

A walk with Mr O (33)

Awe

Mr O, may I ask you what you think of worship leaders, worship bands and all that sort of thing? Are they a problem to you?

No, they are not a problem to me. They are a symptom of a problem. Just as certain spots reveal that you have measles, so the existence of worship leaders, worship bands and 'all that sort of thing' reveal that countless churches are suffering from a degenerative condition called Worship Deficiency.

I'm not sure I know what you mean. Can you spell it out for me, please?

Certainly. It's a simple fact that where you get the paraphernalia of that sort of worship you don't get the dominant ingredient of biblical worship.

And what is that?

It is awe.

And what is awe?

Awe, biblically understood, is something inward. It happens deep in a believer's soul when they contemplate God. It is an overwhelming feeling of astonishment, admiration, respect and dread. The believer is overcome by the beauty of God's being and the wonder of His ways. As they think of Him, they are stunned.

Is that the same as what the Bible calls 'the fear of God' and 'the fear of the Lord'?

Yes, it is. The person who stands in awe of God considers Him to be the ultimate reality. He exists; and His existence does not depend on our being aware of His existence.

Everything else that exists is derived. It owes its origin to something outside of itself. God is not derived. He, and He alone, has no origin. He is. He exists from eternity to eternity. When believers think about this they can't get over it. And so they fear Him. How can they do anything else? They are His creatures; and sinful creatures at that.

How does this fear of God, this inward awe, express itself from day to day?

The Bible gives a clear answer to that question. People who fear God love Him. They love Him for who He is; and they love Him for what He has done for them in Christ. They love Him so much that they set out to obey Him. They care more about His approval than what other people think or do. And they trust Him. They believe in His fatherly love and stop worrying about food and clothing and the supply of their needs. Biblical awe is not crushing! Wherever you find it you will also find a carefree spirit.

It sounds wonderful to me! So how can we get awe back into the lives of Christians today?

We need to take action. And we need to pray.

What action should we take?

We must start by realising that everything that God wants us to do in church has been designed to stir up great thoughts about Him. What and how we sing should do that. So should every prayer. The same is true of how we publicly read Scripture, how and what we preach, and how we do baptisms and observe the Lord's Supper. But you can't think great thoughts about God if you are in awe of the church architecture and furniture, or of the musicians and music, or of the beauty of the prayers, or of the identity and ability of the preacher. It's time to return to plain buildings, to plain music, to plain prayers, and to plain preaching! ALL our thoughts in church must be great thoughts about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Nothing must rival that. Nothing!

And what should we be praying?

We should be praying that an overwhelming sense of God will accompany everything we do in church. We should be praying like that before we come, as we arrive, and throughout the service. We should be praying that the Lord will unveil Himself to our souls during every day of the following week. It's time for tears – tears of repentance. We are simply not having the great thoughts that we should. Scripture teaches us that repentant tears will be followed by God-given joy. Those who return to biblical awe are like those who dream. Their laughing mouths and singing tongues proclaim 'The Lord has done great things for us'. And they are glad.