

“WIRED FOR WORSHIP: OUR APPROACH REALLY DOES MATTER!”
by Rom A. Pegram (1/7/18)

According to a past article on the subject of attitude ... A person's mental attitude has an almost unbelievable effect on his powers, both physical and psychological. The British psychiatrist, J.A. Hadfield, gives a striking illustration of this fact in his booklet, 'The Psychology of Power.' "I asked three people," he wrote, "to submit themselves to test the effect of mental suggestion on their [physical] strength, which was measured by gripping a dynamometer." They were to grip the dynamometer with all their strength under three different sets of conditions:

- First he tested them under normal conditions. The average grip was 101 pounds.
- Then he tested them after he had hypnotized them and told them that they were very weak. Their average grip this time was only 29 pounds!
- In the third test Dr. Hadfield told them under hypnosis that they were very strong. The average grip jumped to 142 pounds. (*Bits and Pieces, May, 1991, p. 15*)

Attitude matters, folks, in our approach to everything in life, including worship! Again, 'a person's mental attitude has an almost unbelievable effect on his powers, both physical and psychological' ... and, I might add, *spiritual* as well! Listen to the attitude that Jesus prefers, as we get into our lesson for today:

"But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?" ³⁷ Jesus replied, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." – Matthew 22:34-40 (NLT)

So, are we 'wired for worship' God's way? Is this the attitude with which we come to worship in each & every Sunday or any other time we worship together? This kind of love—the love that Jesus has commanded of us—needs to be built into our very DNA, as followers of Christ and as the Church together...

I don't usually do this, but I want to share with you today an excerpt from a little book by Tom Kraeuter, entitled "The Missing Element of Worship." Here he paints a picture of what's going on behind the scenes, as people come together to worship in a church not unlike many today. Listen carefully:

On a beautiful spring morning, everyone was trickling in to New Heights Christian Church just before late service began. Josalyn, a relatively new Christian, caught sight of David as he walked through the back door of the church. They had dated three times, all within the past couple of weeks. Unfortunately for Josalyn, David had decided that she wasn't the person with whom he wanted to spend the rest of his life, so he ended

the relationship. Josalyn, on the other hand, had enjoyed their times together. She had begun to think that David would be a good catch. But now she was miffed. *What a slug*, she thought. *I can't believe he's still got the nerve to come to church*. She dramatically turned in her seat and faced the opposite direction.

Sonya and Bill sat just one row back but farther over on the same side of the church as Josalyn. "Look at that dress Josalyn is wearing," Sonya whispered with a tone of disgust. "No, better yet, don't look. It is much too tight for her to be wearing to church. She needs to get a clue."

"Where is she?" Bill whispered as he suddenly looked around.

"Never mind," his wife snapped.

Elmer and Gloria sat in the very back pew on the left, the same place they had sat every Sunday for the past forty-seven years. "If that kid starts banging on those drums again, I'm leaving," Elmer whispered loudly enough for those around him to hear. "I've about had it with that music." No one was quite sure if Elmer wanted others to hear or if Gloria didn't have her hearing aid turned up again.

Teenage friends Ben and Sam sat two-thirds of the way back on the right near the side door. They were uncharacteristically quiet this particular morning. Quiet, that is, until an overweight, elderly woman waddled down the main aisle. Ben nearly laughed out loud as Sam stood and began to imitate her walk. Fortunately she didn't see him, and a few sharp looks from those seated nearby put an end to the episode. Sam sat, but he and Ben continued their laughter. Worse, they murmured criticisms of others throughout the entire service.

Robert, a bank auditor by profession, sat alone on the opposite side. Robert—"Mr. Detail" his friends called him—knew that in the past two years Pastor Perkin's sermons had gone from 23 percent scripture to just 15 percent. The pastor still used scripture, but he used fewer verses and spent more time expounding on the verses he used. From Robert's perspective, however, an 8 percent drop in the amount of God's word used was inexcusable. He checked his stopwatches once more to be sure he was ready for the sermon. He wanted to make certain he had complete and accurate information for the voters' meeting next Thursday night.

Just then Anne walked in with the baby in her arms and her other five straggling behind. The shabby dress of all seven spoke volumes about their financial situation. Rhonda leaned toward her husband and whispered, "Why does Anne always wear that same old dress week after week? She needs to get herself a better job, or maybe a new husband. He must be a real jerk. Have you ever seen him? Just look at all those kids. Margaret Schultz told me that they—" Rhonda went on for quite some time. Her husband just kept nodding and smiling, though he paid little attention to anything she said. Ever.

One of the ushers that day was a tall, muscular, handsome man named Zach. As he escorted beautiful—and eligible—Cynthia to her seat, Zach gently placed his hand on

her shoulder and confided, “Be ready. The pastor is really long-winded this morning.” He shook his head as though in total disbelief. “The sermon took almost twenty-six minutes in the first service. I thought he’d never get done.” Cynthia smiled coyly at Zach and thanked him for the information as she sat down near the end of the pew.

“Why does Zach *always* escort Cynthia to her seat?” Jane asked as she watched. “He’s never once offered to escort me to *my* seat.”

Her husband, Jim, looked at her curiously. In a low voice he asked, “Do I really need to answer that question?” He paused, then continued, “You’re probably twenty years older than she is, and,” Jim rolled his eyes as if stating the obvious, “she’s single.” Jim stared at his wife, amazed that Jane didn’t seem to understand this. “Besides, why would you *want* him to escort you to your seat?”

“I just—” Anything else Jane said was drowned out by the opening notes of the organ prelude.

As the music began, each of the members quickly glanced through the bulletin, checking the songs and other information about the service. They all dutifully noted the sermon title, “Love One Another,” but interestingly, each person had the same reaction: *Why can’t Pastor Perkins find something else to talk about? We have certainly heard that theme enough...* (And some of you wondered what goes on each week before our worship time begins...)

Here’re some good questions for us to begin with today:

- As the Lord views this scene, what does *He* think?
- Is this an atmosphere conducive to worship?
- If you were God, would you want to be worshiped in the midst of these attitudes ... and would you condone such negative attitudes and gossip?
- Finally, are these Godly characteristics being exhibited here?

When the people looked at the sermon title, “Love One Another,” and thought, *We’ve heard that theme enough*, perhaps if they stopped to listen closely, they might’ve heard the Holy Spirit whisper, “Maybe you have heard it, but you have not done it.” You see, from God’s perspective, the element frequently missing in worship is *love for one another*. Attitude matters as we gather together, doesn’t it? Let’s get back, now, to what the scriptures have to say. First:

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD... Verses 37-38 remind us of this: “Jesus replied, ‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.” One day a man who was a Pharisee and an expert in Jewish Law (Torah) asked Jesus (v. 36), “Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?” The first part of his answer was to ‘love God’...

I want you to note here just how quickly Jesus responded to this Pharisee. This question was a serious one—one that might require some forethought to be sure that the answer was proper and accurate. Jesus probably knew, too, that this Pharisee was trying to trap him. So, the answer was of vital importance. Interestingly, this scripture does not indicate that Jesus hesitated even slightly before answering. Because of the importance of the answer he was to give, he was prepared with this truth long before the question was asked of him.

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind,” was the first part of Jesus’ response. Then, he went even further than the question asked for. He told the Pharisee that, along with loving God, one must...

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF... In verse 39, Jesus says, “A second is *equally* important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Why is it *equally* important? Because loving God and loving your neighbor are intrinsically connected; they are NOT separate subjects as far as Jesus is concerned... And both can affect our worship—our relationship with God...

It strikes me as fascinating here that Jesus uses something that most people are all very familiar with... Folks, *self-love* is so ordinary that Jesus used it as a reference point: “Love your neighbor *as you love yourself*.” When I was in elementary school, my teacher sometimes solved the first problem on the board or on a sheet of homework to show us how the others were solved. *Jesus used our love for ourselves in the same way.* ‘Notice how you love yourself,’ he said, ‘and love your neighbor in the same way.’ (*Knowing the Face of God, Tim Stafford, p. 203*)

As I’d mentioned a few weeks back, this is sometimes the easiest thing to say ... but the hardest thing to do! With God’s help, however, *all things are possible*. And, my prayer is that this congregation will be a shining example to the world of what God can do when his people allow themselves to be filled with his love...

As we close today, watch this short clip of a speech made back in 1941 by a famous individual whose name was Gary Cooper. Does anyone remember that famous actor? It may surprise you what he has to say here. Listen...

<1941>

It is all about attitude, folks. And, this attitude needs to begin at home. Then, that same attitude needs to be carried into worship each time we gather together to lift up the name of Jesus. Folks, verse 40 really sums up Jesus’ thoughts on this day. It says,

“The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

This is the foundation for everything else the Torah (Jewish Law) taught. *These two commandments are the foundation for all that Jesus’ taught, too...*

And, *this is where we need to begin*—with LOVE. Love for God and love for people. It's our choice. So, how are we going to worship God in the future ... right here at Trinity UMC ... and beyond?