

**Passionate Worship©**

**Exodus 8:1-10; Luke 10:25-28**

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In the Presbyterian Church, we have two books that are important to us. They are not above the Holy Scriptures, of course. We hold the Bible up as our highest authority and guide.

But we also have two books that we call the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA). Part I ... *The Book of Confessions* ... are statements of faith that have been written and adopted throughout the years, and in response to different things that have happened in our world ... things Christians have wrestled with in regard to what we believe. The other book, Part II, is the *Book of Order*, which is our rules and procedures book.

Over the years, many young Presbyterians have had to memorize parts of the *Book of Confessions*, especially one called the “Westminster Confession” and particularly, the part known as the “Shorter Catechism” which is a series of questions and answers about our faith.

So ... this is a little test for all who have been a Presbyterian for a long time. (Although our youth were taught this question during Confirmation, so they should be able to answer it too).

Who can tell me what is the very first question and answer to the “Shorter Catechism” of our *Confession of Faith*?

Okay, I’ll ask the question. Let’s see who can answer it:

**Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?**

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.<sup>1</sup>

What is the chief end of man? What does that mean in contemporary words? We must remember that in the time these catechisms were written we used the word “men” to mean all people – male and female. So what is the chief end of *all people*? Or, to put it in even more contemporary language – What is our highest purpose for being here? Why did God create us?

And the answer is – so that we might glorify God and enjoy him forever.

The faithful believers that went before us – dedicated, passionate Presbyterians – believed that our main reason for existing is so we can worship and enjoy God forever.

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<sup>1</sup> Reprinted by permission from the *Book of Confessions*, ©1996 by the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Geneva Press,

Our Scriptures today indicate that, don't they? Jesus talks with the man who is an expert in the law, who wants to know what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks him what the Scriptures (the Law of Moses) say.

And the man quotes what is known to the Israelites as the *Shema* (which is a Hebrew word meaning "Hear" ... or "listen up!") I can hear the long horn, the shofar blowing, calling the people to attention and a rabbi declaring loudly: "*Shema, 'Y-srael ...*" "Listen! Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and all your strength." That is from Deuteronomy 6. It is known as the greatest commandment of all.

And Jesus added a second commandment to go with it: To love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus said there is no other commandment as important as these.

And we hear in Exodus, how the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt and God sends Moses to the Pharaoh. He tells Moses "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'this is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.'"

And, in fact, God was so determined, that he sent a plague of frogs to the Egyptians to make it clear that his people needed to be free in order to worship God.

The point is the Holy Bible makes it very clear that loving God with all of our being is of the utmost importance. And if we love with our complete self, then we will surely be passionate about worshipping God.

In our all-church study of the *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, we read that vital congregations practice passionate worship. But what is it about that word "passion" that we Presbyterians shy away from? Surely we are not so determined to live up to that old title of the "Frozen Chosen" to the point of giving up our passion for God.

Those faithful men and women who went before us – many of them were uninhibited with expressing their desire and passion for God. We hear the passionate longing from the psalmist as he writes, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My souls longs for, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord... for a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere." (Psalm 84:1-2, 10)

In our culture today, we tend to separate those God-given feelings, using them more in terms of our human relationships, yet those are the very gifts we were given first and foremost for the purpose of passionately loving, longing for, and desiring to be in communion with God. God gave us those feelings to be directed to him above all else!

Is there anyone you know who is more passionate than an adolescent? We laugh and say the hormones are raging and that is why they are as emotional as they are and as

passionate about life as they are. But can you imagine what it would be like if we allowed ourselves to not lose those feelings EVER when it comes to loving God with all our hearts, souls and strength?

In the book *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* by Andrew Root and Kendra Creasy Dean, they talk about our practices of worship being so important in our Christian growth, in our developing that very intimate relationship with our Creator.

“In worship,” Kendra Creasy Dean writes, “our lives become signs of *God’s* passion as we take part in holy practices, human actions that God uses to infuse creation with grace, wonder and love.” Our passionate action of worship and discipleship “is the container God fills with God’s very presence; the practice itself becomes the place to encounter God.”<sup>2</sup>

Robert Schnase, the author of our Five Practices study writes this: “to *worship* speaks of our devotion to God, the practices that support honor and love of God. *Passionate* describes an intense desire, an ardent spirit, strong feelings, and the sense of heightened importance. *Passionate* speaks of an emotional connection that goes beyond intellectual consent. It connotes eagerness, anticipation, expectancy, deep commitment, and belief.

Passionate worship means an extraordinary eagerness to offer our best in worship, honoring God with excellence and with unusual clarity about the purpose of connecting people to God.”<sup>3</sup> In passionate worship I am offering myself to God – all of me – my heart and soul and mind and strength.

The word “altar” comes from the Latin word “to burn up.” In the Old Testament we read of the people bringing burnt offerings to God. In the new covenant – the New Testament - that comes with God’s own passionate sacrifice to us – Jesus – we discover that God wants our hearts, burning with passion and love for him – that is our greatest sacrifice!

After all, God’s own love for us is pure passion as God willingly suffers for us at the cross. In fact, we call all that Jesus went through in that Holy Week before, and into his death – the *passion* of Christ. It was his great passionate love for us that caused him to be the sacrifice for forgiveness and grace and mercy.

In our adult Sunday School class – HPC 101 – we are using the worship bulletin as a tool for learning. If you look at it, you can see that worship is not just what we do as God’s people. Instead, our order of worship is more of a dialog – an interactive movement between God and us.

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Root and Kendra Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*, IVP Books, 2011, p. 224, 225

<sup>3</sup> Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, Abingdon Press, 2007, p. 37

We gather in this place, understanding that class and race and everything else that tends to separate us out in the world is dropped. In God's eyes, we gather as equals – all God's children.

In the Call to Worship, which is from God's Word – we hear the call to come and worship and we respond with songs of praise in our first hymn – a song that should be full of passionate singing to God.

We then come to God, knowing that we are sinners in need of forgiveness and, together, we confess our sin. But then, even though it is through a human voice, we hear from God's word that we are forgiven. And we respond with rejoicing as we sing "Hallelujah!" or another song of praise.

In our worship, God joins us and participates with us. God is here, right here among us and that presence deserves our highest praise and our most passionate giving of ourselves – loving God with all our hearts, all our souls and all our strength.

That is our chief end – our main purpose for being created. To glorify in worship and enjoy God forever. May we strive to worship God with the same kind of passion that God has for *us* and has demonstrated *to us* in his own Son, Jesus, our Savior, who has given us our very life so we can enjoy him ... forever! In that, we have personally come to know the answer to the question: How might I inherit eternal life.

Love God with all your hearts, all your soul and all your strength. And let it reach out to others forever and ever. Amen.

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