

## SHARED WORSHIP – Part 1

### Introduction

Today, I want to draw your attention to the topic of “worship”. Worship is what Christians do every day and all day. In fact everybody worships every day. It just depends on who or what you worship. Worship is bigger than Sunday morning between 10:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. However that is the topic that I’m addressing. I want us to be considering our corporate – our communal or what I’m calling: our shared worship.

The most basic definition of worship is “what you give value to.” If you were a stranger observing our shared worship, what would stand out to you as “what we all value together”? That’s what we will be evaluating and seeking God’s mind on.

Someone might ask, “Why break away from the Gospel of John to this topic?” Well there are a couple answers to that question:

1. First, I’m doing this because I promised to do this. Last year we took some steps to engage with our music teams on the topic of gathered worship. We got together and talked about what we do and how we are doing. We talked about you, too. Shared worship involves you and in fact it involves you mostly; and
2. The second reason why I’m engaging this now, is that I think we need to stop and ask, “what are we doing”; “why are we doing it”; and “where do we need to be corrected” – “where do we need to improve”?

There is an ever-present danger that our shared worship can become casual, mundane, and mechanical. There is an ever-present danger that we can lose sight of the “awe” of God and the magnitude of His holiness and glory. Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah when he said, “*This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*” (Matthew 15:8, ESV). That’s not where we want to be.

I hope to speak on this topic over 3 Sundays. Today I want to consider what we might call the “bedrock” of corporate worship. Next Sunday I want to remind us how holy and transcendent our God is; followed by the last Sunday and remind us, “What a friend we have in Jesus.” On March 31<sup>st</sup> during the Sunday School time, I will conduct a Q&A on this topic to try to answer some of the questions that will come out of this. But let me start here: There are some things that corporate worship is NOT. It is not:

- a. A town hall meeting. It is not place to come and go as you want. It is not a place to bounce ideas around. Gathered worship is by summons of the King. It is a time to meet with the Holy of holies. We come at His invitation, under His instructions.

- b. Optional. The question is never should we go. The question is always, what reason on earth is more important than ignore the summons of the sovereign of the universe? *“And let us . . . not neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some . . .”* (Hebrews 10:24–25, ESV).
- c. A football game or a concert. It is NOT a spectator sport.

## WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF WORSHIP?

This is not an easy question. To scan writers and preachers you might get some really good definitions. Our music teams are going through a teaching series by a worship leader by the name of Carl Cartee. He defines worship as the “mind's attention and the heart's affection ... EXPRESSED, to the living God.” I don't think there's a better definition. I would just tweak it this way:

Worship is: “Our minds attention and our heart's affection, EXPRESSED, to the living God in response to the glory of God in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Worship is not only an expression. It is a response to a revelation.”

God invites us to worship in this way, not that He needs it, but we are blessed by it. Notice what happens when we worship God in this way: *“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV).

As we behold the glory of God in Christ, we are transformed. Notice the phrase “unveiled face”. We join with other believers in corporate worship with “unveiled faces”. What does that mean? Contextually, it means we can see Christ. It implies that we have been born-again, the Spirit of God has given us new life, and we are filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So a little child asks, *“Daddy, why do you go to Church?”* ***A significant part of the answer is: “I go to Church because the Holy Spirit in me wants to reveal Jesus and the Gospel to me and as I give my mind's attention and heart's affection to Him, He makes me more like Jesus.”***

## HOW DO WE WORSHIP?

One of the most important biblical passages about worship is John 4, when Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well. After Jesus alludes to the sin in her life, she invites him (as a diversion) into a debate on worship. Should believers worship in Jerusalem, as the Jews said, or at the twin mountains Gerizim and Ebal in Samaria? Jesus responds by telling her that one day worship will not be constrained to either place (verse 21), and then he says something quite remarkable:

*“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”* (John 4:23, ESV)

Jesus gives us 3 identifiable attributes of true worship: “God”, “spirit” and “truth”. It is clear by these words of Jesus that worship is Godward, God-centered, Spirit-empowered and Word-driven. Do you see

the Triune God displayed? We worship God. We worship God by the Spirit. We worship God by the Spirit, and our worship is defined by Truth; Jesus being the Truth.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. We worship God.

“Biblical worship is God-focused (God is clearly seen), God-centered (God is clearly the priority), and God-exalting (God is clearly honored).”<sup>2</sup> “It is our proper response to the magnificence, the splendor and majesty of God’s character—“a God who is”, as Dr. D.A. Carson writes, delightfully worthy” of our praise. Worship goes beyond simply *knowing* what God is like; it means that we take *delight* in the perfection of his attributes.”<sup>3</sup>

Not only is the sole attention and affection directed toward God, we learn that it is the Father who invites us: “for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.”<sup>4</sup>

Now I’m going to get real personal here. Our God and Father issues you an invitation to come and spend time in beholding His glory so that we can become more like Jesus, how should we respond to that invitation? I’m going to talk more of this next Sunday, but please be prepared for this. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, invites you to come and “behold” Him, how will you respond? Will you come unprepared? Will you come how and when you want?

[Illustration: Aboriginal Awards.]

Worship is God-centered.

### 2. We worship in the power of the Spirit.

Some people describe “worship in spirit” as our heartfelt attitude. One group of Christians often describe this phrase as “spirited” (i.e., animated, exuberant, energetic) worship. Clearly the grammar allows for a small ‘s’ or a capital ‘S’. I am convinced the New Testament context informs the interpretation as The Holy Spirit. We worship in the power of the Spirit.

Paul says it most clearly in Philippians 3:3 (ESV), For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—.” This means we don’t try to manipulate worship by smoke and lights. This means that we don’t try to manipulate worship by methods and means. This means that if worship occurs, it occurs because it is Spirit-induced and Spirit-empowered. Now the Holy Spirit uses means, but it is not the means that produce worship.

<sup>1</sup> “True worship is empowered by “the Spirit of truth” (14: 17; 15: 26; 16: 13) and is in accordance with truth. It can occur only in and through Jesus, who is “the truth” (14: 6; see 1: 14) and the true temple (see note on 2: 19– 22).” - Zondervan. The NIV Zondervan Study Bible, eBook: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message (Kindle Locations 245697-245700). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Kauflin, Bob. *Worship Matters* (Foreword by Paul Baloche) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/class-xii-worship/>

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 4:23). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

I'm going to get really real here, but let me tell you, I've been in some worship services that looked more like the prophets of Baal trying to coerce and awaken a sleepy, disinterested god, than a Holy God who by grace and faith alone invites His people to come and worship Him. "God isn't a genie we summon by rubbing the bottle called "worship."<sup>5</sup> Worship occurs only when the Holy Spirit brings it to pass.

3. We worship in Truth. To worship in Truth is clearly described by Paul as valuing and glorying in Christ who is Truth. We see this so clearly in Heaven's worship as described in Revelation 5:9–10 (ESV),

<sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

This is why the Gospel, the redemption of God in Christ for all nations, becomes the theme of our worship. That will be the theme for eternity.

Worship in truth also directs us to sound Biblical truth. Everything we sing, say and do must be evaluated in light of Truth.

### WHAT MEANS WILL THE HOLY SPIRIT USE TO WORSHIP GOD IN CHRIST?

Our corporate worship isn't dictated by whatever we want to do. In the New Testament we are given ample examples of what transpires in a corporate worship service. We can see that:

- a. There should be the reading and preaching Scripture ([1 Tim. 4:14](#));
- b. There should be the singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs together ([Eph. 5:18–19](#); [Col. 3:16](#));
- c. There should be praying ([1 Tim. 2:1–2, 8](#)); and
- d. There should be celebrating the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper ([Matt. 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:17–34](#)).

When the Church gathers, there are a lot of things the Church might want to do. Some of them are good. We determine what we do, based upon priorities. There are other means whereby we can communicate news and events. There are other forums we can celebrate marker events in people's lives. We assemble for an hour and a half. Our priority is given to singing, praying, reading and preaching God's Word. Some things don't fit the priority.

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<sup>5</sup> Kauflin, Bob. *Worship Matters* (Foreword by Paul Baloche) . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Some brothers teach we should only do what the Bible commands or illustrates. Some people teach that we can do anything as long as the Bible doesn't forbid it. The debate will go on, but I tend to find myself straddling the fence. I do think we have Biblical principles that govern our gathering.

## WHAT GOVERNS NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP?

Paul writes the Corinthians as says, *"What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up . . . "But all things should be done decently and in order."* (1 Corinthians 14:26, 40, ESV)

When we go home after a church service and think about what just occurred. Can we say, "All things were done:

- a. Orderly; were all things done,
- b. Decently; and were all things done,
- c. To build us up?

I said at the beginning that corporate worship isn't a "town hall meeting". There should be order that is clearly evident. This means in starts on time. It means you arrive on time. It means that we don't just stand up and speak extemporaneously or spontaneously. It means that there is thought and prayer given to the flow of the service. "Carson (1987: 121) concludes that "wise and biblically informed Christian worship" will not pursue "freedom at the expense of order, or unrestrained spontaneity at the expense of reverence."<sup>6</sup>

It is decent. It is becoming. It is proper. Decency is the positive side of disorder. There can be many considerations here. But many of you as mature, Spirit-filled people will understand that some things are just not appropriate. A pastor can make an inappropriate comment or joke. A Church might be grieving that particular Sunday and some things are not appropriate. An announcement, although important, can be made in another way or another time and may not be appropriate. What is appropriate in one culture may be inappropriate in another.

And lastly the worshipful gaze into the face of Christ and the Gospel is intended to produce change. So it is edifying. Our motive is to promote one another's growth in Christian truth, in Christian wisdom, in Christian behavior, in Christian holiness and Christian joy.<sup>7</sup> In a nutshell edification means stirring one another up to love and good deeds ([Heb. 10:24-25](#)).

So no, New Testament worship is NOT free-for-all. The Bible governs what we do. I love what John MacArthur writes, "The church at worship before God should reflect His character and nature because

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<sup>6</sup> Garland, D. E. (2003). [1 Corinthians](#) (p. 675). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

<sup>7</sup> Strong, J. (1995). [Enhanced Strong's Lexicon](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

He is a God of peace and harmony, order and clarity, not strife and confusion (cf. Rom. 15:33; 2 Thess. 3:16; Heb. 13:20).<sup>8</sup> The bottom line is that it is God and His character that governs our shared worship.

### APPLICATION

Next Sunday, at 10:00 a.m. you are, by invitation of the King of kings, the thrice-holy God, the one and only Savior of the world, summoned to gather in His Presence to offer your mind's attention and your heart's affection before the glory of His Son, Jesus Christ.

1. What will you determine is more important than this summons?
2. Will you arrive late, unprepared and casually before the Most High God?
3. Will your mind's attention find object of focus that is more important than the glory of God in the Person of Jesus Christ?
4. Will your heart affection find any satisfaction in anything other than the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

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<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, J., Jr. (Ed.). (1997). [The MacArthur Study Bible](#) (electronic ed., p. 1753). Nashville, TN: Word Pub.