

FR 250

Note: Come by our exhibit at the ACU Lectures for a visit. Leroy and Ouida Garrett are to share it with me. It will be Space B-6 in the Teague Special Events Center Feb. 20-23.

You Are My Valentine!!

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Have I taken leave of my senses or gone to sleep on the repeat key? Maybe the former but not the latter. The approaching Valentine's Day reminds me of an incident that Lea, my wife of fifty-seven years, used to have fun telling about. When she was in the fourth grade, a boy in her class to whom she had given no particular attention gave her thirteen Valentines! It must have been a disappointment to the boy that his extravagant gesture gained no points with her. Should he have given her twenty-six instead of thirteen?

If she had been more emotional than sensible, she might have fallen for him. Why would she not be favorably impressed? Was she just insensitive? On the contrary, this fourth grade girl was sensitive to the boy's lack of sensitivity. An old saying is, "You can overdo any good thing." Many a wife has complained that her husband never tells her that he loves her. If, however, he began to tell her thirteen or twenty-six times every day, after a while, by the time he got to repetition number six, instead of her throwing her arms around him passionately repeating, "I love you," he would more likely hear her say, "Shut up and put the garbage out!" She would be turned off by his emotion that overruled sensibility, by his insecurity, by his lack of trust in her love, and by his trying to gain points with her by superficial manipulation. His repetitious expressions would lose depth of meaning both for him and his wife. It would be more an abject begging for her love on his part than an expression of his love for her.

You have probably anticipated my question and have braced yourself for it. How often and how many times must we tell God and Jesus we love them in order to be convincing? And what form should that expression take? How many Valentines should you give them? As though it were a new edict from heaven in the last twenty years, among evangelical churches there has been a radical change in the singing. Most of our singing

in assemblies is now addressed to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. So the questions I am asking are pertinent.

It is interesting to notice that there is no record in the new covenant writings of anyone telling God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit that he loved them. Well, Jesus did embarrass and coax Peter into admitting his intentional love for him rather than emotional affection (John 21:15-19). No mention is made of disciples of Jesus singing songs of praise to him, nor were they instructed to do it. There is no instance of a person addressing, praying to, or singing to the Holy Spirit. The assemblies were never called worship services. God calls for whole-life worship – *“Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Col. 3:17). We become living sacrifices/offerings (Rom. 12:1-2). No terms like “go to worship,” “begin our worship,” or “miss/forsake worship” are found in the epistles. The stated purpose of participation in assemblies was for edification, encouragement, and consolation of those present (Read all of 1 Corinthians 14 to see how emphatic that truth is). Surely, words, songs, and prayers of praise are in order at all times but in our assemblies we should not eliminate songs of confession, consolation, assurance, aspiration, encouragement, hope, exhortation, and instruction.

There are two facets to praise and glorification of God. Simply illustrated, one says “God, I love you.” How often and how many times do you need to tell him that? If it is done in prayer, Jesus advises, *“And in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him”* Matt. 6:7-8). You do not gain points by giving thirteen Valentines. In his next sentences he gives the “Lord’s Prayer.” It may surprise you that this “model prayer” does not include thanksgiving or praise. It includes awesome acknowledgement of God and dependence on him.

The other facet of praise says, “God loves you and me.” Telling the Good News and testifying as to what God does for you and can do for others presents God in good light – glorifies, praises him – so as to encourage others to accept and follow him. One is addressed to God; the other is addressed more particularly to man. God has no needs, but man has many. So God wants us to address man’s needs. In parable he spoke of those who filled the needs of others saying, *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me”* (Matt. 25:31-45). In assemblies we pray for one another, sing to uplift each other, commune to remind one another of the basis of our salvation, teach one another, and give for physical and spiritual needs of man. God needs none of those things, but we do need them. Those who did not help their fellowman were rejected, but they were not rejected because of failure to sing and shout “hallelujah” all along. By our serving one another, God and Christ are served, praised, and glorified. So as we are so zealously praising him in concert, sometimes I wonder if he might be thinking, “That’s nice, but that is not exactly what I had in mind.”

Those of you who are more emotionally inclined are probably turned off by what you are reading, if you are still with me. You want heart-felt religion. God wants that too. However, the heart he wants to be involved is in the head rather than the chest. Our

assemblies are not designed to increase the heart rate but to affect our sensibility. We still hear people say we have head religion but that it should be eighteen inches lower! The heart with which we serve God believes, thinks, understands, trusts, loves, purposes, imagines, and even commits adultery (See Rom. 10:9-10; Prov. 3:5; Matt. 13:15; Prov. 23:7; Matt. 22:37; 2 Cor. 9:7; Gen. 6:5; Matt. 5:28 in that order). Those functions may increase or decrease the heart-beat by determining the emotions. Sense determines our sensibilities. Worship in the heart may speed or slow the function of the physical heart, and one stage is no more worship than the other.

Under the Law of Moses worship included setting aside the new-born bullock, caring for it and feeding it for a year and then leading it to the tabernacle where it was killed, its blood was sprinkled, and its flesh was burned. It is doubtful if that year of caring for the animal was very exhilarating but it was worship. Mood has little connection with worship. You may read more about this illustration in my book, *Free To Speak*, Chapter 15.

Rather than seeking to discourage worship/praise by this essay, I am intent on causing you to gain a balanced perspective. Singing praise to God (vertical), whether privately or corporately, and serving the needs of your fellowman (horizontal) may both be ways of worshiping and glorifying God.

Conviction, not emotional highs, can keep one balanced for thirty, forty, or sixty years – an entire lifetime. []

(Cecil Hook; February 2005)

Talkin' Texas: (Some of these statistics might have changed since the Texas State Travel Guide was published.) Gail, Texas on the southern plains of West Texas, population 189, is the county seat and only town in Borden County and has no bank, theater, railroad, hotel, doctor, or lawyer. Both the town and county were named for Gail Borden, the inventor of condensed milk and the founder of Borden Foods.