

Worship

*Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing. Psalm 100.1, 2*

Theology of Worship

What is worship?

“If God didn’t show up on Sunday morning, would anyone know the difference?”

Recently, there has been a renewed focus on worship—what it is and how it is to be done. The church that does not operate under a biblical theology of worship is in danger of both failing to give God glory and failing to offer worship that is pleasing to Him. Worship is as misunderstood a doctrine as any other within the church. Contrary to popular belief, worship does not begin and end with the singing portion of our church services. Worship is also not limited to only bowing in reverence before God. To begin with, worship is only determined by God Himself, and not everything we do is acceptable to God as worship just because we are sincere or it makes us feel good.

[Hebrews 12.28](#) tells us that we must “serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (NKJV). The Greek word translated “serve” here is a form of the word “worship” and is used 21 times in the New Testament in the contexts of service and worship. Another form of the word “worship” is the Greek word *therapeuo*—from which we get the English word “therapy”—and this is most often seen translated “heal” in reference to the healing of others. In the New Testament, this word is seen in every case of Jesus’ healings.

Other Greek words translated “worship” are *prokneuo* meaning “paying homage” ([1 Corinthians 14:25](#)), *sebazomai*, meaning “to render religious honor” ([Romans 1:25](#)), and *sebomai* meaning “to revere or adore” ([Acts 16:14](#)). We see this same word used by Jesus to describe the vain, hypocritical worship of God ([Matthew 15:9](#)), leading us to the conclusion that not all “worship” is acceptable to God.

But true biblical worship is to be first and foremost reverent ([Hebrews 12:28](#)). This means it is to be done with the understanding of who it is being worshiped. God is holy, just, righteous, perfect, powerful, loving, wrathful etc. Those who wish to worship biblically must worship God as He is revealed in Scripture.

Second, we must worship in truth ([John 4:24](#)). This means that our worship needs to line up according to the truths in Scripture. Adding our own version of worship and “expressing ourselves” is not true worship if it is not in accord with the Word of God. Personal expressions of worship are not indicated anywhere in Scripture and can lead to activities that are not God-honoring.

Third, true worship is worship in Spirit. Because God is Spirit, true worship is a pure, holy, spiritual worship, the offering of the soul and the homage of the heart rather than merely that of the lips.

Finally, true worship will always produce a change in the heart of the worshipper, causing a greater desire to love and obey the God we worship. If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it isn't worship. Unless we come out of it with a greater commitment to obedience, it isn't worship. Jesus said those who love Him will keep His commandments. If we say we love and worship Him, but do not obey Him, our worship is worthless.

True biblical worship of the one true and living God is to be a lifestyle, not a moment in time ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#)). Just as they will be in eternity, our lives now are to be lives of total worship of God. When we eat, sleep, work, serve, and live from sunup to sundown, all that we do is to be in a spirit of worship of God. We are not to offer temporary, experience-oriented worship on Sunday, and then lead a secular life the rest of the week. True worship is offered to God from the depths of our inner being in praise and prayer, in song, in giving, and in living, but always based upon His revealed truth.

Worship Practices

Humans are instinctively worshipping creatures. The psalmist best expressed this when he wrote, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God" ([Psalm 42:1](#)). As far back as the time of Cicero of the first century B.C., it was observed that religion, regardless of its form, was a universal trait of man. Seeing that men are going to worship something or someone, we must ask what is worship, whom and how shall we worship? What constitutes a biblical worship service, and, most importantly, will we be "true worshipers" ([John 4:23](#)) or false worshipers? True worship involves a deep sense of religious awe that expresses itself in acts of devotion and service. The English word "worship" literally means "worth-ship," denoting that our devotion is directed toward a being or object deemed worthy of devotion.

Christ commanded that true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth ([John 4:24](#)). The apostle Paul explained that we worship by the Spirit of God ([Philippians 3:3](#)), meaning that true worship comes only from those who have been saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit living in their hearts. Worshiping in spirit also means with the proper heart attitude, not simply adhering to rites and rituals. To worship in truth means worshipping according to what God has revealed about Himself in Scripture. In order for our worship to truly be biblical, it must not go beyond that which is authorized by the Bible ([Leviticus 10:1](#); [1 Corinthians 4:6](#)), abiding within the doctrine of Christ ([2 John 9](#); see also [Deuteronomy 4:12](#), [12:32](#); [Revelation 22:18-19](#)). True worship involves only the instructions given in the Bible and nothing else—not a Book of Confessions, Rules of Order, or other man made books of instructions or guidance.

The first-century church engaged in several devotional acts in their worship services, from which we can determine what makes up a truly biblical worship service. The communion

supper was observed ([Acts 20:7](#)), prayers were offered up ([1 Corinthians 14:15-16](#)), songs were sung to the glory of God ([Ephesians 5:19](#)), a collection was taken ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#)), the Scriptures were read ([Colossians 4:16](#)), and the Word of God was proclaimed ([Acts 20:7](#)).

First, the communion supper commemorates Jesus' death during our worship as we memorialize His resurrection until He returns again ([1 Corinthians 11:25-26](#)).

As with the Lord's Supper, prayer must also conform to the divine pattern taught in the Scriptures. Our prayers should be directed only to God ([Nehemiah 4:9](#); [Matthew 6:9](#)) We should never pray to any human, living or dead, or any other supposed god. We are not authorized to use devices such as rosary beads or Buddhist "prayer wheels" that supposedly send written requests into the far regions of the universe. Most importantly, our prayers must be in harmony with the will of God.

Third, we are authorized to sing. The apostle Paul commands us to "speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" ([Ephesians 5:19-20](#)). Singing to the Lord and to one another conveys truth set to music as a form of teaching ([Colossians 3:16](#)), singing with both the spirit and the mind in order to produce understanding on the part of those involved ([1 Corinthians 14:15-16](#)).

Part of true biblical worship is giving of our tithes and offering on the first day of the week, as Paul instructed the Corinthian church: "Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made" ([1 Corinthians 16:1-2](#)). Our regular giving for the support of the Lord's work is a serious responsibility and is part of true biblical worship. Our giving should be viewed as a thrilling blessing, not as a burdensome matter for grumbling ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)). Additionally, it must be stressed that giving is the only authorized method for financing the work of the church of Jesus Christ. We are not authorized to operate businesses, conduct bingo parties, hold pay-at-the-door concerts, etc. The church of Christ is not meant to be a commercial enterprise ([Matthew 21:12-13](#)).

Finally, preaching and teaching are major ingredients of true worship. Our teaching must be based on the Scriptures alone, the only means of equipping believers for life and godliness ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)). The godly preacher or teacher will teach only from the Word and rely on the Spirit of God do His work in the minds and hearts of his listeners. As Paul reminded Timothy, "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)). A church gathering that does not include the Word of God as a major component is not a true biblical worship service.

Without question, God, in His divine wisdom, has provided the perfect model of true biblical worship so that we can worship in a manner pleasing to Him. As we follow the course of true worship, let us worship God with great passion. We must not convey to the world the impression that the worship of our God is a boring, lifeless ritual. We have been redeemed from

sin. Let us therefore praise our Creator as His children who are grateful for His bountiful blessings. “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” ([Hebrews 12:28-29](#)).

Baptism and Communion

Baptism illustrates a believer’s identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. [Romans 6:3-4](#) declares, “Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” The action of being immersed in the water illustrates dying and being buried with Christ. The action of coming out of the water pictures Christ’s resurrection.

Baptism – quantity of water does not matter; focus on God’s grace; reenactment; use available resources

Communion – focus on same things: reenactment, use available resources, grace of God

Leading Worship

Because the term “worship leader” means so many different things to so many people, it is always best to see what Scripture has to say about the role of worship and those who lead corporate worship. True worship, whether corporate or individual, has several major components, as described in [Romans 12:1-2](#). First, the motivation to worship is “the mercies of God” which embodies all He has given us, none of which we deserve. Second, the manner of worship is the presentation of our bodies, including our hearts, minds, hands, thoughts, and attitudes to God. Third, our worship involves renewing our minds through the Word of God. To know the truth, to believe the truth, to hold convictions about the truth, and to love the truth will naturally result in true spiritual worship. Fourth, true worship is God-centered, not man-centered. The purpose of worship is not to produce an emotional experience, but to acknowledge God’s singular worthiness to be worshipped. So the first duty and responsibility of those who desire to lead others in worship must be to first understand the nature of worship itself.

Although the New Testament does not name “worship leader” as one of Christ’s gifts for the edification of the church ([Ephesians 4:11-12](#)), worship leaders are common in the modern church. If the worship leader is to lead, he must lead by example, and his life, therefore, must exemplify that of the true worshiper. As with all leaders in the body of Christ, the worship leader must first focus on spiritual leadership. He must be the first to bow before God in humility and obedience. Just as the high priest had to sacrifice for his own sins first, so must the worship leader ensure he has scraped away the hardness from his heart and loosened the stiffness of his neck before he can begin to lead others. It is the primary duty of a worship leader, therefore, to be aligned with God’s will and to be humble before the great and awesome God. He must lead in humility and genuine concern for those under his care.

Because worship leader is not a biblical office for the church, his role is somewhat indistinct. Most worship leaders are musicians of some kind, whether vocal or instrumental, and their

primary role is to lead the other musicians/singers that are involved in the service. It is the responsibility of the worship leader to ensure that it is not the music, nor the instruments, nor the presentation, nor the voices which are the focus of the worship service. Worship is bowing humbly before God and exalting Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. The responsibility of the worship leader is to become less, that Jesus Christ can become more. And when all of this is done, when hearts are humble before Him, His people are ready to receive, and be changed by, the focal point of the worship service—His glorious and living Word.

The Importance of Music

Historically, songs and music have always been an important part of the idea of worship. Perhaps the reason for this is the ease with which music provides expression for worship. The ability to use songs for worship was recognized early in the history of the Christian faith. It was the apostle Paul who encouraged the Ephesians as well as the Colossians to use hymns, psalms and spiritual songs as a way to express the gratitude within their hearts. Throughout the centuries, music has continued to be used in worship services for that very purpose. The various moods of the congregation can be expressed through different songs including prayer, praise, adoration and reverence. Perhaps even more importantly, songs provide a way for worshippers to confess to God as well as respond to His glory.

Private Worship

A private relationship of worshiping God is the greatest essential element of spiritual fitness. If your worship is right in your private relationship with God, then when He sets you free, you will be ready. It is in the unseen life, which only God sees, that you can become perfectly fit. God's training ground, where the missionary weapons are found, is the hidden, personal, worshiping life of the saint.

Worship is a covenant and call from our Lord to come before Him and meet with Him with reverence, gladness, and joy. It is a call to know Him intimately and express appreciation to Him with praise and thanksgiving, doing so with passion, sincerity, conviction, and in reverent fear and trembling. Worship is the aptitude, attitude, and practice of expressing the desire to know our Lord and Savior further, and being grateful for who he is and what He has done for us. Worship is the giving of our best to Him. And, we do this because we are His; we give Him our heart that is already His. He has given His best to us already; in addition, we are enveloped into His eternal love and care for pure and useful purposes.

Aspects of True Worship

*At the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Philippians 2:10-11***

First, worship is appreciation and our identification, of who Christ is in our lives. He first reaches out to us, and because of our gratitude, we are to love Him back. We are to respond to Christ's claim upon our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can recognize God's revelation to us. We can see who our Redeemer is, what He has done for us, and what He

requires of us.

Second, worship is a response to God's revelation, because God makes known His love to us. Christ reveals Himself to us in the Word and in His character. God revealed Himself to the Patriarchs, and then to Moses, and gave us a pattern for worship. He reveals Himself in the *still small voice* of the Holy Spirit, and in the quiet assurance that He is there with us! In John 20 we find the story of Thomas – who had not been with the rest of the disciples when the resurrected Jesus appeared. When Jesus does appear to Thomas – he cries out in an act of worship:

My Lord and my God. John 20:28 (NKJV)

In Revelation 4.8 we are told that four creatures around the throne of God worship day and night saying:

*Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!*

God is always to be the center of our worship. To worship Him is to ascribe the proper worth to God – to magnify His holiness – to magnify His worthiness. He is worthy of all the worth and honor we can give Him and infinitely more. The more we focus on God, the more we understand and appreciate how worthy He is. But something else happens in worship that is rarely talked about. The closer I come to a Holy God in worship – the more I come to realize my own un-holiness. To be exposed to Holy God should bring about a response in me that would have me examine my own life and my state of affairs. You see it over and over again in Scripture: God is worshiped and the worshiper cries out because his spiritual state is exposed. This is what happened in Isaiah 6. He cries out:

*Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts. Isaiah 6.5*

To walk into the presence of God is a life altering event. God is worshiped – man is made transparent. We are not worshiping if we are not focusing on God and responding to Him. You may be in a church building – singing songs – reading scripture – listening to a sermon – but without focusing on God and responding to Him – you are not worshiping. You may be just going through the motions.

Third, worship is a relationship, because God seeks us, then abides with us. Thus, in worship, we are praising and speaking to the audience, and that audience is God. Then, we are to listen as He speaks to us through His Word. Christian worship is a conversation with our God through His Holy Spirit. It is not a performance or a show; we are not seeking to entertain or promote ourselves, but to make known Christ, crucified. Worship is also an intimate and personal encounter with the Creator of the universe who first loved us. We are to make known our adoration, gratitude, and our needs and through this, discover His Will for our lives--to know Him, and make Him known.

Fourth, worship is reverence. We need to know the seriousness and awesomeness of God. We are to fear Him as in Proverbs 3:5. He may be our best friend, and we can talk to Him in that way, but He is first, and foremost the King and Creator of all. He is to be placed first, and is not to be an after thought, especially in church. God does indeed desire that we admit our spiritual need for Jesus Christ, so we can put away pride and arrogance, and be surrendered and poured out to Him (Galatians 2:20f; Philippians 3:10). This reverence is the essential duty of all Christians, and is the proof of the working of the Holy Spirit within us. The presence of the Holy Spirit will cause us to give glory to Jesus Christ.

Fifth, worship is a cleansing of sin. We are to acknowledge our sin, and turn from it. Then, we will see our churches revitalized and sanctified. Then, we can have an impact in the community and world. We have to be the people of God to do the work of God. When we become emptied of all self-concern, pride, and arrogance, God will enter in with more power. It is our petty political struggles, gossip, slander, pride, self-delusions, and refusal to acknowledge Christ as Lord over all that keeps God from working in our lives. We have to realize the Christian life is about seeking God's direction of holiness and service.

Sixth, worship will lead to renewal. The point of the Christian life is to know Christ, to be like Christ. Thus, the longer we are in surrendered worship and prayer, the deeper in the walk with Christ we become; through the power of the Spirit, renewal will come.

Our understanding of what a church worship service is must reflect the precepts of Scripture. This includes our influence, and the format of our worship services. Our influence must not be just trends or data from surveys. It must be from His Word. We can mix in new ideas, such as songs, prayers, ways of delving the sermon, but not the fundamentals; nothing we do in *doing church* can contradict God's Word.

Worship will be the central aspect of Heaven. (Revelation 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-17; 11:15-18; 15:2-4; 19:1-10) Thus, it must be the central aspect of doing church, and of each Christian's life (Colossians 3:16-17).

Worship must be taken seriously. Worship must be done with pure hands and heart (Psalm 24:4).

Worship is – Conducted in Spirit and in Truth

The most profound passage on the subject of worship is found in John 4:23-24 chapter four.

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24 (NASV)

Before you can worship in spirit and in truth you must have within you the One whose name is the "Spirit of Truth" – the Holy Spirit. He lives only within those who have come to Christ in

repentance and in faith. Without Him – true worship will not happen. To worship God in spirit is to worship from the inside out. That means that there must be an attitude of sincere worship – for there to be true worship. No matter how spiritual the song you are singing – no matter how profound the prayer you are praying – if it is not sincere – it is not worship – it’s hypocrisy.

When the scripture talks about worshipping in truth – it is talking about the truth as revealed through the Bible. There are many attributes of God revealed in the scripture. We may like the fact that the scripture talks about a God who is loving and kind – but the scripture also talks about a God who will come again to judge the living and dead – and that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. God is a jealous God and He does not allow worship to be given to any other god. (Exodus 20:5) Just because we may not like that fact – gives us no right to ignore it. He must be worshiped in spirit and in truth for it to be true worship.

Worship is Expected Both Publicly and Privately

Believers are expected to participate regularly in public worship. In Hebrews chapter ten we find:

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. **Hebrews 10.23-25***

Please notice the words “assembling together”. This means that Christians are to gather together with other believers for the express purpose of worship. Christianity is not an isolationist religion. There are to be no “Lone Ranger” Christians. (Besides even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.)

The New Testament describes the Church as a “body”, a “building”, and a “family”. Each one of these terms – speaks of the relationship between the individual units and that of the whole. We are individually Christian, but collectively we are Christian too.

The author of Hebrews even gives us the reason that we are to assemble together – look at the passage from Hebrews again. We assemble together to – “to stimulate one another to love and good deeds”. Our assembling together is an act of encouragement to other believers. We should always seek ways to encourage one another and habitually worshipping together should be one of those ways.

On the other hand, public worship alone will not satisfy our need to meet God in those quiet places. *He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. (Luke 5.16)*

We find in the scriptures that Jesus faithfully participated in public worship but He also faithfully participated in private worship as well. Matthew Henry the familiar Puritan commentator has said, “Public worship will not excuse us from secret worship.” We must worship God with other believers and in private as well. That was the habit of Jesus and it should be our habit as well.

Worship is a Discipline to be Learned and Practiced

Jesus instructed us: *You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve. (Mark 4.10)*

To worship the Lord our God throughout our lifetimes requires discipline. Without discipline, our worship of God will be inconsistent at best. The book of Hebrews has already told us that we are to consistently “assemble together” so that we can “stimulate one another to love and good deeds”. Forming “Holy Habits” takes consistency – which takes discipline.

Here again we must caution, worship is focusing and responding to God. My footprints can lead me to the habit of worship, but my heartbeats must lead me to a relationship with God.

Worship of God is an End in Itself

There is no higher goal than to focus on God and respond to God. To reach that goal to reach for Godliness. The more truly we worship God, the more we become like Him. Godliness without the worship of God is impossible. It is a true statement. People become what they focus on. We emulate what we think about. Paul said it this way: *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12.2)*

Focusing on the world more than on the God makes me more worldly than Godly. But if I would be more Godly, I must focus on God. Godliness requires focused thinking. I must “be transformed by the renewing of my mind”. I must “discipline myself for the purpose of godliness.”

Worship must walk hand in hand with discipleship, or it will be incomplete. Just as a tree will reproduce after its own kind, discipleship that fails in teaching and modeling biblical worship will reproduce a lifestyle that is lacking in the most basic and essential elements toward an intimate relationship with Christ.

Worship Planning Ideas

Getting all avenues (music, liturgy, etc.) in line with the sermon topics

“What is your goal today?”

Series preaching

Multiple weeks on the same topic

Examples

Use resources

Biblegateway.com and other websites

Concepts of Music in Worship

- ❖ **Music is only one form of worship**
 - Praying
 - Obedience
 - Reading the Bible
- ❖ **Music can be a source of conflict**
 - Style of music
 - Which songs should be sung?
 - How fast or slow should certain songs be?
- ❖ **Different ways to present musical worship to God**
 - Singing
 - Choir
 - Worship Team
 - Congregational singing
 - Playing instruments
 - Playing Spirit-flowing music
 - During quiet times of prayer
 - During a poignant word being shared
 - During setting changes
- ❖ **Why is music so important to worship?**
 - God commands it
 - *Eph 5:19*
 - *Col 3:16*
 - *James 5:13*
 - Music allows us to worship God in unity
 - Music has many roles
 - Helps us pray
 - Teaches us
 - Inspires us
 - Unifies us
 - Excites us
 - Humbles us
 - Invites us
 - Encourages us
 - Gives us a channel thru which to communicate with God
- ❖ **Music is an offering**
 - “Sacrifice of Praise”
 - We do not always feel like praising the Lord

- We may not be comfortable with singing praises out loud
- Music comes straight from our hearts to God
 - Lifting our hands to him
 - Dancing
 - Looking up to Him when we sing and play instruments
 - Giving back to God a portion of what He has given us