

Lesson 8

Praise and Gratitude

Introduction

Praise and joy are the natural products of unity and fellowship with God and one another. At its most basic level, praise is an expression of our approval or admiration, of gratitude and devotion for blessings received.¹⁸ For the early Christians, Christianity was their life. And because of their sincere devotion, they couldn't help but give God praise. They were very aware that God was at work in their midst in a new way and that they were enjoying the benefits of being a part of God's family. We see a clear picture of this in the example of Acts 2.42-47.

Joyful Hearts

In Acts 2.46-47 we read of joyful hearts. The wording here simply means to rejoice. They were simply glad. They were blessed. The blessing they shared in wasn't so much about physical goods and financial appropriations as much as it was the love they possessed together. Such is fantastically contagious. It has a way of building on top of itself. Behind it all was a unity produced by the Spirit ... a singleness of heart.

Sincere Hearts

The joy of the early church also led to sincerity. The phrase *sincere hearts* occurs only here in the New Testament. A similar expression is used in Ephesians 6.5 and Colossians 3.22. The word means *simplicity* and comes from a root word that means "without rocks," or "smooth." Someone has said, "there were no stones of selfishness in their hearts."¹⁹ God's kindness to them bound them to Him wholeheartedly and to one another with generous self-giving. They truly cared for one another.

Praising God

The church had one mind in praising God. If everyone in the local church is involved in praising God and giving Him the glory, then everyone will be one with everyone else. If someone demands everyone give them the glory, problems will arise. *There is no joy in praising yourself because you'll wind up the only one involved.*²⁰ When a person becomes fixated on praising himself, exalting his ways and methods, he will ultimately find no joy because it will eventually lead to him being the only one doing so. Joy will be absent.

In the church, no one has the preeminence but the Lord. Joy is found through praise and observing what God does as He works among us. When all are focused on the Lord, unity results through prayer and

¹⁸ Unger, Merrill Frederick, R. K. Harrison, Howard Frederic Vos, Cyril J. Barber, and Merrill Frederick Unger. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1988.

¹⁹ MacArthur, p. 89.

²⁰ MacArthur, John. "The First Fellowship." MacArthur, John F., Jr. *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.

praise. Unity results when we all care about the glory of the Lord and not our own. God centered churches continually praise God. Their center of gravity is a happy one.

What We Can Take Away

When the local congregation is God-centered, praise will be the result.

What we mean when we say God-centered

The first Christians continually spoke about the Lord. They were thankful for Him. They were submissive to Him and surrendered their lives to Him.

When we are praising God, there will not be any time to speak ill of anyone else. *What characterizes your speech and topics of conversation?* What do others hear and see when you speak? Do you speak often of the work God is doing among your local church family? What are some success stories you see? How can you work these things into conversations with those outside of Christ to show them the hope He offers? What topics of your own study and growth are you working into your daily conversations?

A God/Christ centered church will reflect its disposition ... which will be one of praise. God will be thanked out loud, appreciated, and honored in words and deeds. It will be manifested in the way it worships, its singing, and reverence for God. It will make a conscious decision to refrain from complaining and grumbling. *We need to spend our time in praise.*

What contributes to this climate of praise

A Way of Life

Praising in v. 47 describes the “they” of v. 46 and the “number” of v. 47. The first Christians did all the things of v. 42-46 *while* praising God. The praise was not an additional thing on the list, but it was the condition in which they did all these things. Praise was their way of life. It describes their spiritual state and mode of life. J. A. Alexander says it best:

This evidently means something more than that praise formed a part of their worship. The phrase is obviously intended to describe their whole life as a life of praise to God. It is not so much an additional particular in the description as a pregnant summary of the whole. As if he had said, ‘In a word, they only lived to praise God and glorify their master.’²¹

A Symphony of Adoration

Imagine the scene with over 3000 new believers on the first day, with many more coming to Christ each day. Imagine the work of transformation going on among them ... so visible to all. How many changes were occurring in what people lived for, all of which were prompts to adore God, the transforming One. How many situations of need were being supplied (Philippians 4.19) as God-moved givers?²² Can you image the volume of praise ascending to God?

²¹ Alexander, Joseph Addison. *The Acts of the Apostles Explained*. Vol. 1. New York: Charles Scribner, 1857, p. 95-96.

²² Rosscup, James E. *An Exposition on Prayer in the Bible: Igniting the Fuel to Flame Our Communication with God*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2008, p. 1887.

