoed throughout Scripture:

No-one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life...I will never leave you nor forsake you...Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful...the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (Josh 1:5-9)

God promises to meet with us in and with his word of the Bible. And, as John 14-17 makes clear, all of God comes to us in this way: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **The characteristic response we are to make to God as he comes to us clothed in his promises, clothed with the gospel, is faith.** In the context of the New Testament's vision of what church is to be, this faith most appropriately takes the form of confession. To each other we confess and testify of the greatness of God. We do this by the very activity of making God's Word the centre of our activities—by reading it, preaching it, making it the basis of exhortation, and even setting it to music in hymns and praise. The Spirit uses all this, we are assured, to build us up in Christ. Praise is integral to our activities in church, because it is another form of our response of faith. It is part of our whole life of worship, but only one part of it.

No doubt because of the emotional uplift involved, we may sometimes think that praise is where we most meet God, and thus give it centre stage. But that is a significant misunderstanding. In the same way that worship is not primarily something we do, but something that Christ does for us by taking our prayers and praises and making them acceptable to God, it is not so much we who meet God in our edifying activities, but he who meets us in his word of the Gospel. Praise is just our heartfelt and thankful response to the God who has already come to us. We "declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9). And, we do it to build up those around us (Eph 5:15-20,

1 Cor 14). The order is important—God meets us; and the place is important—in the word of the gospel. Lose that focus and we will not only deny what God promises about how he works in our lives, but run the risk of over-valuing the place of praise when we meet together. We can do this by moving praise from a response which is to edify our neighbour (as much as it is to honour God) to a place where it takes on a life of its own.

On the other hand, we cannot over-value the significance of all our worship activities as they stem from faith—whether baking cakes for our neighbours or reading the Bible or singing hymns. By the grace of God, by faith, we are united to Christ and thus join in his heavenly worship on our behalf. Whether our mundane activities are focussed outside the church in private acts of love to our neighbours, or inside the church in Bible-based edification, they are all offerings to God made acceptable by the obedience of his Son. The first prayer of thanksgiving after the Communion Service in the Book of Common Prayer has captured it: we present "ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice" by, through, and with Jesus Christ. Thus, with Jesus as our liturgy leader, heaven itself rings with our prayers and praises! By faith we are caught up into a worship of cosmic proportions, an offering which takes up the whole world and presents it to the Father until that day when all things will be subject to Christ, and Christ will be subject to God, and God will be all in all! (1 Cor 15:20-28).

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### *Transparency in Church*

What Christians are seeking to do in meeting together is to hear and understand what God has to say about himself and us. We ought not lose our nerve because some people scorn a focus on Bible teaching, labelling it as 'scholastic Protestantism' or a naive belief in 'propositional revelation'. For it is in our meditating on the content of Holy Scripture day and night, being careful to do everything written in it, that God promises to meet with us, and do us good.

It is here the relevance question is solved. **The Bible does not need to be made relevant; it creates its own relevance.** God confronts us directly through it, and exposes us for what we are, and what he wants us to be in Christ. Not relevance, but transparency is needed. The Bible needs to be clearly and appropriately taught so that what God is doing in the world through the gospel might be transparent to the outsider and he may be convicted of his sin, fall down on his face and confess "surely God is in your midst!" (1 Cor 14:22-25).

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# Trading Places: The Priesthood of All Believers

by David Hagopian

So much for the tweed coat, button down collar, and loafers. Oh no, not for this professor. In his attempt to claim solidarity with the common man, he wears boots, disparagingly known as “longhorns” in the farmbelt, and thus spurns any accommodation to the evil capitalism that would actually pay him more than the janitor who cleans his halls at night. In fact, in a well-known article, this Harvard law professor once suggested that the janitors at the law school should trade places with the professors. Only problem: nobody bothered to ask the janitors if they wanted to trade places with the professors.

In a recent edition of Wall Street Journal, however, a Harvard law student did just that. What he found was that the janitors at the law school, on the whole, were not too pleased with this lofty professorial suggestion since lurking behind it was the arrogant assumption that being a Harvard Law School professor was somehow more desirable than being a janitor. So, while the good ol’ professor may have tried to safeguard the dignity and integrity of the janitor as a person, he did so at the tremendous expense of denigrating the janitor’s vocation. In the end, the professor’s lofty suggestion ended up promoting what it ostensibly attempted to deny: that professors are better than janitors.

Over and against such pseudo attempts to preserve dignity and integrity among those who pursue various vocations, stands a clarion truth of Scripture: the Reformed doctrine of **the priesthood of all believers**. This doctrine restores true dignity and true integrity to all believers since it teaches that all believers are priests and that as priests, they are to serve God—no matter what legitimate vocation they pursue. Thus, there is no vocation that is more “sacred” than any other. Because Christ is Lord over all areas of life, and because His word applies to all areas of life, nowhere does His Word even remotely suggest that the ministry is “sacred” while all other vocations are “secular.” Scripture knows no sacred-secular distinction. All of life belongs to God. All of life is sacred. All believers are priests.

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## *Our Great High Priest*

As priests, we must always remember that our priesthood, from beginning to end, is

rooted and grounded in our Great High Priest whose priesthood was not ordained by man, but rather was ordained by God. In fact, God swore with a binding oath that Christ was, is, and will forever be our Eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 6:20, 7:26-27). And as our Eternal High Priest—as the God-man—Christ is the sole Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5), having offered Himself as our sacrifice once and for all in order that He might expiate (cleanse) us from the guilt of our sin, propitiate (turn away) the wrath of God, reconcile us to God, and redeem us as His people.

But Scripture doesn’t simply teach us that our high priest died on our behalf; it also teaches us that **because of His death we have been made priests in Him**. The same Priest “who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood,” also “made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father...” (Rev. 1:5-6). What a glorious truth: Christ as our High Priest not only atoned for our sins, but also, as Calvin so aptly put it, received us “as his companions” in this great priestly office (Institutes, II.XV.6).

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## *Called as Priests*

Thus, on the basis of His priestly work on our behalf, Christ has bestowed upon us a royal priesthood. This priesthood, however, would be meaningless apart from the fact that God richly bestowed His favour upon us, chose us for Himself, and called us to be His people and His priests. Put simply, we would not be priests were it not for the fact that God chose us to be His priests. That is why most every passage which speaks of us as priests also speaks of us as those who have been called by God, as *God’s chosen people*.

**In his first epistle, for example, Peter applies the attributes of the people of God under the Old Covenant to us as believers and explicitly proclaims that we are the people of God.** In Scripture we learn that God mercifully called the children of Israel to be His people, and promised them that if they walked in obedience to His Covenant, they would be His “own possession”, “a kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” (Ex. 19:5, cf Deut. 14:2, 21). Conjuring up this imagery and applying these attributes to believers, Peter writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for

God’s own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In the same vein, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders in the fifth chapter of Revelation sing that the Lamb was slain and with His blood purchased for God “men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou has made them to be a kingdom of priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

First Peter 2:9-10 and Revelation 5:9-10, then, teach us about the mercy and grace of God who called us to be His priests. In particular, we learn at least three important truths from these passages. First, God, by the blood of Christ, has mercifully called people of every tribe and tongue and nation out of darkness into His marvellous light. Second, as those called into His marvellous light, we are also called to be His chosen people and royal priests. Third, because we are royal priests, we are to serve God daily by proclaiming His excellencies and reigning upon the earth to His glory. Put simply, by God’s grace we are royal priests and as such we are to serve God daily as we reign for Him.

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## *Priests in Our Vocations*

Since we are to serve God daily as priests, the priesthood of all believers should not be relegated to the status of a timeworn theological slogan. It is a cornerstone of Reformed theology which should change how we live our lives each and every day, including how we pursue our daily vocations. Properly understood, the priesthood of all believers teaches us that all believers are priests, no matter what their vocation—their calling—in life might be. Luther puts it so well:

A shoemaker, a smith, a farmer, each has his manual occupation and work; and yet, at the same time, all are eligible to act as priests.... Every one of them in his occupation or handicraft ought to be useful to his fellows... (Woolf, Reformation Writings of Martin Luther, I.116).

According to Luther, all believers have equally received the treasures which God has given, from the shoemaker to the farmer to the smith. No vocation stands

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over and above the rest. No vocation is more “sacred” than any other. No vocation is better than another. God has called all believers, without exception, to be His royal priests—from the dockworker to the doctor, from the messenger to the manager, from the educator to the executive. No legitimate vocation is too lowly to be the vehicle through which God will do His work (Eastwood, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, p. 12).

The fundamental problem, though, is that many believers fail to understand that they are priests in their daily vocations and accordingly, fail to see that **their vocations are vehicles through which God will do His work.** As priests, believers are endowed with the incredible privilege of ministering for God daily in their vocations. But because many believers lose sight of their priestly calling, they slosh through their tasks day after day, without seizing valuable opportunities to serve God as priests in their vocations. Let us seize those opportunities and pursue our vocations with vigour and zeal, viewing them as an opportunity to serve our Great High Priest. Humbly recognising the tremendous privilege God has bestowed on us through our Great High Priest, we should view our personal vocations as one of many spheres through which we exercise

our priesthood.

As we exercise our priesthood in our vocations we must also remember that there is no room for arrogance amongst God’s people. No believer has more privilege or status in the sight of God because of the vocation he pursues. From God’s perspective, those who pursue all legitimate vocations are of equal dignity and integrity. As Barkley once put it, “All men are priests in their daily vocation. All are priests though their duties vary according to their calling” (Presbyterianism, p. 18). Indeed different vocations may impose different duties on those who pursue them and one vocation may even pay more than another.

### *Being Somebody*

But just because one vocation pays more than another does not necessarily mean that the person who receives higher pay is endowed with more dignity or integrity than one who receives lesser pay. That’s not what really counts. What really counts, what ultimately distinguishes one person from another, what really makes someone somebody, is Christ. So eloquent was Barkley when he wrote:

The only real farmer is a Christian farmer; the only real doctor is a Christian doctor; the only real man is a

Christian man; and the only real woman is a Christian woman; and so on covering every detail and aspect and station in life. Apart from Christ we are not what we ought to be (Presbyterianism, p. 18).

Indeed, apart from Christ we are nobody and can do nothing (Jn. 15:5). But by His grace we are somebody and can do everything (Phil. 4:13).

Thus, being “all you can be” doesn’t happen in the armed forces or in any other vocation for that matter. Being all you can be comes as a direct result of being a Christian, of knowing the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Therefore, the priesthood of all believers should not only focus us inwardly to serve God as we vigorously pursue our respective vocations. It should also focus us outwardly to introduce those around us to Christ so that they too can really be somebody.

Being somebody—enjoying true dignity and integrity—doesn’t come from trading places with others. Being somebody comes from knowing our Great High Priest who traded places with us by dying in our stead, bestowing His grace upon us, and calling us to be His royal priests.

And that’s a message even our good ol’ professor in longhorns needs to hear.

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In that day shall there be upon the bridles of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD’s house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day *there shall be no more the Canaanite* in the house of the LORD of hosts. ZECHARIAH 14:20-21

## The Money Lender’s Ledger



The Friday night before my nineteenth birthday Mrs. Finucane sends me for the sherry. When I return she is dead in the chair, her eyes wide open, and her purse on the floor wide open. I can’t look at her but I help myself to a roll of money. I take the key to the trunk upstairs. I take forty of the hundred pounds in the trunk and the ledger. I’ll add this to what I have in the post office and I have enough to go to America. On my way out I take the sherry bottle to save it from being wasted.

I sit by the River Shannon near the dry docks sipping Mrs. Finucane’s sherry. Aunt Aggie’s name is in the ledger. She owes nine pounds. It might have been the money she spent on my clothes a long time ago but now she’ll never have to pay it because I heave the ledger into the river. I’m sorry I wrote threatening letters to the poor people in the lanes of Lamerick, my own people, but the ledger is gone, no one will ever know what they owe and they won’t have to pay their balances. [from *Angela’s Ashes* by Frank McCourt]

*As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.* PSALM 103:12