

³When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." ⁴Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

⁸Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

⁹Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up ¹⁰and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. ¹¹But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Getting Together with God

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

2 Corinthians 13:14

Ever wonder why we do things in such a formal way in worship? Why do we whisper in church? Why do we stand up at certain times and sit down at others? Why do we do use the same rituals over and over? Why do we dress up and buy fancy expensive stuff to put in our church building? Why do we arrange the furniture in the sanctuary the way we do? Why do some people prefer to say the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds with all the *thees* and *thous* and *thys*? Why is there so much symbolism in the service? Perhaps you're



coming up with your own list of answers to these questions. And that's a good thing. But allow me to pull your internal discussion in one direction. Why do we do all these things in worship? Because of the *attributes* of God--or to put it another way, the *characteristics* of God. I specifically want to focus today on two attributes of God: God's transcendence and God's immanence. God showed both of these attributes to Moses and the Israelites in our Old Testament lesson. The ceremonies and sacrifices and services that God prescribed for the people back then were intended to remind the people both of God's transcendence and his immanence. He is the same transcendent and immanent God today and so we have designed our worship setting and service to remind us of these same attributes of God. The thing about this is: it can be a tricky thing to keep these two attributes of God in balance because they actually seem to be opposites!

Let me explain. God's transcendence is the fact that God is just so high above us. His glory and majesty transcend so far above us and we are so different from him. It is good for us to remember this about God. We are not on the same plane with him. He is God, we are not. To quote the prophet Habakkuk, "**let all the earth be silent before him**" (2:20).

God's immanence may appear to be the opposite. God is ever so near to us. He is all around us and desire to be intimately united with us. He puts himself on an even plane with us. He became a human being, just like us, and even calls himself our brother. God is immanent among us. But God is also transcendent above us.

I.

We catch glimpses of both of these attributes of God in this amazing ceremony and celebration with Moses and the Israelites. After bringing his people out of Egypt, God employed Moses to share with them the 10 Commandments and all the other rules and regulations for living under him. When the people agreed to follow all these commands, God made a covenant with them. Moses was the one to set this covenant up.

Remember what he did? It was a very symbolic ceremony. He built an altar and placed 12 stone pillars around the altar. The altar is symbolic of God's presence and each of the stone pillars represented one of the 12 tribes of Israel. With all due respect to this solemn ceremony, it almost

seems like the tea-party that a little girl might set up with her stuffed animals. Just like the little girl’s tea-party represents the kind of get-together grown-ups have, this covenantal ceremony represented was in essence a representation of God getting together with his chosen people. Are you already seeing one of God’s attributes? Yes, in his immanence, God has brought himself to be intimately among his people.

What happened next? Moses had some young men offer two kinds of sacrifices: burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Why two different kinds of sacrifices? Well, burnt offerings were completely consumed in the fire, which symbolized the worshipers complete dedication to God. But with the fellowship offering, part of the animal was eaten afterward.

Now, put yourself there. There were multiple animals and multiple sacrifices. Imagine what that must’ve looked like. There must have been a lot of blood! What attribute of God do you suppose all that killing and death and blood might allude to? Let’s see what Moses does with it all. He took all the blood and divided it up--one half he poured into bowl and the other he half sprinkled all over the altar he had built. What was God showing the people? That those animals should’ve been them. It should’ve been their throats cut. It should’ve been their blood poured out in the presence of God for all their own sins. As the book of Hebrews says, “**without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness**” (9:22). All that killing and death and blood would show the people how different they are from God, how far above them he really is, how much they owe him for their many sins. That half of blood should’ve belonged to the people and so it, in a way, represented them. It represented and took the place of their blood, as if they had actually died for their own sins.

But what about the other half of the blood? That was sprinkled all over the people. We might say this symbolized the new life that God gave the people. Since there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, God saw them covered in it and saw them as a new people forgiven by that blood. Does this covenant seem a bit similar to the agreement little boys used to make with each other when they became “blood brothers”? You know, the one where they’d both prick a finger till it bled, then rub them together, to swear allegiance to one another. It’s actually not the same. There’s no mixing of blood in God’s covenant here. Rather, it’s a

division of one blood. This not a two-sided covenant like that of becoming blood-brothers. This covenant only depended on one side: God’s side. God’s people didn’t do anything to make this covenant happen. It wasn’t *their* blood that was shed to forgive their sins. It wasn’t even the blood of the *animals* that forgave their sins. The animal sacrifices that day and every day after that served only as a reminder to the people of their sins. As the book of Hebrews says, “**those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁴ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins**” (10:3-4). The blood of the animals sacrificed that day and every day after that merely foreshadowed the blood of the true sacrificial Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. God forgave his people that day by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

II.

But the covenant made that day did become the foundation and model for much of the sacrificial worship that God’s people continued to follow. God’s people needed constant reminders of their sin until Jesus would finally come to put an end to all animal sacrifice by sacrificing himself. God’s people needed constant reminders of those two attributes of God: his transcendence and his immanence. In his transcendence, God was far above and far different than them. But in his immanence, God preemptively brought himself into an intimate relationship with them, reconciling himself to them, purely on the basis of Christ’s sacrifice.

But the celebration that day wasn’t over yet. The leftovers from the fellowship offering hadn’t been eaten yet. So Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel went up on the mountain to do just that. The amazing thing was that when they went up on the mountain, they saw the God of Israel with their own eyes. Interestingly enough, Moses uses the name for God that emphasizes his might and power and, you might say, his transcendence. This, not to mention the thing underneath God’s feet that Moses could barely describe as being like pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky. What exactly they saw as they looked at God, we don’t know. But we can certainly see a transcendent God in the form he took during this divine meeting. But notice, on the other hand, the fact that the almighty God showed himself to them at all. Look at the fact that he “did not raise his hand against them.” Look at the fact that they ate and

drank in God’s presence in a fellowship meal. The immanence of God is certainly seen in this one-of-a-kind Old Testament event. Yes, God is a God far above all people. But he is also a God who is very near and wants to have close fellowship with all people.

We’ve seen God’s transcendence and immanence in the ceremony and celebration that day, but what about in our worship? How do our rituals and practices become reminders of these attributes of God? Might we be recognizing God’s transcendence by the hushed atmosphere before the service begins. In the same turn, we recognize God’s immanence in the sharing of a friendly greeting or even by sharing a laugh with a fellow worshiper sitting nearby after the service? Do some choose to acknowledge God’s transcendence by dressing up for worship. Do some choose to recognize God’s immanence by coming to worship more casually dressed. Thinking about the standing, sitting, and kneeling in worship. How might those be reminders to us of God’s transcendence or immanence. How does the music speak to one or both attributes? How does the architecture of our building remind us of both: the lofty ceilings, the furnishings that symbolize God’s presence or Christ’s sacrifice? What about the semi-circular arrangement of the people around God’s altar? What about the beginning of today’s service? Did you notice something different about it? Some churches begin every service that way with the Pastor(s) not approaching the altar until after the confession and absolution of sins. This too is a reminder of God’s transcendence. It is intended to remind the worshipers that only by a repentant faith in Christ can we approach God.

Just as in the ceremony and setting of worship we try to keep both of these attributes of God in balance, so in the way we see our relationship with God we also seek to maintain a balance. Yes, God is our brother and our friend. But we do him a disservice if we only ever speak of him as our good ol’ buddy. Yes God is far above us and so unlike us in power and dominion and majesty. But we do him a disservice if he remains aloft and aloof and away from the intimate interworkings of our everyday lives.

Just like the Old Testament believers, we need reminders of God’s transcendence--that he is God and we are not; but also of his immanence--that he desires fellowship with us, on our level. And just like the Old

Testament believers, we need reminders of our sins--of our guilt before God, but also of God’s grace--of the once-for-all sacrifice that Jesus made for our sins.

Because there can is no forgiveness without shedding of blood. Israel looked ahead to the blood of Christ that one day would be shed for them and the world. We look back to blood that *has* been shed for us and for the world. Christ’s death poured out his blood on the altar called Calvary, so that we spiritually died with him there. His resurrection poured out his blood on you and me, so that we have been spiritually raised to a new life with him. In the shedding of Christ’s blood, there is forgiveness, full and free, forever.

But the final foreshadowing we have so far failed to mention is this: when, in his gracious immanence, God shared the fellowship meal with those 70+ representatives of Israel, he was foreshadowing the fellowship meal that Christ would institute for us to celebrate in his memory. Just as the Old Testament fellowship offering was meant to be shared among the people after the sacrifice, so we celebrate and partake of the true fellowship offering Christ made with his own body and blood every time we come together with God himself to eat and drink in the Lord’s Supper. In this meal we enjoy a Holy Communion with God.

What intimate fellowship God has with us! What gracious immanence on his part to come to be with us through the sacrifice of Christ! But how different he is from us. How holy and mighty, powerful and majestic! How perfect he is in all his attributes. He is the perfect God for sinful man. We celebrate God and the perfect attributes he has revealed to us about himself. We acknowledge them in our hour of worship as well as in our lives of worship. Through Christ we get together with God. Amen.

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—
to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.*

Revelation 1:5b-