Liturgical Lessons from the Decalogue: The Priority of Prologue

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Exodus 20:2 NASB)

The Decalogue is a relational covenant between God and God's people, rooted in what God has done to make that relationship possible. God has delivered us all from slavery -- literally, metaphorically, or both. In Exodus 20, the Decalogue's prohibitions and directives are all framed as responses to the all-important prologue acknowledging our deliverance by God. But in practice, this prologue is rarely emphasized. And as a result, the
subsequent relational covenant of freedom becomes yet another burden, a doctrine of self-improvement that merely replaces one yoke with another.

The spiritual slavery of this moralism is nowhere more insidiously prevalent than in Christian worship. And unlike its more rigid cousin, legalism, moralism appeals to liberals, conservatives and everyone in between.

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Biblical Spirituality
by Cheryl Wilson-Bridges

Private Praise

Many times the largest extent of our praise is only what we offer God in public. Most of us don't spend enough private time with God meditating on His works and His Word. Private time in praise to God is essential for proper spiritual nourishment. David tells us in Psalm 34:8, "O, taste and see that the Lord is good." Our pure praise is like a delicious meal that nourishes our souls. So what happens when we don't spend enough private time with God? Let's think of it like this. We all love to eat, right? Well, some of us more than others. However whether you are a food fanatic or have an ordinary appetite, eating is vital to our mental and physical growth. In order to be healthy we must eat daily. If we don't follow these dietary guidelines, our bodies will become diseased. What would happen if you were only allowed to eat one meal per week? I believe that if you only ate once per week, when meal time came around, you would be starving. When you
arrive at your weekly potluck and the food is served, it is unlikely that you would be cheerful, greet others, and spend time talking with people about their personal needs. You probably won't have a desire to socialize because you are starving. Your sole purpose would be to first feed yourself! I imagine you would squeeze through the crowd, fill your plate to overflowing, then sit contented and inactive with your belly full.

Sadly, many of us act the same way with our one-day-per-week praise.

**Editor's note:** This article is an excerpt from an upcoming book titled, *Deeper Praise: Music, Majesty or Mayhem.*

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**Worship Music**
by **Devon Howard**

**Establishing a Worship & Music Ministry in Your Local Church (Part I)**

Weekly corporate worship is an essential activity for a vital relationship with God. It teaches us about His power and also helps us tune out the things in our lives that distract us from Him. Ultimately, it inspires us for our mission of seeking justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

Investing time and resources in the planning and implementation of such an important part of the Christian experience is essential in every church and Christian community. The following summaries from a recent presentation for the Andrews University Music and Worship Conference address some of the fundamental questions that need to be considered when starting a Worship & Music Ministry at any church.
What is Worship?
Worship is not simply music, or musical performance. Rather, it is the comprehensive crafting and implementation of a church experience, as well as the facilitation of participating personnel and groups. This means that all of the events of a Sabbath morning should be considered as part of the worship experience. Effective worship will begin in the parking lot and linger with the individual participants throughout their week.

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Worship Technology
by Eddie Cornejo

Audio-Visual Ministry in Worship

Editor's note: We asked worship leader, Eddie Cornejo, to interview the sound team at his church. He documents his experience and their insights in this video. Share your thoughts in our Facebook dialogue. Click here to watch the video.

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Featured Event
Worship is one of the Core Qualities of the pastor. Worship is defined in Core Qualities as "facilitating an enriching corporate worship experience that brings people into the presence of God." There are eighteen worship seminars at the CALLED Convention.
To find out what is offered open the CALLED app or go to this link:

https://event.crowdcompass.com/called/multi-level-list/ScheduleByTopic/2

You may have to type in the password 'pastor' to open that page.

Featured Resource

Adventist Worship Music (AWM) is a new initiative for digital print music by Adventist composers and arrangers. It will launch this Summer, 2015. Watch for our booth at the upcoming CALLED NAD Pastoral Family Convention in Austin and the General Conference Session in San Antonio.

Adventist Worship Music (AWM) is a publisher and distributor that seeks to resource Adventist churches with new worship music and further the contribution of Adventist worship music to the broader Christian worship community. We value music that reflects the diversity of the global church, the rich heritage of Christian congregational song, and new expressions of worship. We strive to commission, curate and promote Christ-centered music of artistic and theological integrity that builds up
the Body of Christ, is in harmony with Adventist doctrine, and enriches the life of the world.

All music will distributed through AdventSource.

For more information or to make submissions, please write to awm@andrews.edu.

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To the Point

"Worship should be an act of seeing and judgment." Revelation 14 and 15 invite us - in the context of worship - to see and judge the world from God's wider perspective. Worship that embraces judgment is a sight-altering activity that can serve as a corrective to viewing life through the limited and potentially distorted lenses of culture. We have an opportunity to use the transport of worship to provide some much-needed critical distance on 'the way things are' and to spark worshipers' theological imagination about 'the way things really are' when seen with God's final verdict in mind."

Steve Yeagley, *Gravity and the Weightlessness of Worship: Worship, Media, and Apocalyptic in Conversation*

Editor's note: This excerpt is taken from a paper that will be published through AdventSource in a forthcoming North American Division worship resource and was first presented at the 2015 Andrews University Music & Worship Conference.
“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Exodus 20:2 NASB)

The Decalogue is a relational covenant between God and God’s people, rooted in what God has done to make that relationship possible. God has delivered us all from slavery — literally, metaphorically, or both. In Exodus 20, the Decalogue’s prohibitions and directives are all framed as responses to the all-important prologue acknowledging our deliverance by God. But in practice, this prologue is rarely emphasized. And as a result, the subsequent relational covenant of freedom becomes yet another burden, a doctrine of self-improvement that merely replaces one yoke with another.

The spiritual slavery of this moralism is nowhere more insidiously prevalent than in Christian worship. And unlike its more rigid cousin, legalism, moralism appeals to liberals, conservatives and everyone in between. Few Christians would, of course, explicitly say that the central focus of Jesus’ message is behavior improvement. But our worship practices — especially our preaching — are often more moralistic than we realize. I know mine are. Adventist sermons unfold in a variety of ways, but nearly all of them end with the same basic appeal: live better. The definition of living better is where theological camps divide. Conservatives favor calls for individual purity, faithful religious observance, and participation in church growth efforts. Progressives tend to emphasize societal ills, faithful observance of Jesus’ social ethical teachings, and participation in social justice initiatives. But the subtle common thread of moralism in both traditions reflects the shared assumption that what we truly need and what this world truly needs is for us to be better Christians.

We do, of course, need to be transformed. And a true transformation would no doubt benefit our neighbors, communities and planet in important ways. The issue is that spiritual slavery under the yoke of moralism simply does not transform. “You should,” “we should,” “I should,” are some of the most burdensome words in the English language. And they are not only powerless to accomplish their stated ends but often counter-productive. I’ve preached a lot of “should” sermons. But I’ve come to realize recently that the only messages that have ever been transformative in my life and the lives of others have reflected the priority of the divine prologue: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” God’s deliverance of the spiritually, emotionally, materially, or otherwise oppressed and enslaved is ongoing. And that divine work — in which we are graciously invited to participate — is the true transformative hope of the world.
I invite you to consider how worship in your congregation each week can facilitate an encounter with the God who delivers. These three questions might be a helpful place to start:

1. Is the sermon focused on the Gospel? Does the sermon emphasize the good news of what God has done for us that we cannot do for ourselves? Jesus says, “My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30 NASB). Will worshippers leave feeling burdened to live differently out of obligation or freed to live differently out of gratitude?

2. Are we singing the Gospel together? Fortunately, moralism has inspired relatively few popular worship songs and hymns. The Gospel story is almost always reflected in congregational singing. While many contemporary worship songs and nineteenth-century Gospel hymns are overly individualistic, singing together almost always affords the opportunity to focus on the work of Jesus.

3. Are our “benedictions” truly benedictions? Namely, are they words of blessing or just sermon summaries presented as prayers? In Christian worship, God is not only acknowledged in the prologue as the One who comes before but is given the last word as the One who sends forth. The benediction provides an opportunity to let the last words be God’s in the form of a Scriptural blessing. This blessing assures worshippers that the Gospel can be embodied in their lives and communities because of the self-giving work of a present and gracious God. The God who has already delivered us will continue to bless us.

As you prepare for worship this coming Sabbath, may you be encouraged by this blessing from the Book of Numbers:

“The Lord bless you, and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.”
(Numbers 6:24-26)
Private Praise

By Cheryl Wilson-Bridges

Many times the largest extent of our praise is only what we offer God in public. Most of us don’t spend enough private time with God meditating on His works and His Word. Private time in praise to God is essential for proper spiritual nourishment. David tells us in Psalm 34:8, “O, taste and see that the Lord is good.” Our pure praise is like a delicious meal that nourishes our souls. So what happens when we don’t spend enough private time with God?

Let’s think of it like this. We all love to eat, right? Well, some of us more than others. However whether you are a food fanatic or have an ordinary appetite, eating is vital to our mental and physical growth. In order to be healthy we must eat daily. If we don’t follow these dietary guidelines, our bodies will become diseased. What would happen if you were only allowed to eat one meal per week? I believe that if you only ate once per week, when meal time came around, you would be starving. When you arrive at your weekly potluck and the food is served, it is unlikely that you would have a desire to socialize because you are starving. Your sole purpose would be to first feed yourself! I imagine you would squeeze through the crowd, fill your plate to overflowing, then sit contented and inactive with your belly full.

Sadly, many of us act the same way with our one-day-per-week praise. We are spiritually starved and arrive at church ravenous because our daily worship is weak or non existent. When we enter into the banquet – God’s House – spiritually starved, we focus on what is here for me instead of who is here for the Master. Unfortunately, because we are nearly empty, we fill up on the junk food of a bloated praise experience. Without proper spiritual nourishment, we can’t focus on sharing our faith or impacting others with our worship. We can’t give to others because we are too busy feeding ourselves. Yet we are starving for proper spiritual nourishment. We become bloated worshipers who are content with being full, instead of feeding others by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Spiritual starvation causes soul disease. We must digest God’s Word daily and spend time in private praise so that others can taste and see the bounty of God’s goodness in our lives.
Weekly corporate worship is an essential activity for a vital relationship with God. It teaches us about His power and also helps us tune out the things in our lives that distract us from Him. Ultimately, it inspires us for our mission of seeking justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.

Investing time and resources in the planning and implementation of such an important part of the Christian experience is essential in every church and Christian community. The following summaries from a recent presentation for the Andrews Worship & Music and Worship Conference address some of the fundamental questions that need to be considered when starting a Worship & Music Ministry at any church.

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**Why is Worship & Music Ministry Important?**
A formal Worship & Music Ministry is important because worship is our theology. In other words, the way we worship reflects and informs the way we believe. A well organized Worship & Music Ministry will educate, inspire and empower the congregation to model their faith to the community.

**Why Hire a Professional to Facilitate It?**
A well trained professional doesn't replace volunteers but supports them, preventing the cycle of burnout. They have investment in the ministry's success, including training and an incentive to continue training. In partnership with the pastor, a professional is also able to set direction and make decisions with authority as an accountable representative of the congregation.

In Part II I will lay out specific steps for establishing a Worship & Music Ministry as well as some practical tools for success.