

“Worshipping God with Our Hearts and Our Lives”

LaPorte New Church Swedenborgian
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Scripture

Psalm 84:1-4

Romans 12:1-2

Hymns/Songs

"This Is the Day" (*sung twice*)

"Break Thou The Bread of Life" 902

"Be Thou My Vision" 201

Psalm 84:1-4, 10-12 (ESV)

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

² My soul longs, yes, faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.

³ Even the sparrow finds a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!

¹⁰ For a day in your courts is better
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

¹¹ For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor.

No good thing does he withhold
from those who walk uprightly.

¹² O LORD of hosts,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

Place Your Life Before God

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform 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.

Insight for Worship

Secrets of Heaven 7884, by Emanuel Swedenborg

"When people today talk about worship of God, they mainly mean worshipping with one's lips in a church and [private prayers] morning and evening. However, it is not these that are the essential components in worship of God, but rather a life of useful activity. Worshipping by living a useful life accords with the arrangement ordained for heaven. Worship of the lips too is worship, but it does no good whatever unless we worship with our lives, because that is heartfelt worship. If worship of the lips is really to be worship, it must grow out of living worship."

SERMON: "Worshipping God with Our Hearts and Our Lives"

When you think about worshipping the Lord, what comes to your mind right now when I say those words? Most people tend to associate worship of the Lord with going to church on Sunday mornings and participating in the worship service—thus, listening to God's Word, turning one's attention deeply toward the Lord, singing spiritual songs, praying, and listening attentively to and thinking about the preacher's sermon. All of those things are good for us spiritually, however, they are secondary to a much deeper and greater form of worshipping the Lord, and it is this deeper degree and meaning of "worship" that I invite you to reflect about with me this morning.

When I was in seminary and was a student in a class titled, "Worship and Sacraments," taught by the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, she asked us this question more than once: *what do we really mean by the word, "WORSHIP"?*

Let me share with you what I shared with Dr. Harvey and my classmates: I responded by saying that to me, worshipping the Lord involved attending worship services regularly and thinking, speaking, praying and singing in reverent ways; I continued saying that it involved having a humble attitude and approaching the Lord with awe and gratitude; listening attentively to God's Word as it is read aloud and listening carefully to spiritual messages or sermons. I added that it also encompasses celebrating the Lord's Holy Supper at least several times a year, and also warmly relating with others in conversations about God's Word and our journeys of spiritual life.

Should I have gotten an "A," a "B" or a "C" grade on my response? What do you think? Dr. Harvey listened to me carefully, and then she looked me in the eyes and said, "Thank you for sharing that Kit, however, while what you just shared is true, it is lacking what is most important in how our theology looks at what worship is primarily." I sat in my seat feeling humbled at that point, and then she said, "In short, worship is primarily about being holy inwardly in spirit...it's about choosing to respond to the Lord's divine Love for us by thinking and caring about others more than ourselves...and therefore

living life from such goodness. It's about wanting to focus my life on God and His ways each day—not out of duty but out of my own passionate response to God's deep Love for me. So, the deeper meaning of worship," she said, "is having a primary focus in life of a heavenly frame of mind in caring for others seven days a week, because this is God's way of life at all times."

What do you think about that...about what I just shared with you?

We spent time in that "Worship and Sacraments" class studying the distinction between worshiping God as a way of daily living and worshiping Him on Sunday mornings. Another way that Dr. Harvey drew this distinction was by saying that worshiping God on Sunday mornings (or on any day of the week) is what most people think of as honoring the 3rd Commandment given at Mt. Sinai: "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." (*Exodus 20:8*) I like this quote from William Temple that reads: "Worship [of God] is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable...." We can summarize all of this by saying that a person "is in worship when [the Lord] is loved." (*Heavenly Secrets 3690:5*) Or, said in another way, "A person is worshiping all the time if love and charity abide in him." (*Heavenly Secrets 1618*)

Our theology adds this helpful insight, "**...our inner nature determines our outer nature—the latter comes from the former the way our actions come from our spirit.** To be inwardly holy, then, is to love what is good and true because it is good and true and to love what is right and honest because it is right and honest. The more we love these things for their own sakes, the more spiritual we become." There are thousands of ways we can focus ourselves on goodwill towards others, and when we do so people's hearts are affected profoundly so. For example, did you happen to learn in the nightly news several years ago when 4-year-old Austin Perine of Birmingham, Alabama, a sweet African-American boy, learned that there were people in the world who were both homeless and hungry? Well, he decided to do something about it. Donning a cape and going by his new nickname, "President Austin," he asked his parents to take all the money they would spend on his toys and instead buy chicken sandwiches for him to hand out to the homeless. As he did, he gave each recipient a piece of advice: he said to them, "**Don't forget to show love.**" And you know, when selfless love happens for real, people are affected by it forever!

Think about this my friends: **what is it that occupies your thoughts and interests most of all each day?** It is easy to accidentally spend most of our free time thinking of

and loving material things in this world more than we do the Lord. Having no other God than the Lord means having nothing that we care more for than we do for Him. When you become so interested in your games or toys that you think of nothing else from morning to night, you are making a god of something else besides the Lord. Or you may make a god of new clothes or jewelry by thinking more of them than you do of anything else.

So, is this wisdom saying that attending worship services and being involved in the life of the church are of little importance? No. Not at all. This wisdom is simply helping us to understand that loving God through a life of caring and goodness is of central importance, while also acknowledging that all goodness and truth flow into us from God; this wisdom is saying that being active in our church's outward worship services is meant to be married to a life of living the Lord's Commandments from freedom of choice. To add further clarity here, we are taught that: "Practical piety is to act in every work and in every duty from sincerity and right, and from justice and equity, and this because it is commanded by the Lord in the Word. Piety is to attend churches and listen devoutly to preaching there; to partake of the sacrament of the Holy Supper frequently every year, and likewise the other services of worship. But the life of charity consists in willing and doing good to the neighbor; and in acting from a principle of what is just and fair, and good and true, in every work and every office. In a word, the life of charity consists in performing uses. Divine worship, therefore, consists primarily in the life of charity, and secondarily in religious piety. [Thus we can say that] those who lead a life of piety and not at the same time a life of caring do not worship God." (see *New Jerusalem and the Heavenly Doctrine* 124 and *Revelation Explained* 325:4)

We are taught also that when the Lord came into the world, "the Sabbath Day became a day of instruction in Divine things...and of meditation on such things as relate to salvation and eternal life, and it also became a day of love toward the neighbor" (*True Christian Religion* 301). The particular rituals of the Jewish law were annulled, but the Lord in no way abolished the Commandment that the Sabbath was to be remembered and kept holy (see *Heavenly Secrets* 9394). Our need for this now is just as great as it was for the Children of Israel. And now we can know why. We keep the Sabbath holy when, at any time, in any situation, we act from the Lord's will instead of from our own. In essence, what is taught about the Sabbath has no relation to a day or to any time, but rather **to a state of mind**. To remember the Sabbath Day is to acknowledge the goodness of the Lord throughout the week, to recognize that the Lord alone is the source of all that is good and true and to trust that He is "the way, the truth, and the life." (*John 14:6*)

In conclusion, God seeks and values the gifts we bring Him--gifts of praise, gifts of thanksgiving, gifts of service, and gifts of material offerings. But the gift is acceptable

to God in the measure to which the one who offers it is in fellowship with Him in character and conduct; and the test of this is in our relationships with our fellow men and women. We are thus charged in *Matthew 5:24* to postpone our religious giving to God until our loving and genuine relationships are established with others. All of this is reflected beautifully when Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (*John 14:15, 23*)

Perhaps now, together, we can more deeply appreciate these powerful words from Paul's letter to the church in Rome, chapter 12:1-2, and this time I will read it to you from another translation called "The Message": "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, [and] develops well-formed maturity in you." Amen.

LET US PRAY:

O Lord of love and life, thank you so very much for your Word, and thank you for our New Church teachings, both of which raise up for us what is central about genuine worship: loving you by caring for and loving all people, and living a good, fair and useful way of life, exemplified by how you lived your life while on Earth. We are reminded of your response to that scribe who asked you long ago what is the greatest commandment in Scripture—and he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." (*Luke 10:27*) *Help us, O Lord, to sincerely live our lives according to this powerful truth.* It is incredible how easy it is to veer off from these deeply challenging words, and so please help us quickly when we do so. We know that incorporating these wise truths into our daily lives may not be easy, for wide is the pathway that leads us into spiritual demise and narrow is the way that leads us into Heaven's life. Whatever it takes, Lord, guide us into heavenly love, goodness and ongoing spiritual growth. We pray these things in your Holy Name, O Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.