

Philosophy of Worship

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Definition of Worship

“Worship is communion with God in which He reveals Himself through word and deed, and His people respond with heart and mind, glorifying Him in attitude and act.” (By Dr. Gene Rivard, 2002; based on a definition by Bruce Leafblad)

As we unpack this definition we first see that worship is communion with God. This relationship is what God desires for us. In sin we were separated from God and given to death, but through Christ’s death and resurrection we are given eternal life. And Jesus says, “this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). God desires us to be close to Him. This is the gospel and is central to our worship, as without it, we cannot worship God, as he desires.

Next, we see a key component of worship, revelation and response. God has revealed himself in word and deed. We have seen this in His general revelation and His specific revelation. Romans 1:20 says that, “God’s invisible qualities” are clearly seen in His creation. We also have the Bible, which is, “God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). God, in revealing Himself to us, has initiated worship. It is important that our worship rehearses God’s revelation and keep place for God to speak and be revealed to us.

After God’s revelation, His people must respond. We respond both in heart and mind as well as in our attitudes and actions. Jesus said the greatest command is, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:38). Like a relationship with any loved one, our worship should involve emotions. However, we also do not neglect the minds that God gave us. Colossians 3 tells us that as we sing with gratitude to God we must also, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...”(16). It is a mistake if worship becomes entirely emotionally based. It will be in danger of becoming uprooted from the truth that God has revealed.

Lastly, worship is both a lifestyle and an event and so, it is important that we understand worship to be evident in both our attitudes and our actions. In regard to worship in act, we will look at two words for worship found in the Bible. One Hebrew word for worship is “Abad” which means to “work” or “serve”. A Greek word,

“proskuneo” means to “kiss toward in reverence”, or to “fall on one’s knees” or “prostrate one’s self”. Both these words describe two different ways in which we worship God in act. However, underneath these actions, we must have an attitude of worship. As Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” It is this attitude of worship that lets the carpenter swinging his hammer worship as he uses the gifts that God gave him (Abad), and the same goes for the person who kneels in prayer (proskeneo) during a church service, out of reverence for God.

Greek and Hebrew Words for “Worship”

Take some time to look up each scripture below, look up the Hebrew or Greek word and read the description. Then read some of the other verses where this word is found in order to get a full idea of how this word is used in the Bible. You may use Bible Study Tools at Crosswalk.com to do this study. Use either the KJV or NASB and click on “Strong’s Numbers”.

Old Testament:

“Worship” as in Genesis 22:5 schachah

“Worship” as in Exodus 3:12 abad

“Praise” as in Genesis 29:35 yadah

“Fear” as in Genesis 20:11 yirah

“Bless” as in Psalm 16:7 barak

New Testament:

“Worship” as in Matthew 2:2 proskuneo

“Worship” as in Matthew 4:10 latreuo

1. *What insights about worship have you gained through doing this study?*
2. *How could knowledge of these words broaden your understanding of Biblical worship?*
3. *Has this study changed or enhanced your personal approach to worship in any way?*

John 4 - Worship in Spirit and Truth

God is jealous for us. As we seek to give Him the worship that he requires, it needs to be abundantly clear that He alone is the object of our worship. Jesus said that, “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth,” (John 4:23) and part of worshiping in truth is worshiping the true God. Along with that, we must also worship God as he truly is and not as we think Him to be. A.W. Tozer said that, “Wrong ideas about God are not only the fountain from which the polluted waters of idolatry flow; they are themselves idolatrous” (4). When we imagine God to be something that he is not then we are creating for ourselves an idol. God in reality, and as He has revealed Himself to us, is far above our understanding. He is Holy, the creator of everything and above it all. Furthermore, this lofty God is a Trinity and we must worship Him as such.

If we are to worship the Father as He is then we must first know Him. God’s word makes it clear to us that the only way to know God is through His son, Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” It is through Jesus and His blood that we are brought close to worship the Father.

Jesus said we must worship in “Spirit and in truth.” Part of what it means to worship in Spirit is to worship through the Holy Spirit. Phil 3 says, “we worship by the Spirit of God” (3). Also, Romans 8 tells us that the Holy Spirit, “helps us in our weakness” and “intercedes for us” in prayer (26). Matthew Henry, in his commentary on John 4 says that in our worship, “We must depend upon God’s Spirit for strength and assistance, laying our souls under his influences and operations” (Matthew Henry). Furthermore, part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the Father and Glorify the Son (John 14:13-15). Certainly the Holy Spirit is pivotal in worship and He helps us to worship properly.

Personal Worship & Corporate Worship

It is essential that one know God and be in relationship with Him. This is where personal worship meets corporate worship. We each need to make sure we are growing in love with God in heart and mind as well as worshiping Him in our attitudes and actions. Then our corporate worship service is an event that flows out of our personal worship. Corporate worship is a group of believers gathering to worship together. This is certainly highly valued in Scripture. Hebrews 10 tells us to “not give up meeting together” and that we should “encourage one another” (25). It is notable to mention that our corporate worship should be just that, and not only a group of persons each having a separate worship experience (Rivard). We are all children of God and called to love each other, as we worship together it is a sweet demonstration of this.

Question for discussion:

What about non-believers who attend our services?

Methods of Worship and Worship Activities

After all this, there remain two main essential elements to the method of worship, which we have touched on: revelation and response. These are absolutely fundamental since worship is communion with God. This communing with God, as in any dialog, is based on revelation and response. It is especially key that corporate worship have revelation and response, as this is what can separate a corporate worship service from any ordinary corporate gathering. If this dialog with God does not occur then we did not have a worship event. These two elements are seen in the early church as their services were based upon two main parts, the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist (Webber, 54-55). The word is rehearsing the revelation of God and the taking of the Eucharist is an act of response by God's people.

The Psalms are full of Biblical examples of worship activities. One could write books on this subject but a few prominent activities of worship include: praising, rejoicing, listening, proclaiming, singing, weeping, and remembering etc. These activities are, of course, responses to the revelation of God. For example, in a corporate worship service we may be celebrating the revelation of God's salvation, this would cause us to rejoice and praise. In another such service we may be encouraged to think about the judgment of God on sin, and we may respond with weeping and repentance over our own sin. There are many ways in which we can act out our response to God in worship and we should encourage and allow acts of response to take place as we meet with God.

Do a Psalm study. List the different worship activities you see.

Roles in Worship

During corporate worship, everyone who is a believer should participate in offering the worship that God desires. However, people in attendance certainly play different roles. Generally there are two roles that are present. First, there is the role of the worship leaders, and second the role of the congregation. The worship leaders include all those involved in serving and leading during the church service: the pastor, musicians, ushers, sound tech, etc. Some of these leaders are more involved than others, but they all do their part. The job of the worship leaders is to facilitate worship. This means that they plan and coordinate the activities of the service and invite the congregation to take part. The leaders then demonstrate and lead corporate responses of worship. Since response is based on God's revelation, the worship leaders are often responsible for being the spokesperson for the revelation of God, or for calling everyone's attention to God's revelation. It is also important that the worship leaders know, love, and work alongside the people they serve. They shouldn't only be in charge of facilitating the corporate worship but also be striving to foster a church that worships in their own personal lives as well. This may be done in varying degrees according to the particular position. But, the worship pastor, for example, should be involved in some form of teaching, and every leader should be exemplifying personal worship in his or her own lives. The job of the congregation is to come prepared to worship and then they actively take part in the service as everyone responds together to God.

For the worship leaders there are important things to consider when planning a worship service. Not only do they want to be sure they facilitate true worship, but they should be in tune with God, and consider what God wants to teach His people and what the church needs to learn. In considering these things, worship leaders will be able to plan and execute a worship service that has proper revelation. They will also be able to choose fitting ways to best lead the people in response to God's revelation. Since people are very different and come from different backgrounds and traditions the style of response should be considered. The worship leaders need to be able to evaluate the content of different traditions and styles and assess whether they are Scriptural and truly beneficial to worship. Furthermore, the leaders need to be able to appreciate different worship styles and see the value in them if they are indeed valuable.

Worship Instincts

Different styles and traditions of worship seem to stem from different worship instincts that we each have. These instincts are different ways in which people find themselves best connecting with God. Gordon MacDonald has identified 6 of these, they are: aesthetic, experiential, activist, contemplative, student and relational. Worship instincts are a separate study all together, but we can take some time to briefly expound on two of them. For example, the aesthetic person will feel most connected with God when they are in a beautiful environment. A person with an aesthetic instinct will pay special attention to the décor of a room or the symbolism and art used. The student, to give one more example, connects best with God through intellectual pursuit; this person really comes alive during Bible study or the sermon time of a worship service. Many quarrels about worship can come from not having an appreciation or understanding of the different ways people tend to connect with God. One person may think that their worship instinct is the way we all ought to offer worship, and this can make a person with another instinct feel like there is something wrong with them. With that said, it is important to note that we shouldn't make it the goal to make everyone happy in our worship services. That is not the point; the point is to worship God. However, it is very important that we include all kinds of response for all kinds of people and realize that God does not favor one instinct above another. What God requires is worship in spirit and truth, as long as we are offering that, any spiritual instinct is legitimate.

See hand out: "The Leading Spiritual Instincts of the Soul"

Why Music?

The last thing we will look at is the music ministry and what should be considered regarding it. Music has been used in worship all throughout the Bible and continues to be an important part of our worship services today. Music is powerful and stirring; it is a wonderful way for a congregation to respond in unison to God in worship. Robert E. Webber even says that music, “elicits from deep within a person the sense of awe and mystery that accompanies a meeting with God” (195). Music is a fitting tool to use in our worship services and as Christians we should, as in any area, strive for excellence in our musicianship. Psalm 66:3 says to, “play skillfully” and Psalm 66:2 says to, “make his praise glorious”. Our God is magnificent and worthy of outstanding celebration. Each congregation should offer the best that it can musically to the worship. The musicians on the worship team should be practicing and studying to perfect their craft more and more. As far as the style of music used in a worship service, it should depend on the people in the service. Worship leaders need to do their best to speak the language of the people they minister to and whenever possible, the congregation should be led to respond stylistically in their own musical language. This issue should be treated no differently than the worship instincts and different traditions. However, in the end, music style quarrels fade as we learn to worship in the way God requires. We should use music and we should use good music whatever style we choose. Yet, in doing so it is so very important to remember that music is just a tool to worship. We should use the tool of music with excellence but it can never in itself overshadow true worship.

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