



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

September 2017 – *GOD COMMUNICATING HIS PRESENCE*

In one of his last books, *Reflections on the Psalms*, C.S. Lewis included a chapter titled “A Word About Praising.” He shares that, early in his Christian life, he found a stumbling block in the idea of God “demanding” praise, and explains what he would later come to understand. A brief excerpt¹ follows:

What do we mean when we say that a picture is “admirable”? We certainly don’t mean that it is admired (that’s as may be) for bad work is admired by thousands and good work may be ignored. Nor that it “deserves” admiration in the sense in which a candidate “deserves” a high mark from the examiners – i.e., that a human being will have suffered injustice if it is not awarded. The sense in which the picture “deserves” or “demands” admiration is rather this; that admiration is the correct, adequate or appropriate, response to it, that, if paid, admiration will not be “thrown away”, and that if we do not admire we shall be stupid, insensible, and great losers, we shall have missed something. In that way many objects both in Nature and in Art may be said to deserve, or merit, or demand, admiration. It was from this end, which will seem to some irreverent, that I found it best to approach the idea that God “demands” praise. He is that Object to admire which (or, if you like, to appreciate which) is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all. The incomplete and crippled lives of those who are tone deaf, have never been in love, never known true friendship, never cared for a good book, never enjoyed the feel of the morning air on their cheeks, never (I am one of these) enjoyed football, are faint images of it.



But, of course, this is not all. God does not only “demand” praise as the supremely beautiful and all-satisfying Object. He does apparently command it as lawgiver. The Jews were told to sacrifice. We are under an obligation to go to church. But this was a difficulty only because ... I did not see that it is in the process of being worshipped that God communicates His presence to men. It is not of course the only way. But for many people at many times the “fair beauty of the Lord” is revealed chiefly or only while they worship Him together. Even in Judaism the essence of the sacrifice was not really that men gave bulls and goats to God, but that by their so doing God gave Himself to men; in the central act of our own worship of course this is far clearer – there it is manifestly, even physically, God who gives and we who receive. The miserable idea that God should in any sense need, or crave for, our worship like a vain woman wanting compliments, or a vain author presenting his new books to people who never met or heard of him, is implicitly answered by the words, “If I be hungry I will not tell thee” [Psalm 50:12]. Even if such an absurd Deity could be conceived, He would hardly come to us, the lowest of rational creatures, to gratify His appetite. I don’t want my dog to bark approval of my books. Now that I come to think of it, there are some humans whose enthusiastically favorable criticism would not much gratify me.²

As Lewis points out, those who never come to know and praise God will have lost the greatest experience, and in the end, have lost all. For the Christian, being neglectful in our worship and praise can result in missing out on many of the experiences and blessings God offers to us in His love. Are there any changes you would like to make in how you worship and praise God?

“Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD!”

PSALM 117 (ESV)

¹ For another excerpt from “A Word About Praising”, see *Reflections*, May 2012, *God Invites Us to Enjoy Him*.

² C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), pp. 92-93.