

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

6/26/2011 Work with Worship/Work without Worship Romans 5:1-5

Last week, I dealt with Paul's objections to some Christians who declared that participation in worship was optional for Christians, because they were saved by the freely offered forgiving grace of God, not by good works that included worship.

Paul rejected their assertion outright. True, we are saved by grace alone. If you truly believe that, says Paul, you cannot help worshiping God out of pure gratitude.

Paul then points to the second reason for the importance of worship. Without participating in worship, faith will atrophy. Without worship, faith will become pallid. Without worship faith will dry up and eventually die.

Paul is blunt. Those who say that worship is optional for Christian faith are simply hiding their spiritual laziness behind the façade of appreciation for God's grace.

On the basis of Paul's emphasis on worship, I pointed out that JAUC might fall into the same trap those wrongheaded Christians had fallen into, if we are not mindful.

If we engage in committee work without worship, we are making the same mistake that those wrongheaded Christians made.

If we enjoy fellowship without worship, we are making the same mistake that those wrongheaded Christians made. If we emphasize church activities apart from worship, we are making the same mistake that those wrongheaded Christians made.

But we may say that minimizing the importance of worship is the logical conclusion of Paul's theology. After all, Paul insisted that only God's grace of forgiveness as a free gift would save us.

So what's wrong in thinking that worship may be optional for Christian life?

Here is the answer. It is true that God's forgiving grace is freely offered. It is offered unconditionally without merit. But it bears fruit in us only when we accept it.

Here an analogy may be helpful. Take the air, the oxygen for example. It is always and equally available for everyone. We do nothing to merit it, nothing to obtain it. We depend on it totally and absolutely.

But the air cannot do anything unless we breathe it. Only when we breathe it, it empowers us to live.

The freely offered forgiving grace of God works the same way. God's grace bears fruit only when we accept it and live it. It is here that the importance of worship becomes clear.

Praise, prayer, reading and hearing of the word and communing with one another are our acts of accepting God's freely offered forgiving grace.

Worship is our act of breathing the air so to speak. In worship we accept God's grace into our souls. In worship our faith becomes a life-style commitment to God.

Let me repeat. Worship is our saying to God, "Thank you for your freely offered grace. We accept it gratefully. We cherish it passionately. We hunger for it every moment."

So Paul is right. God's freely offered grace, when accepted, bears fruit in us as genuine fortitude in the midst of suffering, love in the midst of lovelessness, and hope in the midst of hopelessness.

God is gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

Thanks be to God.