



STUDIES IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

WORSHIP

Edited by Scott Aniol

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Worship: Studies in Practical Theology

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PREFACE

Scott Aniol

Worship—it is why God created us. Yet worship is perhaps one of the most misunderstood biblical concepts, and that misunderstanding has led to all sorts of problems in the corporate worship of our churches. This is why it is so important that we carefully study the Word of God to determine how *he* defines worship and how *he* wants us to worship him as his people.

This twelve-week teaching curriculum has been designed to help you do just that. Each lesson features teaching from respected preachers and teachers on the subject of worship that has been edited into an easy-to-follow curriculum that is ideal for use in Sunday School classes, small groups, and families. The study has been designed to help facilitate as much or as little discussion as desired. We have provided a student guide that includes the main lesson idea, main lesson passage, and Scripture memory for each lesson. Additionally, we have included several questions throughout each lesson to help facilitate reflection and discussion. We encourage you to use these questions as a means to cultivate discussion as well as a greater level of comprehension for your classes or small groups with each lesson.

To watch videos of the presentations that accompany each lesson, visit:

<https://g3min.org/library-resources/worship-study>.

We pray that this teaching resource will be a blessing and help to you as you seek to learn and teach others what it means to “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:29).



LESSON 1: THE REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

Josh Buice

MAIN POINT: The deformation of worship necessitates a bold reformation.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Timothy 3:14–16

MEMORY: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16–17)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14–15)

In 1 Timothy, Paul is writing to his son in the faith, Timothy, as he was pastoring the church in the city of Ephesus. Paul had served in a pastoral role in this very church for a period of three years, but prior to leaving, he called together the elders of the church:

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. ¹⁸ And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹ testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:17–21)

Paul also warned the church’s elders that certain false teachers from within the body would seek to destroy the church from within to destroy this very church:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. (Acts 20:28–31)

Shortly after he addressed these Ephesian elders, Paul was put into prison in Rome, and it is from prison that he wrote his epistle to the Ephesians as well as his letters to Timothy, continuing many of the themes he expressed to the elders in Acts 20. Paul desired to further equip Timothy to lead the church at Ephesus by instructing him concerning how the church should function according to the Word of God.

This is exactly what Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:14: “I am writing these things to you,” Paul said to Timothy, “so that if I delay in coming to you, you may know how one ought to behave in

Anastrephō [behave] means “to conduct oneself in terms of certain principles, act, behave, conduct oneself, live.” (BDAG)

the household of God.” The term “behave” here comes from a Greek term that literally means to conduct oneself in a specific manner. In this context, it is a reference to the functionality of the church, which would have involved the way that the church worships. Paul is concerned that the church knows how to properly conduct itself in its public worship.

Apparently, something in how the Ephesian church was behaving was off-center. Perhaps Paul had heard that something wasn’t proper in some specific area of the functionality or the worship of the church. So Paul is writing to Timothy to help this pastor lead his church to worship in conformity with God’s Word.

This church was on the verge of attack when Paul left Ephesus. It was under attack during the time of Timothy’s pastoral ministry. And it was still under attack forty years later when then church received a message from the Lord Jesus Christ himself:

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. ² I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary.

⁴ *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” (Rev 2:1–4)*

Unfortunately, in his message to the Ephesian church, Jesus accused them of abandoning their first love, the gospel of Christ. How could such a privileged church come to abandon their first love for the gospel? That is frightening. To labor with a church and see it walk away from the true gospel is a hard thing.

Paul heard of the church’s compromise, Timothy experienced the church’s compromise, and Christ judged it.

Churches today are under the same kinds of attacks and are in danger of falling under the same kinds of accusation. On the one hand, we might think of the beautiful cathedrals all over the world filled with worshipers lighting candles, praying to images, and venerating saints. Yet we should also recognize the many cultural trappings that even modern evangelicals welcome into our churches, turning the worship of God into entertainment. It is a sad reality that many evangelical churches have been transformed into entertainment communities who gather at entertainment centers to be entertained—watching the worship, watching the singing, watching the praying.

When we consider the reality of worship in many modern evangelical churches, we cannot help but recognize that many Christians do not seem to think much about what worship really is. Sometimes it’s empty worship. Sometimes the worship is misplaced. Sometimes the focus of the worship is not on God at all, but rather on man-centered pragmatics that have robbed God of his worship. The public worship of God has been consistently deformed through the years.

Indeed, like the church in Ephesus, worship today is in much need of reformation.

Think About It

1. In what ways do you see the culture around us negatively affecting the church?
2. In what ways do you see modern evangelical churches failing in their public worship?
3. How would you define worship?

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Before we consider how Paul’s instructions to Timothy describe the necessary steps toward reforming worship, we need to first define worship biblically. The English word *worship* has been used in a variety of different ways, from when knights would “win worship” by their feats of arms, to the Old English prayer book where the groom tells his bride, “With my body, I thee worship.”

The antiquarian English term (*weorthscipe*) carried the idea of worthiness or the “worth-ship” of the object or person in reference.

The English term may help somewhat in defining what we are doing when we worship, but even more importantly, Holy Scripture itself must define our understanding of worship. The New Testament employs a couple of primary terms when talking about the subject of worship. The first is the word *proskuneō*, which carries the idea of having complete dependence or submission to a higher authority. It means to fall down before, to bow in honor of, to worship. The second term is *latreia*, which is often translated as “service” or “to serve.” A third is *leitourgeō*, from which we get our English term “liturgy,” and which refers specifically to public worship.

Terms for “Worship” in the New Testament

proskuneō (73 times) – “to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully” (BDAG)

- *Matthew 2:11* – “And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.”
- *Revelation 5:14* – “And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

latreia (22 times) – “the state of a hired laborer, service” (LSJ)

- *Romans 12:1* – “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”
- *Hebrews 9:1* – “Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness.”

leitourgeō (6 times) – “service of a formal or public type, service” (BDAG)

- *Luke 1:23* – “And when his time of service was ended, he went to his home.”
- *Hebrews 8:6* – “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.”

The New Testament also refers to worship with other less technical terms as it addresses the order and conduct of church gatherings, even as simple as “when you come together” (1 Cor 14:26). Public worship is at least one aspect of what Paul addresses when he says to Timothy in verse 15, “*how one ought to behave in the household of God*.” The term “behave” could describe the personal relationships among members of the church, but it is also a reference to the conduct of the church when it gathers for worship. In other words, at least one of Paul’s central concerns as he writes to Timothy in this letter is that Timothy and his church know how they should conduct themselves as they come together for public worship. He wants the church to reform its worship.

REFORMING WORSHIP THROUGH PASTORAL OVERSIGHT (1 Tim 3:14)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you ...

The first key step toward reforming worship that comes from Paul's instructions to Timothy is to recognize the necessity of pastoral oversight. In verse 14, Paul says, "I am writing these things to you, Timothy." It is the elders' responsibility to protect and safeguard the worship of the local church. It was Timothy's job to oversee and bring about necessary correction to the church. You see, pastoral leadership is more than simply showing people where to go, it also involves reproof and correcting the church when it goes astray.

REFORMING WORSHIP BY THE WORD (1 Tim 3:15a)

... so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.

Elders are tasked with leading and even at times reproofing the people under their care, but they do so through the Scriptures. As Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16–17)

In other words, there is a time when the church needs to experience reproof, including with their worship, and that reproof happens through Scripture. We might acknowledge this need in some areas of Christian practice and living, but many times Christians think that when it comes to worship, they may worship in whatever way they deem best.

We need to ask ourselves an honest question: does God regulate the worship of His church? The clear answer is Yes, because as Paul says in 1 Timothy 3:15, "You need to know how one ought to behave in the household of God," which implies the fact that God is the one who is regulating the boundaries of the church's functionality, including its public worship.

Principles of Worship

The Inventive Principle – we may do in worship whatever we might imagine.

The Normative Principle – whatever is not forbidden in Scripture for worship is permitted.

The Regulative Principle – whatever is not prescribed in Scripture for worship is forbidden.

Historically, three approaches to this question have emerged. One would be what we can call the inventive principle, which would have the idea that we may do in worship whatever we might imagine. This approach leads to churches having indoor fireworks or pastors approaching the pulpit on zip lines.

The second approach is known as the normative principle, which claims that unless God forbids something, then it is permitted for worship. Traditions like the Lutheran church and Anglican church adopted this principle in response to the Church of Rome; they eliminated from worship any elements that Rome had established that were contrary to Scripture, yet they retained other worship practices that they deemed helpful, even though those practices were not commanded in the New Testament.

The third approach is known as the regulative principle, which claims that we should only approach God and worship in the way that he has clearly prescribed such worship in the pages of Holy Scripture, which is God's sufficient, inerrant, and authoritative message of God to His people. This was the principle adopted by the Reformed wing of the Reformation, including John Calvin, John Knox, and early English Baptists like Benjamin Keach.

“No acts of worship can properly be called holy, but such as the Almighty has enjoined. No man, nor any body of men have any authority to invent rites and ceremonies of worship; to change the ordinances which he has established; or to invent new ones.... The divine Word is the only safe directory in what relates to his own immediate service. The question is not what we may think becoming, decent or proper, but what our gracious Master has authorized as such. In matters of religion, nothing bears the stamp of holiness but what God has ordained.” (John Fawcett, *The Holiness Which Becometh the House of the Lord* [1808], 25)

The fact that Paul says “how one ought to behave in the household of God” indicates that God regulates how your church worships him, and the manual for that worship regulation is the Word of God. You don't have to go to a conference, buy someone's book, or pick up a manual to figure out how to best conduct worship. You have that in the Word of God; God's Word is sufficient.

Think About It

1. What do you think is mostly impacting how churches worship today?
2. Why do you think Christians do not believe that the Bible is enough to regulate how we worship God?
3. If you committed to worshipping only as God has explicitly prescribed in the New Testament, what elements would you have to eliminate from your services?

REFORMING OUR PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHURCH (1 Tim 3:15b)

... the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

A third essential step toward reforming worship is to reform our perspective of the church. Paul articulates a biblical understanding of the nature and mission of the church simply in the descriptive phrases he uses in this passage.

HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

In verse 15 Paul describes the church as the “household of God.” This emphasizes the fact that the church is not so much a building or structure; rather, the church is the family of God. This intimate statement points to our commitment to one another as a people who gather together, serve together, pray together, and worship together.

In Ephesians 2:19, Paul also tells Christians that they are “members of the *household of God*,” and Hebrews 10:21 describes Jesus as “a great high priest over the *house of God*,” specifically in the context of the church meeting together (v. 25). The phrase “house of God” was a technical term used at the time to describe the sanctuary of God’s presence (Matt 12:4, Mark 2:26, Luke 6:4). In the Old Testament, Jacob referred to the place where he met with God as “Bethel,” meaning “house of God,” and several places refer to the tabernacle as the “house of God” (Judges 18:30, 1 Chron 9:25–27) as well as the temple (2 Chronicles 3:3, Ezra 1:4, Neh 6:10, Ps 42:4, Eccl 5:1, Dan 1:2). Thus, as the temple was the house of God and the place of corporate worship in the Old Testament, so the assembled church is the place of worship today.

CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

Next, Paul uses the specific term “church.” This term, *ekklēsia*, literally means “called out assembly of believers.” The church is not simply loosely connected believers; rather, the church assembles for worship. God has not called Christians to ecclesiastical spectatorship, he has called believers to church membership, to assembling with other believers as active participants, not spectators of worship.

ekklēsia, “from ek, ‘out of,’ and klesis, ‘a calling’ (kaleo, ‘to call’), was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens ‘gathered’ to discuss the affairs of state.... It has two applications to companies of Christians, (a) to the whole company of the redeemed throughout the present era,... (b) in the singular number, to a company consisting of professed believers,... and in the plural, with reference to churches in a district.” (VONT)

Paul literally calls the church here, “the Living God’s Church,” a descriptor Paul uses intentionally to contrast with the idolatrous culture of Ephesus. Located in modern day Turkey, Ephesus was the gateway to Asia, labeled by many today as “the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.” The city was well-known for its trade and athletics, but it was also known for its worship. Ephesus was the home of the temple of Artemis (also called Diana). This temple was filled with a shrine and a bank dedicated to this goddess who was a multi-breasted idol worshiped through prostitution. The city was so filled with idolatrous wickedness that the philosopher Heraclitus (“the weeping philosopher”) once said, “No one could live in Ephesus and not weep over its immorality.”

This is why Paul so firmly admonished Timothy to preach the Word—he served in a city of sin, and he would have no greater weapon to defend and protect the church than the sword of the Spirit. Paul instructed Timothy to resist the deforming attacks of the idolatrous culture and lead the church to dedicate themselves to the living God, not dead idols.

PILLAR AND BUTTRESS OF THE TRUTH

The first two phrases Paul uses to describe the church, “household of God” and “church of the living God,” are common in Scripture, but his third description is perhaps more striking to us today; Paul calls the church the “a pillar and buttress of the truth,” which describes the calling of the church. Pillars support the roof of a building, and the buttress is the foundation that supports the entire structure.

Though Paul’s image may sound unusual to us today, he was deliberately alluding to something that would have been very familiar to Timothy and the Ephesian Christians—the temple of Artemis. One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, this temple was a massive structure measuring 425 feet long and 225 feet wide, double the size of other temples in the ancient world. In order to support such a large building, the temple was surrounded by 127 columns that were 60 feet high and four feet in diameter arranged in double rows all around and decorated with relief

figures from Greek mythology. When Paul references the “pillar” of truth, he is calling to mind these massive pillars upholding the imposing structure.

And what is that structure supported by the church? Truth. The church is called to uphold and support the truth. This means that we are committed to the Scriptures as God’s inerrant Word. Paul’s use of the definite article, “the,” stresses that it is not just *a* truth, but *the* truth that will reform the church.

Think About It

1. What does the phrase “household of God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
2. What does the phrase “church of the living God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
3. What does the phrase “pillar and buttress of the truth” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?

REFORMING OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH

(1 Tim 3:16)

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.*

In verse 16, Paul presents a concise summation of the truth of which the church is the support. In a sense, this is an early church confession by which we ought to reform our understanding of truth.

Yet this is not a confession to simply post on a bulletin board or website—this was a hymn sung by the early church. What this tells us is that while preaching is the central, primary means of grace in the worship of the church, how the church sings matters.

This sung confession contains six main verbs that are centered on a high Christology that must be carefully maintained and fervently proclaimed (and sung!) by the church. First, Christ “was manifested” (*phaneroō*)—“made visible”—“in the flesh.” Jesus Christ was truly God, but he was made visible in human flesh. This line embodies the entirety of Christ’s ministry in the flesh from the incarnation in Bethlehem to his death on Calvary.

Second, Christ was “vindicated” (*dikaioō*)—“justified”—“by the Spirit” in his resurrection from the dead. As Paul proclaimed in Romans 1:4,

[Christ] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Jesus was victoriously vindicated at his resurrection, which was confirmed, third, when he was “seen by angels” who declared, “He is not here, for he is risen.” This proved that Jesus is truly God and truly man and puts him into contrast with the other false, dead idols of the day.

The final three verbs describe the results of this three-fold gospel truth: Christ is “proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.” This is the Great Commission. This is what the church has been commanded to do. We gather for worship that must be reformed by gospel truth, and we scatter for missions to proclaim gospel truth, for the church’s goal and mission is to proclaim the excellencies of Christ, to make much of King Jesus, and to declare the good news of hope in Jesus.

This is the central confession of faith we must preach, sing, and live in our churches and in our daily lives.

THE DEFORMATION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES A BOLD REFORMATION

This confession is exactly what is under attack in today’s culture, just as it was in Ephesus. The world has sought to redefine the truth, reject the truth, and replace the truth with falsehoods. This has been the pattern since the very beginning in the Garden of Eden when the Serpent lied about God and pointed Eve toward death.

This attack on God’s truth is at its root an attack against true worship. As Paul stated in Romans 1:25,

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

This Romans 1:25 curse has prevailed from ancient days to modern times. The world hates the truth, Satan is committed to twisting the truth, and the culture will seek to sway the church away from the truth. Because truth is under such strong attack, leading to church behavior drifting from the regulation of God's Word, it is the duty of the pastors and the calling of the church to engage in the ongoing work of bold reformation—to literally *reform* what has been *deformed*.

It is the duty of the pastors and the calling of the church to engage in the ongoing work of bold reformation—to literally *reform* what has been *deformed*.

This is exactly what led to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation—it was preceded by a long period of deformation. Martin Luther began by seeking a religious conversation when he nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg church door.

But the deformation that had taken place within the church required much more than a mere conversation. Following the piercing of Luther's heart with the sharp edge of Romans 1:17, the conversation moved to a confrontation, which erupted into a full Reformation that has not ceased to this day.

Reformation within the church and its worship will happen only as the churches proclaim and preserve the truth of God. John Calvin observed,

Nothing is more sacred and holy than the truth that embraces both God's glory and man's salvation. If you could collect together all the praises that have been heaped on pagan philosophers, they pale into insignificance when compared with this heavenly wisdom. This alone should be called light and truth and this alone gives teaching about how to live and how to find the way to God and his kingdom. This truth is only preserved in the world through the ministry of the church. So a very heavy responsibility rests on pastors who have been entrusted with the safekeeping of this priceless treasure. (Crossway Classic Commentaries [1998], 61)

Calvin is exactly right. The Reformation was a return to the Word of God; it was about bringing the Bible to the people and the people to the Bible. We must not diminish the responsibility of the church to safeguard the right worship of God through the truth of God's Word.

For this reason, biblical, God-honoring preaching is essential for the reformation of true worship. The Protestant Reformers knew this. Between 1510 and 1546, Luther preached approximately 4,000 sermons. He viewed the Bible as God's Word, and he preached it. Calvin took preaching a step further by practicing faithful expositional preaching through books of the Bible. William Tyndale, John Rogers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Thomas Cranmer, and later, faithful pastors such as Charles Spurgeon each steadfastly preached the truth of Scripture, stood against attacks from the world around them, and in some cases suffered imprisonment and even death for their commitment to the Word of God.

And the church in our day has seen just as much deformation as these men saw, and it is likewise just as much in need of reformation. Over the past centuries since the start of the Protestant Reformation, truth gave way to rationalism, rationalism gave way to empiricism, empiricism gave way to existentialism, existentialism gave way to postmodernism, and postmodernism has led to the idea that there is not truth, no certainty, and no meaning. In our world saturated by postmodernism, truth is rejected and there is an ongoing attack on the Word of God.

But no matter what the world says about God's truth, as Luther penned so well in his glorious hymn,

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still,
His Kingdom is forever.

As the culture seeks to deform the worship of the church, we must be committed to reforming the church's worship to honor God.

Think About It

1. In what ways do you notice truth under attack in our day?
2. How has attack on truth contributed to the deformation of the worship of evangelical churches today?
3. In what ways can a return to the truth of God's Word serve to reform the church's worship?

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, as we see your truth and your worship deformed in the world around us and even in our own churches, help us to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in your work, knowing that our labor is not in vain in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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STUDENT HANDOUT

LESSON 1: THE REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

Josh Buice

MAIN POINT: The deformation of worship necessitates a bold reformation.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Timothy 3:14–16

MEMORY: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16–17)

Think About It

1. In what ways do you see the culture around us negatively affecting the church?
2. In what ways do you see modern evangelical churches failing in their public worship?
3. How would you define worship?

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

REFORMING WORSHIP THROUGH PASTORAL OVERSIGHT (1 Tim 3:14)

REFORMING WORSHIP BY THE WORD (1 Tim 3:15a)

Think About It

- 1.** What do you think is mostly impacting how churches worship today?
- 2.** Why do you think Christians do not believe that the Bible is enough to regulate how we worship God?
- 3.** If you committed to worshipping only as God has explicitly prescribed in the New Testament, what elements would you have to eliminate from your services?

REFORMING OUR PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHURCH (1 Tim 3:15b)

HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

PILLAR AND BUTTRESS OF THE TRUTH

Think About It

1. What does the phrase “household of God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
2. What does the phrase “church of the living God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
3. What does the phrase “pillar and buttress of the truth” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?

REFORMING OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH

(1 Tim 3:16)

THE DEFORMATION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES A BOLD REFORMATION

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways do you notice truth under attack in our day?
- 2.** How has attack on truth contributed to the deformation of the worship of evangelical churches today?
- 3.** In what ways can a return to the truth of God's Word serve to reform the church's worship?



LESSON 2: THE FOUNDATION OF WORSHIP

Paul Washer

MAIN POINT: We must build our worship on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 3:9–17

MEMORY: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor 3:11)

Unacceptable worship is merely a symptom of a far greater problem, and if we do not deal with that problem, all the tweaking of worship will not help. We must return to the fundamentals of the faith, and those fundamentals stand upon the central doctrine of the Reformation, Sola Scriptura. In order for true reformation to take place, everything must be brought into submission to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, and that is only possible when a people have knowledge of his Word and fear him. We might say that we believe that the Scriptures are inerrant and infallible, that they come forth from the mouth of God, but do we really believe the Scriptures are sufficient?

If we want to truly reform worship, we must go back to the beginning and make sure that we are starting out with the correct foundation. This is what Paul emphasized in his first letter to the Corinthian church, and in chapter 3 he draws their attention to the foundation of the church and its worship.

STEWARDS UNDER AUTHORITY (1 Cor 3:9)

For we are God's fellow workers....

Paul first emphasizes that those who lead the church in its worship are God's fellow workers. This is a privileged position, but it is also a weighty position. Later in this chapter, Paul refers to the fact that each one's work in building Christ's church will be tested (v. 13). Who is sufficient for these things? How can a church leader bear such a privilege? How can he have confidence that he is carrying out his responsibility in the way that Christ requires?

The only way is by knowing and submitting to Scripture.

It is important to stress that church leaders are God's co-workers, not God's co-owners. Church leaders are stewards of Christ's work, and it is a requirement of a steward only to obey the decrees that have been handed to him. Church leaders do not invent new ways of worship and ministry; they submit to the ways that Christ has prescribed in his Word.

... You are God's field, God's building.

After referring to the church leaders, Paul tells the entire church that they are God's field and God's building. Grammatically, Paul uses what is called a genitive of possession, emphasizing the fact that the entire church and its leaders are possessed by God.

Biblical Metaphors for the Church

Body

Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 10:17; 1 Cor 12:12, 27; Eph 4:12; Eph 5:23, 30; Col 1:24

Bride

2 Cor 11:12; Eph 5:31–32; Rev 19:7–8; Rev 21:9

Family

Matt 12:49–50; 2 Cor 6:18; Gal 6:9–10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 5:1

House

1 Tim 3:14–15; Heb 3:6; 1 Pet 4:17

Temple

1 Cor 3:11, 16–17; Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:5–7

Field

1 Cor 3:9

The fact that God possesses the church as his field and his building is why church leaders must submit to God's instructions regarding ministry and worship. We need not—we must not—look to the culture around us for new ways to worship; we must simply trust that what God has given us in his Word is sufficient. Anything added to God's field is foreign seed that will produce weeds. Anything added to God's building beyond what he has prescribed is foreign material.

Consider the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt 13:24–30). The servant asked the landowner, "Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?" The

landowner replied, “An enemy has done this.” Whenever someone adds seed to God’s field beyond what he has prescribed, he is God’s enemy.

Or consider what God said to Moses when he was about to erect the tabernacle:

For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

If Moses had deviated in anything while building God’s tabernacle, it would have brought fearful judgement upon him and the people.

What is more important to God, the shadow or the fulfilment? We are not dealing with sticks and stones and cloth now. We are dealing with the body of Christ. We must not bring in any material that is not prescribed by the Word of the living God. To do so is arrogance and foolishness.

Now, let’s take this one step further. Even though it is not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 3, the New Testament also calls the church God’s bride. Imagine a king who loves his wife, and he dresses her all in the finest white linens. What a beauty she is, and part of that beauty is her simplicity, her purity. But the king is going to go on a long journey, and so he tells his steward, “You are in charge of my bride.” He sets forth clearly written decrees of exactly what the steward is to do with his bride. What if, after the king is gone for a long while, the steward decides to take matters in his own hands and use the king’s bride to draw the carnal men of the kingdom back into loyalty to the king?

Unfortunately, this is what many evangelical ministers are doing today to God’s bride, the church. They think they need to renovate his bride, change the worship, and modernize in order to draw in the lost. On the contrary, we must trust in the sufficiency of what God has commanded. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Think About It

1. In what ways do church leaders sometimes reveal that they view themselves as co-owners of God’s church?
2. What do the metaphors of God’s field and God’s building emphasize about the nature of the church and its worship?
3. What are implications of the reality that church leaders are stewards of God’s possession?

LAYING THE FOUNDATION (1 Cor 9:10–11)

Paul continues this building metaphor in verse 10:

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.

A FOUNDATION OF GRACE, WISDOM, AND POWER

How can we explain the ministry of the apostle Paul? The apostle ministered by grace of God and the wisdom that was given to him in God's Word. The ministry of the Apostle Paul has no natural explanation. He explained this earlier in chapter 2:

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor 2:3–5)

When we consider the apostle Paul and the abundance of fruit in his ministry, there is only this explanation: the grace of almighty God, the wisdom of almighty God's Word, and the power of almighty God's Spirit. This is how it has always been. Consider when God chose the craftsman who would build his tabernacle:

The Lord said to Moses, ² "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, ³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship. (Exod 31:1–3)

God made a man to build his tabernacle by his grace, and he filled that man with his wisdom and his Spirit. How do we explain the fruitful ministry of men like John Calvin and Charles Spurgeon? It cannot be explained in terms of human abilities; it is the grace of God, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. Nations can be conquered by plow boys when they are trusting only in the wisdom of God and they are filled with the Spirit of God.

Too often when we consider how churches are built, and especially the place of worship in the building of the church, we trust in human strength, human creativity, and human methods. We use the music and other elements of our worship as clever gimmicks to attract people to our message and thus build our churches.

But Paul is clear: building the foundation for our churches has nothing to do with man-made abilities; in fact, those are a hindrance to building God's church. Rather, we must rely alone upon the grace, wisdom, and power that comes from God through his Word by his Spirit.

A FOUNDATION OF CHRIST

And then Paul makes the nature of this foundation of grace even more explicit in verse 11:

For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

We need nothing else to build God's churches. We do not need clever methods or the world's entertainment. We need only to follow God's blueprint given to us in his all-sufficient Word. And that blueprint will always lead us to lay a foundation of Jesus Christ.

We build this foundation through teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ—the attributes of God, the depravity of man, and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. No church growth strategies here. It is as if, when Paul wanted to plant a church, he took out a big sign and wrote on it the most offensive thing to the people of his day: "I preach Christ crucified." And then he walked down the middle of the street with that sign. As Paul says earlier in chapter 1,

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:18)

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only sure foundation upon which to build our worship. This is the foundation the apostle Peter laid on that Pentecost day when the church first began (Acts 2:14–40). God created all things to serve him. He is holy and righteous and perfect. He demands perfection. He cannot tolerate evil. But every one of us is evil. All we have to do is compare ourselves to the Ten Commandments and it is obvious that we disobey God every day of our lives. Hebrews 9:27 says that each of us is destined to die, and after that comes judgment. Why? Because God, who is perfect, cannot overlook sin; He must judge it. Romans 6:23 says that the payment for sin is death.

So the problem that each of us faces is the same problem that was so evident to Peter's audience on that day he preached: judgment is coming for us all. There is no doubt—one day each of us will face the white-hot holy justice of the almighty God, and if we do not measure up to His standard of perfection, we will be judged. Is there any way to be saved from that judgment? Peter answered that question with one of the most hope-filled promises in all of Scripture: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Peter knew that the only sure foundation upon which to build the church was Jesus Christ. He knew that this is exactly what had been prophesied in the Old Testament:

For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

⁷ So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,"⁸ and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Pet 2:6–8)

Jesus Christ, the cornerstone, was a stumbling block to those who rejected him, but he is the foundation for all true churches.

The apostle Paul preached this same gospel of Jesus Christ as the foundation of the churches he planted. In each place he visited, Paul proclaimed the same message he gave to the Philippian jailer: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). He reasoned with people from Scripture, "explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ'" (Acts 17:3). He confronted sinners and called them to repentance, as he did in Athens when he proclaimed, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

And Paul did the same when he came to the city of Corinth. He did not use clever methods to draw people in, he simply preached Christ:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (1 Cor 2:1–2)

The book of Acts tells that in Corinth, "Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus" (Acts 18:5). He stayed there a year and a half, "teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

In those first years of the church, a foundation was laid that was nothing more and nothing less than the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it must continue to be so today. God's Word, Jesus Christ, is the only sure foundation of the church and its worship.

Think About It

1. What are some man-made foundations upon which some churches are built?
2. What are some results of building churches on our own foundation?
3. If the foundation of our churches is truly Christ, his gospel, and his Word, how will that affect our worship?

BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION

(1 Cor 3:12–15)

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—¹³ each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.¹⁴ If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward.¹⁵ If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

Once the foundation of Jesus Christ is laid, we continue to build upon the foundation, but Paul stresses that those who build must take care. He contrasts building materials that will one day burn up, and those that will endure.

The enduring materials—gold, silver, and precious stones—are nothing less than the continued teaching and preaching of the cross of Christ. The same Word and gospel that saved us continues to be that which will sufficiently build us up and sanctify us into the image of Jesus Christ.

"Since valuable metals and precious stones (cf. Rev 21:18–21) were used to adorn ancient temples, Paul could have taken his imagery from Herod's temple in Jerusalem (Matt 24:1, 2) or from the beautiful public and religious buildings in Athens (Acts 17:23) and Corinth (where the remains of the sixth century B.C. temple of Apollo still stands today)." (W. Harold Mare, Expositor's Bible Commentary)

Yet many churches today dress up the message of the gospel with decorations they think will attract people and draw them in. They assume we need extra-biblical ideologies and methods to encourage and equip God's people. In reality, they are building with consumable materials—wood, hay, and straw. These are inferior materials that are not necessarily evil in themselves, but

they are insufficient to build God's church since they do not derive from his authoritative blueprint. Paul's admonition here is striking: if we build with those materials, we might save ourselves in the judgment, but not much more.

The Word of Christ must be the foundation of all of our building: Jesus Christ crucified for our sins, raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father in glory and power. This is what we must teach and preach without fail. This is how Paul planted churches; this is what we see in the book of Acts—the church built by the preaching of the Word.

But this building is not didactic only. Building upon the foundation of Christ and his gospel means that we will focus our labor on growing in holiness. It is endeavoring to make sure that every soul in the congregation is converted; it is caring for and nurturing souls until Christ is formed in them. As Paul says in Colossians 1:28,

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Many of the maladies in the local church would be cured if Christians understood the gospel and labored with souls in the fear of the Lord until there was evidence of sound conversion. Instead of chasing after gimmicks and strategies, instead of concerns that music be more relevant and contemporary, we simply need to do the work of ministry that the Bible commands.

If we want churches filled with people who love God deeply and want to worship him fully, then we simply need to proclaim the excellencies and beauties of Christ. The more we see of him the more we will love him, and we will worship him.

Think About It

1. What are some examples of enduring building materials?
2. What are some examples of insufficient building materials churches use today?
3. In what ways will proper building of Christ's church result in true worship?

|| DESTROYING GOD'S TEMPLE (1 Cor 3:16–17)

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.*

In the remainder of the chapter, Paul makes the image of God’s building explicit by identifying it as “God’s temple,” which makes the connection to our worship even stronger. The pronouns in this passage are all plural, emphasizing that he is calling the gathered church God’s temple, not just individual Christians, as he does elsewhere (1 Cor 6:19). This building that Paul has been describing, the one built on the foundation of Christ, is the place of God’s worship—the church.

Paul uses the same language in Ephesians 2:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

The warning in 1 Corinthians 3 is sobering for anyone involved with building God’s temple, including leading the worship that takes place there: if you destroy God’s temple, God will destroy you. This image of destroying God’s temple is directly connected to the previous verses about the builder’s work being burnt up. In other words, Paul is saying that if we build the temple of God’s worship with materials that do not endure—materials of our own invention and creativity, then what we build will burn in the judgment, essentially destroying God’s temple.

The only solution is to build on the right foundation with the right materials. We must build our worship on the foundation of Jesus Christ, using the materials prescribed for us in God’s sufficient Word.

Think About It

1. How is building the church upon the foundation of Christ and his Word related to true worship?
2. What implications does the warning in 1 Corinthians 3:17 have for those who lead the church’s worship?
3. What are some ways you haven’t trusted in the sufficiency of God’s Word for your church and its worship?

PRAYER: O Lord God, forgive us for attempting to build our churches and our worship on any other foundation than Jesus Christ. And forgive us for building with materials that will not endure, thinking that we need more than your Word to make our churches attractive. Motivate us, we pray, to trust confidently in the sufficiency of your gospel and your Word to build and sustain the worship of your churches. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

MacArthur, John F. *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World*. 3rd ed. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010.

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Tozer, A. W. *Whatever Happened to Worship*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Christian Publications, 1985.



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 2: THE FOUNDATION OF
WORSHIP

Paul Washer

MAIN POINT: We must build our worship on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 3:9–17

MEMORY: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11)

STEWARDS UNDER AUTHORITY (1 Cor 3:9)

Think About It

1. In what ways do church leaders sometimes reveal that they think they are co-owners of God’s church?
2. What do the metaphors of God’s field and God’s building emphasize about the nature of the church and its worship?
3. What are implications of the reality that church leaders are stewards of God’s possession?

LAYING THE FOUNDATION (1 Cor 9:10–11)

A FOUNDATION OF GRACE, WISDOM, AND POWER

A FOUNDATION OF CHRIST

Think About It

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2. What implications does the warning in 1 Corinthians 3:17 have for those who lead the church's worship?
3. What are some ways you haven't trusted in the sufficiency of God's Word for your church and its worship?



LESSON 3:

WORSHIPPING A THRICE HOLY GOD

James White

MAIN POINT: Worshiping a thrice-holy God compels faithful proclamation of God's message of judgment and salvation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Isaiah 6

MEMORY: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" (Isa 6:8)

Scripture presents us with two extended descriptions of the worship of heaven that provide the foundation for our understanding of the nature of worship, notably one set in the context of worship in the Old Testament (Isa 6) and the other set in the context of worship in the New Testament (Rev 4–5). In both cases, these descriptions of heavenly worship were presented during a time of problems with earthly worship, revealing the fact that problems with our worship now are corrected when we bring our worship into proper relationship with the true worship of heaven.

This was true for the nation of Israel; during Solomon's reign and especially following the divided kingdom, God's people forsook the pure worship of God and began first to fall into syncretistic worship, and eventually full-blown idolatry. Even noble kings in the southern kingdom, such as Uzziah, approached worship presumptuously and not according to God's explicit command by entering into the sanctuary though they had no right to do so (2 Chron 26).

It is no coincidence that the death of Uzziah is the very context for the prophet Isaiah's vision of heavenly worship. In a way, this was God reminding Isaiah of the true reality upon which pure earthly worship was supposed to be based.

THE HOLY LORD IS ON HIS THRONE

(Isa 6:1–2)

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him stood the

seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

The historical context of this passage is a time of transition. King Uzziah has died, and that leads to disruption of life—speculation as to who the new leader is going to be. But in the midst of this unsettled time here on earth, Isaiah sees the Lord seated upon a throne. Nothing that happens here upon this planet ever causes God to have to leave that throne. Nothing ever results in a question as to whether that throne is going to be overthrown. All kingly thrones will someday cease, but not God’s throne.

He is seated upon the throne, “lofty and lifted up.” Isaiah sees a glorious vision of God seated upon his throne, and the house was filled with his glory. We are only given a few incidents like this in all of Scripture, including this in Isaiah 6. Revelation 4 and 5 also give an insight into the worship that takes place in the heavenly realm. We should be grateful in humble remembrance for the opportunity to consider how God exists in and of himself in the heavenly realm. But it should also very much encourage us that this worship has been going on from creation itself, and all the things that have happened amongst men have never interrupted the worship of God.

However, we are interrupted all the time. Many thoughts intrude into our minds that distract from our worship. Let us remember that God is seated upon his throne.

In Isaiah 6, the house is full of his glory, and the Lord is surrounded by heavenly hosts, these strange beings with six wings. Have you noticed that they are specifically created for the purpose of worshiping the Lord? We live in a day where everything is about us and our felt needs; it is about making us happy. And yet from a biblical worldview, everything that exists is made to serve God. It’s all about him. We are the very fortunate recipients of his grace and mercy, but it’s not about us.

Here you have creatures who are specifically made and formed to worship God and to proclaim his worthiness—they have been made to worship. That’s how they fulfill their very purpose, and yet they are not made in the image of God like we are. If it is their purpose to worship God, how much more is it our purpose to worship God?

Think About It

1. What are some parallels between our present age and Israel during Isaiah’s day?
2. How would seeing God high on his throne have given Isaiah comfort? How can this recognition give us comfort?
3. If God created seraphim to worship the Lord, how much more is it our purpose to worship God?

|| THE LORD IS THRICE HOLY (Isa 6:3–7)

And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”⁴ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

The seraphim surrounding God’s throne were made in such a way as to show respect for him—they cover their faces because they are in the very presence of the Holy One. They acknowledge this reality by crying out to one another in what has come to be called the *Trisagion* hymn (“thrice holy”)—“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.”

Here is a bold expression of the sovereignty of God: “the Lord of Hosts” —Yahweh of the angelic hosts. Think of what a single angel could do to the armies in the ancient world, and there are hosts of these angels. Here is the sovereign Lord, and he is three times holy—not just once; three times. He is separate, pure, different: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts. And all of the earth is filled with his glory.”

The sound of their proclamation of the gloriousness of God makes the whole house shake. The foundations, the beams, everything shakes at the sound of the voice, and the house is

“Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.”
(Exod 19:18)

filled with smoke. Why is it filled with smoke? The same thing had happened when Moses met with God upon the mountain. The smoke partially veils the white-hot holiness of God.

|| WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD LEADS TO CONVICTION

When Isaiah sees God as he is, his immediate response is found in verse 5:

And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for 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!”

The sight of God in all of his holiness and splendor caused Isaiah to recognize his own sin and unworthiness to draw near to the presence of God in his temple, what Uzziah should have known before entering the earthly temple as he did. This holy man, this spokesperson for God upon earth says, “I am wretched; I have been pierced through.” Why? “Because I am an unclean man, and I make my living amongst an unclean people, and my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of Hosts.”

How many people, upon having visions of God's glory expected to be killed immediately? The reality of heavenly worship reminds us that entering the presence of God as sinners is a fearful matter.

We live in a fallen world amongst a people who now believe that the beauty we see around us just came into existence, that we have no transcendent meaning. We have no responsibility before God. The purity of God immediately results in having the proper perspective to see me as I am: "I am a wretched man. I have seen God. I know my own state."

So in this worship of heaven, the first element is the truth of God proclaimed: he is sovereign and holy. Then the response of the worshiper is to accept with full acceptance the truth about who God is, and as a result, the worshiper experiences conviction.

There can be no true worship of the triune God, the thrice-holy God, that does not lead to conviction.

GOD MAKES PROVISION

Yet God did not simply expel Isaiah from the temple due to his impurity; rather, God provided means of atonement.

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ And he touched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.

The altar here is probably the altar of incense in the temple. Even the seraph has to pick up the burning coal with tongs, and he touches the prophet's mouth, the very place Isaiah had acknowledged was unclean. And the seraph declares Isaiah forgiven. Provision has been made in the very presence of the holy God to remove the impediment preventing Isaiah from serving that God in the appropriate fashion.

This sets a model for all worship. Any worship that focuses first upon ourselves rather than first and foremost God's revelation is not going to be worship of the one true God, and it is not going to accomplish what God desires to do amongst us. Worship can never be centered upon man. True worship focuses our attention upon the holy perfection of God to the degree that we recognize our unworthiness to be in God's presence of our own merit because of our sinfulness; it compels us to acknowledge and confess our sin before the Lord, recognizing that only God can provide the means by which we can be accepted in his presence. Only God can provide the atonement necessary for the forgiveness of sin.

Think About It

1. Why should God's holiness lead to our confession of sin?
2. How might the necessity of confession impact corporate worship?
3. Why do you think many Christians today do not think they need to confess sin any longer?

WORSHIPING A THRICE-HOLY GOD COMPELS FAITHFUL PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MESSAGE (Isa 6:8–13)

Once Isaiah has been forgiven by the means that God has provided, God calls him to serve:

⁸ And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me."

Standing accepted in God's presence, Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord giving him a message, to which Isaiah willingly offered obedience. Not only does true worship compel sinners to confess their sins, those who leave a worship service having truly encountered God will be those who are ready to sacrifice themselves upon the altar of the service of God. Forgiven sinners are prepared to obey whatever God commands them to do.

A MESSAGE OF PURE JUDGMENT

And so God gives Isaiah a message to proclaim to the people:

⁹ And he said, "Go, and say to this people: "'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." ¹¹ Then I said, "How long, O Lord?" And he said: "Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, ¹² and the Lord removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land."

The message that he receives is a message of pure judgment. This was not a message Isaiah was eager to deliver, which is probably why he says in verse 11, “How long, O Lord?” This does not appear to be a message of hope and joy, but rather the destruction of the people, their land, and their cities.

Throughout Israel’s history, God has been sending prophets; they have had his law. He has been gracious to them and patient with them, but judgment is finally coming because of their disobedience and idolatry.

And the description that is given in verses 11 and 12 was very well fulfilled in what happens both between the Assyrian and the Babylonian destructions of Israel and Judah. For the most part, the people of Israel and Judah did not heed the warnings of God’s prophets, and because of their persistent syncretism and idolatry, both the northern and southern kingdoms were plagued with turmoil and war.

God does not tolerate false worship; because the people did not keep his commandments, God allowed the northern kingdom to be defeated by Assyria in a series of invasions until finally, in 722 BC, Assyria completely defeated them and took the people captive. The southern kingdom did not fare much better. Because of their increasing idolatry, God raised up the nation of Babylon to invade the nation, and finally in 586 BC the city of Jerusalem along with the temple were utterly destroyed; in a series of deportations the people were taken captive to Babylon.

Is judgment not also due our present age? What are we supposed to do? How are we supposed to act? We must first remember, just as Isaiah experiences, that none of the sinfulness and rebellion of the present age will change the fact that God is on his throne. Second, we need to look to our own lips and our own lives, confessing our own sins to the Lord. And third, we have to be faithful in proclaiming his message even when God is bringing judgment.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Judgment is promised, yet there is possibility of hope in verse 13:

“And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Although most will reject God, a tenth, a remnant—what verse 13 calls “the holy seed”—will return to God and remain faithful to him. Later, Isaiah’s message to the people of Israel reveals that if they submit to God’s exhortation and commit themselves to him, then “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (Isa 25:6).

This message of judgment and hope is embedded in Isaiah's encounter with God; it is what he himself experiences as a forgiven sinner worthy of judgment; and it is the message God gives him to deliver to the entire nation.

Likewise, this gospel message should be embedded in Christian worship. We forgiven sinners draw near to a holy God through the means of atonement that he has provided. And after such an encounter, we are sent out into the world with a message similar to the one given to Isaiah: judgment of sin is coming, but forgiveness is possible for those who repent and trust in Christ's sacrificial atonement on the cross.

Historically, Christians have also noticed that the progression of elements in Isaiah's encounter with God in the heavenly temple contained a theological pattern that should have provided a corrective for the syncretistic and idolatrous worship of God's people:

- God reveals himself and calls his people to worship (Isa 6:1–4)
- God's people acknowledge and confess their need for forgiveness (Isa 6:5)
- God provides atonement (Isa 6:6–7)
- God speaks his Word (Isa 6:8–13)
- God's people respond with commitment (Isa 6:8)
- God hosts a celebratory feast (Isa 25:6)

The heavenly worship revealed in Isaiah's vision was supposed to be a corrective for the false worship of Israel because their own worship contained the same theological pattern as true heavenly worship.

Think About It

1. Why must the message of the gospel always include an announcement of judgment upon sin?
2. How can gospel-infused worship compel us to proclaim the gospel to those who do not believe?
3. How can the promise of a believing remnant compel us to proclaim the gospel?

WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD IS WORSHIP OF JESUS

Interestingly, the New Testament quotes Isaiah 6:10. John 12 comes to a climactic point in Jesus's ministry where almost everyone has rejected him, even though he had done many miraculous works in their midst. After chapter 12, Jesus focuses his ministry exclusively on the disciples. John explains this rejection of Messiah by first quoting from Isaiah 53:1:

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him,³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (Jn 12:37–38)

Then John quotes another passage from Isaiah, this time Isaiah 6:10:

Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” (Jn 12:39–40)

The Jews’ rejection of their Messiah was not a surprise to God—it had been prophesied to Isaiah. But then comes a short verse we often miss. In verse 41, John provides commentary about Isaiah’s vision:

Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him. (Jn 12:41)

There is only one “him” in the context, and it is Jesus. This is one of those incredible texts that identifies Jesus as Yahweh. If you asked Isaiah whose glory he saw on the throne in heaven, Isaiah’s response would be that he saw the glory of Yahweh seated upon his throne lofty and lifted up (Isa 6:1). If you asked John, “whose glory did Isaiah see?” John would reply, “Isaiah saw Jesus’s glory and he spoke about him” (Jn 12:41). John’s gospel is the same that began by telling us about the one who was in the beginning with God, who is in the very bosom of the Father, Jesus the Messiah. “Whoever has seen me,” Jesus said, “has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). As John said in chapter 1, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” (Jn 1:18).

JESUS IS GOD

Jesus has to be the God-man or he cannot do what the Scripture says he does, and that is reveal to us God the Father in a perfect way. Belief in the deity of Christ is not just something you argue with people at the front door once in a while on a Saturday morning; it is central to the Christian message. There is no cross, there is no redemption, without Jesus being *theanthropos*—the God Man.

And so, in the midst of Jesus being rejected by his own people who will soon betray and crucify him, John seems to give his readers hope by identifying the one whom Isaiah saw on the throne

New Testament Quotations of Isaiah 6

- Matt 13:14–15 Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”
- Mark 4:12 ... so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”
- Luke 8:10 He said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”
- John 12:40–41 “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.” ⁴¹ Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke of him.
- Acts 28:25–27 The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ “Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. ²⁷ For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”
- Rom 11:7–8 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, ⁸ as it is written, “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”
-

in all of his glory as Jesus himself, he who would continue to rule despite rejection, he who would bring promised judgment, and he through whom forgiveness may be found. In John’s context, Jesus is about to be destroyed by the greatest power on earth. But from the Christian perspective, who is the one who gives himself on Calvary? He is the one who hundreds of years earlier was seen sitting upon the throne announcing judgment.

How many of us, when we present Jesus, present him as he is portrayed in Isaiah 6? We often do not, which is perhaps why we struggle when we read the book of Revelation and see people calling upon the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the wrath of him who sits upon the throne and the wrath of the Lamb.

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP

This is the God who is worthy of our worship—he is Jesus Christ, the King high and lifted up upon a throne; he is the Judge of sin, from whose wrath sinners will one day flee in terror; he is the

Savior of those who confess their sins and cry to him for mercy. The truth of God is glorious when you allow all of Scripture to speak, and the one we worship is indeed worthy of our worship.

JESUS IS THE ONLY MEANS TO ENTER GOD'S PRESENCE

This also reveals the essential connection between the gospel of Jesus Christ and true worship: the forgiveness Isaiah experienced that allowed him to be in God's presence was based upon the atoning death of the Holy Son of God. And Paul describes this reality for Christians in Ephesians 2:6 when he states that God has "raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Christ is seated in heaven, and since we are in him, we are with him there. And he tells us how just a few verses down in Ephesians 2:18:

For through [Christ] we . . . have access in one Spirit to the Father.

We have access to the Father because in one Spirit through Christ, we are welcomed into the presence of a thrice-holy God, just as Isaiah was. This is why we give glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, for each person of the Tri-unity of God plays an active role in what makes worship in God's presence possible for Christians.

Through Christ in the Spirit we have access to the presence of God. The goal of the gospel is to enable us to draw near to the presence of God, in his house, in his heavenly temple, where we are then able to commune with him.

Think About It

1. Why is it important to recognize that the one whom Isaiah saw was Jesus Christ, the second person of the godhead?
2. How does this recognition compel us to worship Christ?
3. How does this recognition impact our proclamation of Christ?

PRAYER: Our gracious heavenly Father, indeed as we come before you at this time, we do pray that you will help us to truly understand what it means to be your creatures who are called into your presence, the true holy, triune God. Allow us to worship you in a way that is pleasing to you, and then fulfill your promise Lord, to change us as we worship you. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Barrett, Michael P. V. *The Beauty of Holiness: A Guide to Biblical Worship*. Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2006.

Payne, Jon D. *In the Splendor of Holiness: Rediscovering the Beauty of Reformed Worship for the 21st Century*. Dallas, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2008.

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STUDENT HANDOUT
**LESSON 3: WORSHIPPING A THRICE-
HOLY GOD**

James White

MAIN POINT: Worshiping a thrice-holy God compels faithful proclamation of God's message of judgment and salvation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Isaiah 6

MEMORY: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" (Isa 6:8)

THE HOLY LORD IS ON HIS THRONE
(Isa 6:1–2)

Think About It

1. What are some parallels between our present age and Israel during Isaiah's day?
2. How would seeing God high on his throne have given Isaiah comfort? How can this recognition give us comfort?
3. If God created seraphim to worship the Lord, how much more is it our purpose to worship God?

THE LORD IS THRICE HOLY (Isa 6:3–7)

WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD LEADS TO CONVICTION

GOD MAKES PROVISION

Think About It

- 1.** Why should God's holiness lead to our confession of sin?
- 2.** How might the necessity of confession impact corporate worship?
- 3.** Why do you think many Christians today do not think they need to confess sin any longer?

WORSHIPING A THRICE-HOLY GOD COMPELS FAITHFUL PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MESSAGE (Isa 6:8–13)

A MESSAGE OF PURE JUDGMENT

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Think About It

- 1.** Why must the message of the gospel always include an announcement of judgment upon sin?
- 2.** How can gospel-infused worship compel us to proclaim the gospel to those who do not believe?
- 3.** How can the promise of a believing remnant compel us to proclaim the gospel?

WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD IS WORSHIP OF JESUS

JESUS IS GOD

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP

JESUS IS THE ONLY MEANS TO ENTER GOD'S PRESENCE

Think About It

1. Why is it important to recognize that the one whom Isaiah saw was Jesus Christ, the second person of the godhead?
2. How does this recognition compel us to worship Christ?
3. How does this recognition impact our proclamation of Christ?



LESSON 4: TRUE WORSHIP

John MacArthur

MAIN POINT: True worship is any expression of obedience, praise, honor, adoration, and gratitude offered to the true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves him.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 4:19–24

MEMORY: “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.” (Jn 4:23)

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” . . . ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.” (Jn 4:7, 19–20)

Jesus’s discussion with the Samaritan woman reveals a contrast between true worship and false worship. In 722 BC, when the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by Sargon, the Assyrian, and scores of Israelites were taken away, the only ones left in the north were the poor. Over time, these poor Israelites intermarried with idolatrous pagan people, and their descendants constituted the hybrid group known as the Samaritans. The Samaritans developed their own kind of worship at Mount Gerizim—a simple approach based on what they knew from the Pentateuch, and that alone; none of the history books or literature or prophets informed their worship. They had their own kind of worship. However, their worship was vain.

WORSHIP BASED ON GOD’S COMMANDS

How did this Samaritan woman, with only the Pentateuch in her religious background, know that a relationship with God was defined as worship?

She would know that because she knew the Ten Commandments, the first three of which clearly articulate the worship of God as central to a relationship with him. The first commandment identifies *whom* we are to worship:

And God spoke all these words, saying, ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ³ You shall have no other gods before me." (Exod 20:1–3)

The second commandment addresses *how* God should be worshiped, or rather, how he should *not* be worshiped—by means of any visual representation:

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exod 20:4–6)

The third commandment lays out very clearly the responsibility of any human being before God to make certain that he or she never takes the name of the Lord in vain:

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. (Exod 20:7)

The Samaritan worship would have also known well the *Shema*, the central statement of faith for an Old Testament Jew:

"The first commandment concerns the object of worship, Jehovah, and him only. The worship of creatures is here forbidden. Whatever comes short of perfect love, gratitude, reverence, or worship, breaks this commandment. Whatsoever ye do, do all the glory of God. The second commandment refers to the worship we are to render to the Lord our God. It is forbidden to make any image or picture of the Deity, in any form, or for any purpose; or to worship any creature, image, or picture. But the spiritual import of this command extends much further. All kinds of superstition are here forbidden, and the using of mere human inventions in the worship of God. The third commandment concerns the manner of worship, that it be with all possible reverence and seriousness. All false oaths are forbidden. All light appealing to God, all profane cursing, is a horrid breach of this command. It matters not whether the word of God, or sacred things, all such-like things break this commandment, and there is no profit, honour, or pleasure in them. The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." (Matthew Henry, Concise Commentary on the Bible)

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. (Deut 6:4–6)

The Pentateuch is clear about the importance and nature of true worship. On the negative side, do not take the name of the Lord in vain, or you will not be guiltless; on the positive side, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might. So this woman knew that a relationship with God is defined in how that individual conceives of the divine being.

Think About It

1. Based on God's commandments regarding worship in the Old Testament, what would render worship vain?
2. How important are external acts of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.
3. How important are internal aspects of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.

VAIN WORSHIP

The Samaritans had distorted true worship; as Jesus said to the woman, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (Jn 4:22). Yet even the Jews failed to obey God’s commands and often worshiped in ways that rendered their worship vain.

BLASPHEMING THE NAME

And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶ Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death. (Lev 24:15–16)

One way of taking the Lord’s name in vain is to blaspheme the name. This means to accuse God of any evil, any ignorance, any incompetence, any impotence, or anything that is less than who he truly is—to declare that God is not who he reveals himself to be. That is a form of cursing God.

Normally, people blaspheme the name because they are bothered by the biblical revelation of God. They would like to determine that God is not nearly as harsh about sins and immorality as some things in the Bible may appear to make him sound, so they want to say that God is more tolerant of sin. Or they want to say that God really can't possibly know the future, because if he knew the future, he'd do something about it. All these are forms of blaspheming God, not overtly but covertly.

SWEARING FALSELY

Leviticus 19 adds another way that the name of the Lord can be taken in vain.

You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. (Lev 19:12)

Swearing by God's name falsely means that, in trying to convince someone of something that is false, you swear by the name of God so others think you're telling the truth because you wouldn't put yourself in such a position before God. It's like telling a lie, and then saying, "This is true, so help me God." That is taking the Lord's name in vain.

SPEAKING FOR GOD FALSELY

A third way to take God's name in vain is to make the false claim that you have heard from God, and speak for him when you haven't really heard from him.

Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: "Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land."¹⁶ Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD."¹⁷ They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, 'It shall be well with you'; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No disaster shall come upon you.'"¹⁸ For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened?¹⁹ Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked.²⁰ The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly.²¹ "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet

they prophesied. ²² But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. ²³ “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?” (Jer 23:15–23)

God is condemning those who say they heard God say certain things, but they did not really hear from him. They're offering a peaceful message, but they're stripping out the offensive part of the message. They're saying, "Everything is going to be fine; calamity will not come on you." We hear this so commonly today: "God loves you. He just wants you to be happy and successful and fulfilled." This is supposed to be the message from God, but it is not. That is taking the Lord's name in vain.

WORSHIPING IN ANY WAY THAT DIMINISHES GOD'S GLORY

Another way to take the Lord's name in vain is to worship the Lord in any way that diminishes his glory.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the Lord. ³ Say to them, ‘If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the Lord, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the Lord.’” (Lev 22:1–3)

This is a warning to Aaron and the priests that how they handled the holy things that were part and parcel of God's prescribed worship was a serious issue. How they handled holy things was a serious enough issue that if they profaned his holy name by deviating from the prescription that he gave them, they would be executed. If this is how Old Testament priests handling physical things, how much more frightening would be the indictment on one who handled the Word of God?

The prophet Isaiah later condemned Israel's worship for failing on this very point:

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Bring no

more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. (Isa 1:11–15)

God had prescribed how he wanted to be worshiped and told the people of Israel to observe his commands. Yet, they became a burden to him. He was weary of bearing them. He said through the prophet Amos, “Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen” (Amos 5:23). I don’t want to see your festivals. I don’t want your prayers. I don’t want your offerings. I don’t want the animal sacrifices. I don’t even want your music. Your hearts aren’t right.

Jesus indicted the leaders of Israel in his day for the very same problem:

⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt 15:7–9)

You take the name of the Lord in vain any time you diminish his holy glory, and particularly, in an act of supposed worship. To take the Lord’s name in vain would be to cheapen it, to reduce it to insignificance, to reduce it to nothing, to make it frivolous, to make it shallow, to make it superficial, to empty it of its glory. Don’t ever do anything in his name that diminishes the glory of God, while naming him.

You may not blaspheme and curse God; you may not swear falsely; you may not make false claims to having heard from God yet speaking what is not true. But in our worship, we also must not do anything that diminishes his glory. Do not speak of him or sing of him or think of him in any way that robs him of his glory. Do not empty his name. Do not use his name in cheap forms of entertainment and emotional manipulation. Anyone who empties his glorious name in any way by having a divided heart should remember David’s words:

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. (Ps 24:3–4)

If you want to enter the holy hill and worship, you must have clean hands and a pure heart. And if you don't, you are in grave danger.

I think it's safe to say nothing is more glorious than the worship of God's people, and nothing is more dangerous than false worship. Everyone who cheapens, empties, or diminishes the holy

"We must use the holy name of God only with fear and reverence, so that we may rightly confess him, call upon him, and praise him in all our words and works."
(Heidelberg Catechism, Q99, 1563)

name of God offers vain worship. Everyone who expresses only external forms of worship without having been washed and sanctified and without having clean hands and a pure heart has taken the name of the Lord in vain, and is not guiltless.

This rich, deep, thorough truth concerning God is sadly missing today. We take our Lord's name in vain when we think less of him, when we know less of him. When we love him less, we take his name in vain. The history of the church has corrupted worship in a formal way, emptying God of the love that he deserves. The contemporary church has taken the name of the Lord in vain with its often informal worship. Both are vain worship.

Think About It

1. What are some ways churches in the past have taken the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
2. What are some ways that contemporary churches may take the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
3. In what ways have you personally taken the Lord's name in vain in how you have approached him in worship?

THE SOLUTION FOR VAIN WORSHIP

Yet God provides the solution for even vain worship:

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. ¹⁸ Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of

the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isa 1:15–20)

If your hands are covered with blood, speaking of sin, they need to be washed. You need salvation. Unforgiven sinners cannot worship; they cannot worship a God they do not know nor love.

But thanks be to God that Jesus died to forgive corrupt worship. Through the blood of Christ, sinners can be forgiven, brought into fellowship with God, and recreated to worship God as he has commanded.

Redeemed worshipers should be compelled to recognize that if worship is dangerous when it is vain—if we are in danger of chastisement even as believers, then we must do what God wants us to do in worship. And we find that revealed for us in Scripture.

TRUE WORSHIP

In contrast to vain worship, true worship is any and every expression of obedience, praise, honor, adoration, and gratitude offered to the true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves him. Christ communicates this understanding of true worship to the Samaritan woman.

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ 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. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (Jn 4:21–24)

THE SOURCE OF TRUE WORSHIP

First, Jesus is clear about the source of true worship: God himself. The Father is the author and initiator of worship. This is the heart of everything. In John 6:44, Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

This is the foundation of all truth regarding God and the gospel: God is a Father, that is, God is eternally in a relationship of love with other persons. The true God can love, because the true

God is three persons in one. There cannot be an attribute of love in a single deity who eternally has only lived with himself. That is why in Islam there is no such thing as love from God.

We have a God who is, first and foremost, a Father—a Father who loves his Son and is loved by his Son. This Father loved and chose the nation Israel. This Father, out of love, continues to choose his own eternal family. The true God is set apart from every other false deity.

This is why it is so foundational for us in the New Testament to hear that God so loved the world. God's love for the world is behind everything, but not just his love for the world—his love for his own Son. And he extends that love to those who keep his commandments. Jesus said, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (Jn 14:21).

"That in John, 'God is love' shows that there are more persons than one in the Deity: for it shows love to be essential and necessary to the Deity, so that his nature consists in it; and this supposes that there is an eternal and necessary object, because all love respects another, that is, the beloved." (Jonathan Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity")

The whole plan of salvation is based on the Father loving the Son, and through the Son and the Spirit loving a redeemed humanity that he brings to glory, so that forever he can lavish them with his own love and be loved by them. Jesus continued this theme later in his high priestly prayer:

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (Jn 17:22–23)

This Father, who by nature is love and has eternally expressed that love in the Trinity, is able to extend that love beyond the persons of the Trinity to unworthy sinners. When we talk about God and when we worship God, we go to him, not as a distant Creator, but as our Father—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is one with his Son.

This is salvation. You have been brought into a loving relationship with God the Father through the work of the Son redemptively and through the work of the Spirit in regeneration. The whole redemptive plan is the Father loving the Son and seeking a bride for the Son who can love the Son everlastingly.

Zēteō [seek] – "to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective." (BDAG)

This is the worship that the Father is seeking. This is that efficacious seeking as God craves the fellowship of the elect redeemed humanity, not only for the fulfillment of his own love, but for the

love of the Son to whom he gives those he loves as gifts. Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me” (Jn 6:37).

The whole point is that God is love; that love existed eternally in the Trinity and was extended through the work of redemption to unworthy sinners who were given to the Son as a bride who will forever praise and glorify him. That is the source of worship.

THE OBJECT OF TRUE WORSHIP

Second, Jesus identifies the object of true worship. As with the source of worship, the object of all true worship is the Father. God has drawn us to himself to worship him.

The God whom we are to worship is not only a Father, but as verse 24 says, he is a spirit. He is the invisible God (Col 1:15), in contrast to the physical nature of man (Jn 1:18; 3:6). The fact that God is invisible is one of the central reasons that God himself must initiate worship, for man would never know or comprehend the invisible God except that God revealed himself. Both the beginning and end of worship is by necessity God.

Meanings of *pneuma* [spirit]

1. air in movement, blowing, breathing (Heb 1:7)
2. that which animates or gives life to the body, breath (Matt 27:50)
3. a part of human personality (Lk 1:47)
4. an independent noncorporeal being (Jn 4:24)
5. the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11)

THE LOCATION OF TRUE WORSHIP

This leads, then, to the location of true worship. Since God is a spirit, he is not restricted to any one physical location. As Stephen said,

Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made by hands, as the prophet says,⁴⁹ Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?⁵⁰ Did not my hand make all these things? (Acts 7:48–50)

This is why Jesus said that an hour was coming when true worshipers would not worship in Samaria on Mt. Garizim or in Jerusalem. The Samaritan temple on Garizim had been obliterated in 125 BC, and in AD 70 the temple of Jerusalem would be destroyed. Even the legitimate Old

Testament worship that was associated with the temple was going to disappear in favor of a kind of spiritual worship that had always been God's will throughout the whole Old Testament.

Since God is a spirit, worship is not tied to a place. In fact, in the New Testament, the new temple is the living temple of the church. We are a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5). We are the temple of the living God (Eph 2:21–22). God in his Spirit lives within us, and the new temple is any gathering of the people of God. When we come together, we constitute the true new covenant temple.

THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

Finally, Jesus defines the nature of worship as in spirit and truth (v. 24). True worship is in spirit—in the human soul from the heart, and in truth—the knowledge of the true revelation that God has given in Scripture. It is wholehearted, whole-souled loving worship of God in the fullness of the revelation that gives him all the glory he deserves.

Think About It

1. How would recognizing that God the Father is the source and object of true worship affect how we worship?
2. Does the fact that worship is not limited to a geographical location minimize the importance of physically gathering for worship? Why or why not?
3. What aspects of our worship facilitate worship in truth? What aspects facilitate worship in spirit?

CONCLUSION

Jesus had a conversation with a Samaritan woman, and even she knew that her relationship to God could be defined only by worship. God is the source. He seeks the worshipers. He's the object, the one who is Father, the one who is eternal Spirit. And while there are places where we assemble, the spirit of worship is life itself, because God is everywhere with us and in us. And the nature of worship is from the human spirit, empowered by the Holy Spirit, pouring forth the love of the truth. That's the worship the Father seeks.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for seeking us. Thank you for craving a redeemed humanity whom you chose before the foundation of the world. In love, you predestined us. In love, you sent Christ to die for us. In love, you gave us your Spirit, so that he might shed love abroad in our hearts, And we might be marked by the fruit of the Spirit, which is love. Thank you that you have revealed yourself to us, and the purpose and point of knowing about you is so that we might love you with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Even when we were yet sinners, Christ died for us because you loved us. You love us still in our unworthiness. We want to love you and your worthiness. Make us true worshipers. Forgive us for our sinful emptying of your glory when we have diminished it in how we have spoken or thought or acted with relationship to you. May we ever live and speak and think to the praise of your glory. By the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus, we ask these things. Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Aniol, Scott. *Worship in Song: A Biblical Approach to Music and Worship*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 2009.

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MacArthur, John. *Worship: The Ultimate Priority*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2012.

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STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 4: TRUE WORSHIP

John MacArthur

MAIN POINT: True worship is any expression of obedience, praise, honor, adoration, and gratitude offered to the true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves him.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 4:19–24

MEMORY: “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.” (Jn 4:23)

WORSHIP BASED ON GOD’S COMMANDS

Think About It

1. Based on God's commandments regarding worship in the Old Testament, what would render worship vain?
2. How important are external acts of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.
3. How important are internal aspects of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.

VAIN WORSHIP

Think About It

4. What are some ways churches in the past have taken the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
5. What are some ways that contemporary churches may take the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
6. In what ways have you personally taken the Lord's name in vain in how you have approached him in worship?

|| TRUE WORSHIP

| THE SOURCE OF TRUE WORSHIP

| THE OBJECT OF TRUE WORSHIP

THE LOCATION OF TRUE WORSHIP

THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

Think About It

1. How would recognizing that God the Father is the source and object of true worship affect how we worship?
2. Does the fact that worship is not limited to a geographical location minimize the importance of physically gathering for worship? Why or why not?
3. What aspects of our worship facilitate worship in truth? What aspects facilitate worship in spirit?



LESSON 5: DRAWING NEAR TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST

Scott Aniol

MAIN POINT: Worship is drawing near to communion with God through Christ by faith.

MAIN PASSAGES: Hebrews 10:19–25, 12:18–24

MEMORY: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

The Lord Jesus Christ gave the church its commission before he ascended to his Father:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt 28:19–20)

How public worship fits into this commission is often a matter of confusion. On the one hand are those who make every church service an evangelistic meeting and consider worship something we’ll do in heaven some day. On the other hand are those who insist that the purpose of a church service is for believers to authentically worship God, and evangelism should happen outside the four walls of the church building.

However, the relationship between worship and evangelism is actually more complementary than either of these perspectives imply. Rather than pitting worship and evangelism against each other, we should understand that worship and the gospel are fundamentally connected.

THE CALL TO DRAW NEAR IN WORSHIP

(Heb 10:22)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

This idea of drawing near—*proserchomai*—is an important focus of the book of Hebrews. This is evident by its presence in the major literary climaxes of the book. Hebrews seems to have three primary literary climaxes. Here in chapter 10:22 we find the second of these climaxes. The first is found in 4:16, which says, “Let us then with confidence draw near (same term as chapter 10) to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” And the final climax of the book is 12:22, which says, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” and here that phrase “you have come” is a translation of the same term, *proserchomai*, translated “draw near” in our text. The concept of drawing near is critical in this book.

Proserchomai [draw near] “is used exclusively of an approach to God. The writer compares Israel’s approach to God in cultic ceremony to the Christian’s experience in worship.” (William Lane, Hebrews, 460)

“Draw Near” in Hebrews

- 4:16 “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”
- 7:25 “Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.”
- 10:1 “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.”
- 10:22 “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
- 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”
- 12:18 “For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest.”
- 12:22 “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.”
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DRAWING NEAR TO GOD IN WORSHIP

So what is the importance of this command? What does “drawing near” mean? This word, *proserchomai*, is a term that means more than just a casual coming toward something. Rather, it refers specifically to an approach to God, and we can see this by how it is used in the book; we find commands to draw near to God, draw near to the throne of grace, and here in our text, verse 19 implies that we are to draw near to the holy place.

What is clear that this drawing near is an entrance into the presence of God himself, and throughout the book of Hebrews the author compares this idea of drawing near to the Hebrew worship practices—they are in our text as well; in verse 19, the “holy place” to which we are to draw near refers to the “holy place” in the temple. We also find temple terms like “the veil,” “high priest,” “sprinkling” and “washing”; these each connote Old Testament worship terminology. In other words, drawing near to God is what the author defines as the essence of worship.

Worship language in the book of Hebrews:
draw near, temple, priest, high priest, holy places, curtain, sacrifices, intercession, gifts, tent, most holy place, mercy seat, washings, blood, rites, sprinkle, offering

This idea of drawing near to God in worship permeates the storyline of Scripture. It is what Adam and Eve enjoyed as they walked with God in the cool of the day (Gen 2:8). It is described in Exodus 19:17 when Moses “brought the people out of the camp to *meet God*” at the foot of Mt. Sinai. He had told Pharaoh to let the

people go so that they might worship their God in the wilderness, and this is exactly what they intended to do at Sinai. It is what Psalm 100 commands of the Hebrews in temple worship when it says, “Come into his presence with singing and into his courts with praise.” It is what Isaiah experienced as he entered the heavenly throne room of God and saw him high and lifted up. To draw near to God is to enter his very presence, to bask in his glory, to have perfect fellowship with him. To draw near to God in this way is the essence of worship.

And it is God who calls us to do this! We do not come in worship to draw near to God of our own initiative; God himself has invited us to draw near to him.

Think About It

1. What would this idea of “drawing near” to God mean for our understanding of what it means to worship God?
2. If the essence of worship is that God has called us to draw near to him, who initiates worship?
3. If God is holy, who can draw near to him?

WE CANNOT DRAW NEAR BECAUSE OF SIN

But any reader of this invitation to draw near would have immediately recognized its inherent problem—this God to whom we are supposed to draw near is holy; he cannot tolerate sin. Yet we are sinful.

The fall of mankind into sin destroyed the possibility of drawing near to him. After Adam and Eve sinned, they no longer enjoyed the privilege of walking with God in the garden; instead they hid from him in fear and desperately tried to cover their guilt with leaves. And ever since that time, any attempt to draw near to God results in a profound recognition of guilt and unworthiness. The Israelites experienced this when they drew near to Mt. Sinai; when they witnessed the majesty and greatness and white-hot holiness of God, they trembled in fear and begged Moses to go in their behalf. This is the reason that although God inhabited the holy place in the tabernacle and later the temple, no person could enter his presence except the high priest once a year on the Day of Atonement. This is what Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord high and lifted up in all of his glory and holiness and cried out with, “Woe is me! For I am undone; for 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!”

The problem with the command in our text is that we have no right to draw near to God; we do not have access to him because of our sin. The only way God enabled people to partially draw near to him is through temporary sacrifices, and even then there are barriers keeping people from the very presence of God himself; there is a veil hiding the holy place, only the high priest can enter there and only once a year, and we know what happens if you even touch the symbol of God’s presence, the ark—Remember Uzzah? Even Psalm 100 calls people to come only into the outer courts of the temple, not into the actual presence of God. The people had no direct access.

In fact, we have in our Old Testament an account of a man who dared enter the presence of the Lord even though he had no right. 2 Chronicles 26 records the reign of King Uzziah. For the most part, Uzziah was a noble king who did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and God rewarded him by giving him many military victories. But the text tells us that “when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God and entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.” Here was a great man, a righteous man, the leader of God’s people whom God had blessed, but he had no right to enter the temple; he had no legitimate access.

Yet he entered anyway. In fact, he entered the holy place itself and offered up incense on the altar. And the priests ran in after him and begged him to leave; they confronted him and told him that he had no right to enter the temple. They said, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the Lord God.” But he was angry and continued what he was doing.

And we're told that while he stood in the sanctuary and before the altar of incense, and while he still had the censer of incense in his hand, and while he was expressing his anger at the priests, leprosy suddenly began to break out on his forehead! The priests saw it; and they carried him out of the sanctuary as quickly as they could. It was clear that the Lord had struck him for having dared to draw near to the holy place in such a presumptuous way; and the Bible tells us "King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was cut off from the house of the LORD" (2 Chron 26:21). It was an act of mercy from God that the king didn't die on the spot! Others in Bible history HAVE died for such boldness before God!

The point is that we cannot obey this command. God commands us to draw near, but this entering into the presence of God to worship him is not possible.

Think About It

1. Discuss the incident of Uzzah and the ark from 1 Chronicles 13. What did David fail to do in his attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem? Why was Uzzah killed?
2. Discuss the incident of King Uzziah from 2 Chronicles 26. What was Uzziah's core problem?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1–13. Notice the relationship between Isaiah's vision and King Uzziah. What implications for worship can be drawn from this passage?

THE BASIS FOR DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:19–21)

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God . . .

WE HAVE ACCESS INTO THE HOLY PLACE

However, our text provides for us the solution to the problem for two reasons. The first is found in verse 19: The text reads,

. . . since we have confidence to enter the holy places . . . draw near.

Now the term translated “confidence” in the text has the idea of free expression that is only possible when one has open access to someone. “Since we have access to enter the holy place . . .” So this verse is specifically addressing our problem. God commands us to draw near to him, but because of our sin we do not have access to him. But this verse tells us that such access *is* possible; it *is* possible to have access to the holy place of God’s presence.

“Parrhesia [confidence] works itself out in the confidence and openness which need not be ashamed when it stands before the Judge.” (TDNT)

Here is the first term in our text that is meant to conjure up images of Old Testament worship. The holy place was that most sacred of places in the tabernacle and temple. As you know, there were several boundaries to access God in the Old Testament. The first was the wall that enclosed the outer court of the temple, then was the wall of the temple itself, and finally the veil that hid the holy place where the Ark of God dwelt. In each successive stage, fewer and fewer people had access. No Jew would ever even consider entering the holy place; they knew what happened when Uzziah did that.

In fact, even today in Jerusalem, there is a sign at the temple mount that forbids Jews from entering that area, because they don’t know for sure where the holy place is, and no Jew would ever put his foot on the holy place. Orthodox Jews have a fear still today of ever going into the presence of God.

But this verse tells us that we have access, not just to the outer court, not just into the entrance of the temple, but beyond the veil into the very presence of God. How can this be? Keep reading: “by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.”

Access to God is possible through a sacrifice, and this is no ordinary sacrifice; this is the vicarious, substitutionary atonement of the Son of God. At the beginning of Hebrews 10, the author revealed the insufficiency of animal sacrifices to purify those who come to God in worship:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

But *this* sacrifice *can* perfect those who draw near. This Jesus is fully man, and thus he can stand as our substitute, and he is fully God, and thus he can pay an eternal punishment to an eternal, holy God that no normal man could. And because of the perfection and eternity of this sacrifice, it need not be offered day after day to atone for sin; it is offered *one time* and the complete wrath of God is fully appeased.

This is what God pictured when he slew the animal in the garden and covered Adam and Eve's guilt. This is what was pictured when Moses offered a sacrifice at the foot of Mt. Sinai so that the elders of the people could approach God. This is what was pictured each year in Israel on the Day of Atonement when an animal was sacrificed and the high priest entered the holy place to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. This is what was pictured when the seraph took a burning coal from the altar and placed it on Isaiah's lips, saying, "your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

And this is pictured no more beautifully than with what happened at the moment of Christ's death. The gospel accounts of the crucifixion tell us that Jesus cried out with a loud voice and gave up his spirit, and at that exact moment, the veil of the temple was torn in two—as if that veil was the body of the Son of God himself prohibiting entrance into the presence of a holy God—and that access that had been lost by the fall of man is now restored! There is now a new and living way to draw near to God, and that way is his Son.

This phrase, "new and living way," paints a beautiful picture as well. The word translated "new" here is not the typical word that would have been used. It is a word that originally meant, "freshly slaughtered." He was freshly slaughtered and yet he is living! He rose from the dead having defeated sin and death. And now we have access to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by a freshly slaughtered yet living way. Therefore, draw near.

Prosphatos [*new*] contains the root "phen" meaning "to slay, kill"; thus "freshly slain."

WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

But there is another reason in our text that explains to us how we have access to God, and that is found in verse 21: It reads "and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near." In the Old Testament economy, the only person on earth allowed to actually enter the

"The real agent in all true worship is Jesus Christ. He is our great high priest and ascended Lord, the one true worshiper who unites us to himself by the Spirit in an act of memory and in a life of communion, as he lifts us up by word and sacrament into the very triune life of God."
(James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*, 17)

presence of God, and that only once a year, was the high priest. But this verse tells us that not only is Jesus the perfect sacrifice that gains us access to God, but he is also the high priest who offers the sacrifice; he is priest *and* victim. And now because of our relationship to this great high priest, we can draw near to God in worship.

Hebrews 7:25 emphasizes the fact that Christ's high priestly ministry of intercession makes such an approach possible: "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

So God commands us to draw near to him in worship, but because of our sinful condition, this is only possible through the shed blood of Christ on our behalf and through Christ's high priestly ministry. Jesus Christ is the only basis for drawing near to God in worship.

Think About It

1. Discuss what was necessary for an Old Testament Jew to draw near to the presence of God in the temple.
2. Read Leviticus 16. What can the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement teach us about the nature of the gospel and worship?
3. Consider the popular title of "worship leader." Based on what we have seen in Hebrews 10, who is the only true worship leader?

THE MEANS OF DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:22)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

But our text does not only explain to us the basis for drawing near to God in worship; it also tells us the means of drawing near. The basis for drawing near to God is the sacrifice of Christ, but the means of drawing near is sincerity and faith in Christ.

"True" in the text literally means "real" or "sincere." God does not want worshipers who draw near out of duty or habit. He desires those who will draw near with sincerity out of a deep longing for communion with him.

But not only are we to draw near with a sincere heart, we are also to draw near in full assurance of faith. Faith is absolutely necessary in order to draw near to God, and understanding the nature of faith is very important for our grasp of the essence of Christian worship.

Of course, we need look no further than the book of Hebrews for the clearest definition of what faith is. According to Hebrews 11:1,

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:6 emphasizes the need for faith in coming to God in worship:

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

This is the essence of faith: belief in what we cannot see.

You see, the God to whom we are drawing near in worship is one whom we cannot see with our physical eyes right now. We cannot see him, we cannot touch him, we cannot feel him. We do not experience God with any of our physical senses, and so the only means to approach him in worship is with faith—with full assurance that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him, with full assurance he will keep his promise that if we draw near to him, he will draw near to us. Only by faith can we have confidence that when we draw near to God through Christ, we are actually in his presence even though we can't see him.

Drawing near to God through Christ in faith means that we do not depend upon any physical evidence to give us assurance that we are truly worshipping. To worship in faith means that we do not define worship by a physical experience, feeling, or any other tangible proof. To worship in faith means that we believe in the sufficiency of Christ's death on our behalf to gain us acceptance into God's presence, we follow his Word for how he wants us to draw near to him through reading the Scriptures and prayer and singing, and then we simply trust that we are truly worshipping regardless of any physical factors. Worship is not tied to any physical location, ritual, ceremony, element, or feeling. Worship is simply a spiritual drawing near to God through Jesus Christ, and in order to do this, we must have a full assurance of faith.

"His meaning is that there are realities for which we have no material evidence though they are not the less real for that. Faith enables us to know that they exist and, while we have no certainty apart from faith, faith does give us genuine certainty." (Leon Morris, Hebrews, 113)

You see, this may have been somewhat of a challenge for the Hebrew converts to Christianity that the author of Hebrews was addressing. As Jews, when they thought of worship, they thought of it in terms of temple, animal sacrifices, and ceremonies. Yes, worship has always been at its essence a heart response toward God in faith, but in the old dispensation, when the veil of separation between men and the presence of God was still intact, worship was tied to the temple and the Law and visible, physical expressions.

But once Christ came, once God in flesh drew near to his people, once Jesus Christ himself became the sacrifice and the veil was torn in two, worship became no longer tied to a physical expression. Christ said so himself in John 4: "The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit [that is something immaterial] and in truth."

Something similar is expressed in the final climax of the book of Hebrews at the end of chapter 12. The author says in verse 18,

For you have not [drawn near] to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

The author uses Mt. Sinai as a representative example of the essence of Old Testament worship. Notice how the author describes Old Testament worship: it is physical—it can be touched; there are visual sensations—burning fire and darkness and gloom and storm; it has aural sensations—the sound of a trumpet blast and actual words spoken from God Himself. In other words, Old Testament worship was very sensory. This is what we naturally think of when we consider Old Testament worship. There was a beautiful temple that shone brightly in Jerusalem. There was incense and burnt offerings—you could smell this worship. There was elaborate priestly adornments and gold and fine linens—you could see this worship. You actually had to lay your hand on the animal as it was being slaughtered, and then you'd be given meat from that animal to eat—you could feel this worship; you could taste this worship. It was all very physical and sensory. It created an experience of the senses that permeated the whole being. This was a frightening experience according to the text, but in some ways it perhaps made worship seem more “real.”

But the author says, now because of Christ, you have not drawn near to that mountain that can be touched; rather, in verse 22,

But you have [drawn near] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.

Worship is no longer tied to an earthly, physical location; now, because Jesus Christ is our great high priest, we can actually worship through him in the heavenly temple itself—not yet physically, but spiritually. We don't call God down to us when we worship; he calls us up to join in with the heavenly beings who worship him day and night.

This is why we need faith to draw near to God in worship. The text tells us that we can actually worship in heaven with Christ, but we can't see that and we can't smell that and we can't feel that. We must simply trust that it is so.

But drawing near to God by faith in this way can often be difficult even for us today, because we are physical beings and so naturally we want physical proof. We naturally want to be able to point

to something, whether it is a location or a ceremony or a tradition or a ritual or a feeling, and say, “That’s worship.” And so when we attempt to obey this command to draw near to God in worship and nothing physical happens, we begin to doubt. Have I really drawn near? Am I in the presence of God? Am I really worshipping?

And then we end up needing other things to give us confidence that we’re really worshipping, whether it be a certain kind of music or an atmosphere that creates a certain aura, or a particular place; and if we don’t have those things, then we don’t “feel” like we’re worshipping. But the author in chapter 10 commands us to draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of *faith* in things we do not experience with the physical senses—that’s the definition of faith.

The point is this: If we cannot draw near to God in worship simply with nothing more than faith in Jesus Christ, then perhaps we are not worshipping at all. Certainly when we worship there will be

If we cannot draw near to God in worship simply with nothing more than faith in Jesus Christ, then perhaps we are not worshipping at all.

physical feelings to one degree or another—we are physical beings and there is nothing wrong with feeling. But as Christians, we worship through Christ by faith and not by sight. We worship by faith and not by feeling.

But also, drawing near to God through Christ by faith can be often difficult because of guilt. Any one of us who is genuinely honest acknowledges that even as children of God, when we consider the prospect of drawing near to the presence of God, we know that we are not worthy. Even just this morning you may have snapped at your children or ridiculed your wife or broken the speed limit or had a demeaning thought about someone else in this room; how dare you assume that you can just waltz in here and draw near to the presence of God? Who do you think you are?

Verse 22 tells you who you are:

... with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

If you are a follower of Christ, you are one who has had your heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and your body washed with pure water. These expressions are flavored with Old Testament purification ideas: your guilty conscience has been cleansed; your filthy sinful flesh has been washed. This assures you that no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, if you are in Christ, God accepts you; you have every right to draw near to God because of Christ. We can sing with Charles Wesley, “Arise, my soul, arise! Shake off your guilty fears. A bleeding sacrifice in your behalf appears!”

This is why it is so important that whenever we draw near to worship the God of holiness, we must acknowledge our unworthiness to be in God's presence and confess our sins to him, but then hear a clear proclamation of the gospel: "In Christ your sins are forgiven. The Lord be praised!" My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought; my sin, not in part, but the whole was nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

Think About It

1. Why is faith necessary for Christian worship?
2. Discuss reasons you should worship even if you don't "feel" like it.
3. Discuss implications for corporate worship that come from the wonderful truth that when we worship through Christ, we are joining in with the true worship of heaven.

CONCLUSION

We are sinners. But because of the blood of Jesus, because of the new and living way that he opened for his people through his flesh, because he is our great high priest, we can have confidence to draw near to him in worship.

Do you? If not, God invites you to draw near to him through his Son's shed blood on your behalf by faith. Trust Christ; he is the only way to God.

Worship is possible only through the gospel, and the purpose and end of the gospel is worship.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, we acknowledge to you that we are sinners who are unworthy to enter your presence. But we praise you that through the blood of your Son, you have opened a new and living way that enables us to come boldly into your presence to give you praise and honor and glory, joining our voices with the angels and saints in heaven in worship of your holy name. Let us always be faithful to draw near to you through Christ by faith, and help us to faithfully gather more worshipers through the proclamation of the gospel. Through Jesus Christ our Savior we pray. Amen.

|| **FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

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STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 5: DRAWING NEAR TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST

Scott Aniol

MAIN POINT: Worship is drawing near to communion with God through Christ by faith.

MAIN PASSAGES: Hebrews 10:19–25, 12:18–24

MEMORY: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

THE CALL TO DRAW NEAR IN WORSHIP
(Heb 10:22)

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD IN WORSHIP

Think About It

1. What would this idea of “drawing near” to God mean for our understanding of what it means to worship God?
2. If the essence of worship is that God has called us to draw near to him, who initiates worship?
3. If God is holy, who can draw near to him?

WE CANNOT DRAW NEAR BECAUSE OF SIN

Think About It

1. Discuss the incident of Uzzah and the ark from 1 Chronicles 13. What did David fail to do in his attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem? Why was Uzzah killed?
2. Discuss the incident of King Uzziah from 2 Chronicles 26. What was Uzziah’s core problem?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1–13. Notice the relationship between Isaiah’s vision and King Uzziah. What implications for worship can be drawn from this passage?

THE BASIS FOR DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:19–21)

WE HAVE ACCESS INTO THE HOLY PLACE

WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Think About It

- 1.** Discuss what was necessary for an Old Testament Jew to draw near to the presence of God in the temple.
- 2.** Read Leviticus 16. What can the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement teach us about the nature of the gospel and worship?
- 3.** Consider the popular title of “worship leader.” Based on what we have seen in Hebrews 10, who is the only true worship leader?

THE MEANS OF DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:22)

Think About It

- 1.** Why is faith necessary for Christian worship?
- 2.** Discuss reasons you should worship even if you don't "feel" like it.
- 3.** Discuss implications for corporate worship that come from the wonderful truth that when we worship through Christ, we are joining in with the true worship of heaven.



LESSON 6: WORSHIPING GOD REVERENTLY

Tom Ascol

MAIN POINT: God expects people created in his image to come before him reverently.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

MEMORY: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.” (Ecc 5:1)

It is easy to enter corporate worship with God’s people without giving much thought to what we are doing there. Demands of life—the difficulties, responsibilities, and pleasures of life—can distract us from having the kind of serious thought we ought to have when we come together to worship. Yet, the true worship of the true God is something that each one of us desperately needs.

We were made for worship. We can’t function well in this world without worship. Without worship, we are easily swept along by the currents of this world’s values and ideals. But regularly coming into the presence of God, with the people of God, helps us to see through the mirage of what this world portrays is valuable, right, good, and desirable. Worship reorients us. It refreshes us. It reminds us of who God is and who we are. Worship helps us to remember what life is truly about.

Worship also matters to God. He cares about how we think about him. He cares about what we say and what we do when we come to worship him. In fact, he not only cares about our actions and our words, he also cares about our thoughts, our attitudes, and our demeanor. That’s why he has spoken so clearly in the Bible about worship. He intends for our worship to be regulated by his Word and not by our own whims.

So the Bible prescribes what we are to do when we come before him in worship, and the one overarching requirement that God makes of those who worship him tends to be the one thing that is so often lacking and neglected in modern approaches to worship: reverence. God expects people created in his image to come before him reverently.

That’s what the wise man is saying to us in Ecclesiastes 5:1–7. Up to this point, the author of Ecclesiastes has been giving us reflections on life in this fallen world. He looks at life under the sun as it really is. He acknowledges that he has pursued all sorts of things to try to make sense

out of this life. He concludes it's all vanity, until he remembers God and brings God back into the picture. Then he sees meaning and purpose. Then he sees reality in this fallen world.

But now in chapter 5, having given us some of those reflections, he begins to give us exhortations. He admonishes us repeatedly in this text regarding how we are to approach God in worship. And you can summarize all the admonitions of this passage by simply acknowledging that we are to worship our God reverently.

The author presented four specific admonitions, which if we heed, will lead us to reverent worship.

BE CAREFUL HOW YOU ENTER INTO WORSHIP (Ecc 5:1)

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.

First, be careful how you enter into worship. Remember that it is to *the house of God* that you are going. We are entering into God's presence when we come to worship. And so as we do so, we shouldn't enter into it casually. We shouldn't go to corporate worship as if we're just dropping by to say hello to a friend at his house. Rather, we are coming to the place where God has promised to be present.

WE ARE ENTERING GOD'S PRESENCE

In the Old Testament, God promised to manifest his presence in the tabernacle, and then later in the temple. Yet, the construction of both the tabernacle and the temple were designed to limit access to God and to prohibit anyone from entering into his presence casually. In fact, the common Jewish man or woman could not personally enter into the holiest place of the tabernacle or temple for worship. Old

"And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." (Exod 40:35)

Testament Jews could only enter into the holiest place of worship representatively through their high priest. And that high priest could only do that having offered up a goat and taking the blood of that goat with him into the holiest place. And he could only do that one day of the year.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is revealed to be our high priest, and by his life and death and resurrection, he has provided direct access to God for all who turn from sin and trust in him.

Those who trust Jesus can enter into God's presence personally and directly. We're no longer dependent on a building or any particular location, because collectively, we are God's building (1 Cor 3:16); we are his temple (2 Cor 6:16). So today, whenever or wherever the Church of Jesus Christ gathers for worship that is where God promises to be present. As Jesus, put it when he was teaching on the church, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mat 18:20).

"Temple" Language in the New Testament

- Eph 2:20–22 "... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."
- 1 Cor 3:16 "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?"
- 2 Cor 6:16 "We are the temple of the living God."
- 1 Tim 3:15 "... you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God."
- Eph 2:19 "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."
- Heb 10:21 "We have a great high priest over the house of God."

So, what this means is that when we gather on the Lord's Day weekly with the church to worship the Lord, we must do so with the awareness that we are entering into the very presence of God—the God who created us, the God who sustains us moment by moment, who keeps our hearts beating and our brains functioning. We are gathering before this God who not only created us, but who through his Son the Lord Jesus has redeemed us. He delivered up the Son of his love to death, so that we, his creatures who had rebelled against him, might be reconciled to him. And as reconciled children, we enter into his presence for worship. This God has granted us an audience, so we must guard our steps as we approach him in worship.

WE COME TO HEAR WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY

How are we to guard our steps when we approach him? We do that by coming to hear what God has to say to us. As the author says in verse 1,

... to draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools.

The offering of sacrifices in the temple in the Old Testament was characterized by silence. The worshiper was quiet. The priest would read from the Law, give an explanation, and pray. The people would respond in songs, and the priest then would pronounce a blessing on them.

Fools however, would go through these motions thoughtlessly. We see in the Old Testament how God upbraids this kind of foolish worship time and again. For example, Malachi 1 presents a description of this type of foolish, thoughtless worship. After the Lord has reminded his people that he intends for his name to be regarded as holy among them, he intends for them to honor him as the true and living God, he says in verse 13,

“But you say ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it,” says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering. “Shall I accept that from your hand?” says the Lord. Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. “For I am a great King,” says the Lord of hosts, “and my name will be feared among the nations.” (Mal 1:13–14)

The worshipers were supposed to offer the best of their flock to the Lord in worship, but instead, they offered him what was convenient. They offered him that which cost them little. And the text says it was the sacrifice of fools—it is evil, even though the worshipers didn’t think they were doing anything evil. Too often, we approach worship as a matter of convenience rather than as a matter of our need to meet with and hear from God.

Have you ever decided just to skip out on worship on the Lord’s Day, because something came up that was better? It’s easy for us to fall into that way of thinking, isn’t it?

WE MUST PREPARE TO MEET GOD

The concern that is expressed in Ecclesiastes goes beyond what we do in times of worship; it also includes the way that we prepare for worship. If we are to enter into worship thoughtfully—reverently—then we must plan and prepare to do that.

Have you ever shown up for worship drowsy or lethargic because you decided there were activities that were more important for you to do on Saturday that would drain you of energy, and you decided that you would rather be lethargic on Sunday than miss out on those activities on Saturday? Have you ever entered into worship thoughtlessly, just because it’s the next thing on your calendar? It’s easy, isn’t it, for us to fall into these patterns? The author of Ecclesiastes is calling us to wake up and to be guarded against that, to be careful how we enter into the presence of the Lord to worship. We come, the text says, to listen—to hear and to heed what God has to say to us as we meet.

This is the very reason that we must emphasize the Word of God in our times of worship. Pastors need to make sure that the services of worship that they lead are rich with the Word of God. Use

“Devote yourself to the **public reading of Scripture.**” (1 Tim 4:13)

“**Preach the Word.**” (2 Tim 4:2)

“Let the **Word of Christ** dwell in you richly ... **singing** psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” (Col 3:16)

“If you abide in me, and **my words** abide in you, **ask** whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (Jn 15:7)

the Word of God to call people to worship. Let them hear God’s Word read carefully, with preparation and expression, so that the meaning of the text is made plain simply by the reading of it. And let’s not only read the Word, let’s sing the Word, so that the songs that we offer up to God are grounded in God’s Word. Let’s pray the Word, so that we’re not just freewheeling with thoughts that come

to our minds as we talk to God, but we’re having our thoughts trained by the Word as we offer up our petitions and praises to him in prayer. Let’s enact the Word in the sacraments that we are given in baptism and in the Lord’s Supper, so that the Word of God is portrayed dramatically. Let’s preach the Word, so that we are careful to set forth what God says. We come together knowing that we need to hear from him.

Jesus emphasizes this in the New Testament, nowhere more clearly than in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. In all seven of his letters to the churches he says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” When you gather to worship, do you consider what the Spirit intends to speak? He intends to take the Word and communicate it to listening ears and hearts. Do you pray, “Oh God, give me ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to this church on this day”?

If we would do that, if we would be careful on Saturday night and Sunday morning to take time and to plead with God that he would give us and all those we’ll gather with ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the church, it could transform the way that we approach God in worship.

Be careful how you enter into worship.

Think About It

1. What are some implications of the fact that the New Testament calls the gathered church “God’s temple” and “God’s household”?
2. What are some practical ways we can come to hear what God has to say when we gather for worship?
3. In what ways have you come to worship thoughtlessly? What can you do to better prepare to meet with God?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY IN WORSHIP

(Ecc 5:2–3)

Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few. ³ For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

Second, be careful what you say in worship. From warning us about our attitude and approach, the preacher gets even more specific in verse 2 by warning us about the words we use in worship. We are to be thoughtful and cautious in the words that we speak to God. We are to be careful about speech at all times. Jesus says it very clearly:

I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak. (Matt 12:36)

James 1:19 says we're to be slow to speak, quick to listen. Proverbs 10:19 teaches,

When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

This care with speech is especially important in what we say to God in worship. We should be thoughtful about how we talk in the presence of God. Jesus instructs us about this specifically with regard to the way that we pray in Matthew 6. He says,

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt 6:7–8)

We need to remember who God is, and remember who we are, as Ecclesiastes 5:2 says, “For God is in heaven and you are on earth.” That is not a statement about geography, that is a statement about theology. It is a reminder that God is God and that we are his creatures. He has adopted us into his family, but he is our Father who is in heaven. When we come to the Lord's presence for worship, we need to be mindful of the fact that we are creatures entering into the

presence of the one who created us. We are the redeemed entering into the presence of the one who has redeemed us. Our lives are in his hands.

We're not doing God a favor when we show up. He grants us an audience. He condescends to us, so we must come before him reverently. We need to be thoughtful. We need to be wise. We need to be careful in what we say to him, what we sing to him, and what is preached in his name.

What this means is that we're not free to simply wing it when we come to worship. We can't honor the Lord and enter into worship thoughtlessly, casually, doing what we want, saying what we want.

As verse 3 states,

... for a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words.

When you let yourself get overwhelmed with business and activity, you provide fuel for daydreaming, for letting your mind drift away from proper thoughts about God. And when you simply multiply your words without thinking, you're speaking, the text says, with the voice of a fool.

God cares about what we say and do when we come before him in worship. This is a lesson that was painfully made evident to Aaron and the people of Israel on a day that is described for us in Leviticus 10:1–3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" And Aaron held his peace.

Nadab and Abihu did not intentionally provoke God; they were simply going to do it the way they had done it before. And so they just casually, according to their own whims, offered up strange fire, and God immediately consumed them before their father's eyes. We may be tempted to think that God was too harsh. Yet God emphasizes his holiness, his determination to be worshiped as God.

God has not changed his determination on how he is to be worshiped from that day to this. We are to enter into worship carefully. We're to be careful of what we say in worship.

Think About It

1. In what ways do we sometimes speak rashly in worship?
2. What does Leviticus 10:1 mean when it says that Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord?
3. What are some measures we can take to guard what we say in worship?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU VOW IN WORSHIP (Ecc 5:4–6)

When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶ Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?

Third, we are to be careful what we vow in worship. The text says, pay what you vow. This is a reference to the Old Testament law concerning vows found in Deuteronomy 23:21–22:

If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. ²² But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin.

In other words, keep promises that you make to God. Don't thoughtlessly declare your loyalties and resolutions to live for him only to forsake those vows later. It's better not to make a vow to God than to make it and break it. God takes the promises that we make to him seriously, and failure to fulfill what we have promised is sin. If you fail to keep your word that you've made to God, then you will be tempted to justify your sin of not keeping your word, thereby compounding your sin in God's eyes (v. 6).

The Bible doesn't forbid us from making vows. What it does forbid is us making sinful or thoughtless vows, or using vows and oaths to get out of legitimate responsibilities. That's what the Pharisees did for which Jesus upbraided them in Mark 7, when they took vows and dedicated all their possessions to God, so their aging parents would just have to fend for themselves. It was a selfish and sinful ploy.

But not all vows were ploys. In the Old Testament, vows would sometimes be made to God as an expression of devotion to him. For example, Hannah vowed if he would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the priestly work. And God heard, and in grace granted her request, and she in faithfulness kept her vow.

Vows in the Old Testament

Gen 21:34 Abraham swore an oath to Abimelech.
Heb 6:13 God swore an oath to Abraham.
Gen 28:20 Jacob made a vow to the Lord.
1 Sam 1:11 Hannah vowed a vow to the Lord.
2 Chron 15:14 Asa and the people swore an oath to the Lord to reform their worship.

Here's the point: God desires us to worship him from the heart, to keep the promises that we make to him as his children. This a call for integrity and honesty in worship, to say what we mean, and to mean what we say.

In the first century church, the church of Jerusalem was given a graphic illustration of how seriously God takes this. Many early Christians were selling their lands or possessions and bringing the proceeds to the apostles, so that those who were suffering and impoverished might be cared for. But although Ananias and Sapphira evidently give the full proceeds from their land, they lied and only gave a portion.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him. (Acts 5:1–6)

Later Sapphira, complicit in the lie, suffered the same fate. God wants integrity in worship. We should not make promises to him that we do not intend to keep.

This includes the songs that we sing. We certainly can voice our aspirations in biblical ways of our determination to live for God, but we should do that with humility, with an understanding of our weakness and dependence upon God's grace. And when we sing promises to God, we ought

to do so reverently; we ought to do so with our hearts crying out that we intend to obey, humbly requesting God's help.

Do you ever stop to think about some of the things we vow in our songs?

Facing a task unfinished
that drives us to our knees,
a need that, undiminished,
rebukes our slothful ease,
we who rejoice to know thee
renew before thy throne
the solemn pledge we owe thee
to go and make thee known.
—*Frank Houghton, 1995*

We often sing that thoughtlessly. When you sing that, do you sing that with a prayer? “Oh God, I want my whole life to be laid before you. If you want me to go to some hard place where Jesus has never been known, to live and die and make him known, then send me. Don't let me grasp anything so tightly that I'm unwilling to go, and make thee known.”

All to Jesus, I surrender.
All to him, I freely give.
I surrender all.
— *Judson W. Van DeVenter, 1896*

Sometimes we have a hard time surrendering one day a week, yet we sing “I surrender all.”

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my silver and my gold;
not a Mite would I withhold.
—*Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874*

When we sing this, we ought to do so with the prayer, “Oh God, make it so. It is my desire. I want my bank account to be yours. Everything I have comes from you, so as I sing this, I don't want to sing it thoughtlessly; but I know that I am singing, I am pledging, I am determining to live in a way that I cannot live apart from your grace. Oh God, come, work in me.” We worship the Lord in this way with dependence, and we speak these vows to God with humility, with a determination that our lives really do belong to him.

When you vow a vow to God, do not delay in paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It doesn't mean that we never boldly declare our intentions or make promises in the songs we sing. Rather, it means we should sing like we mean it. Better yet, we should sing because we mean it. By his grace, we will keep it.

Think About It

1. What are some ways that we make vows to God when we worship him?
2. What are some songs you regularly sing that include promises to God?
3. As you sing those promises, what are some prayers you can offer that ensure you are singing with humility and dependence upon God to keep those vows?

BE CAREFUL TO FEAR GOD IN WORSHIP (Ecc 5:7)

For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.

Finally, be careful to fear God in worship. In worship, when you let your mind multiply dreams and your lips multiply words, the result is futility and emptiness. Your worship is not being regulated by the Word of God but by your own whims. You approach God on your own terms, rather than his. And worshiping God in this way, Scripture says, is vanity. It is empty and worthless. Why? Because it is not really God we're worshipping—in reality, we're worshipping ourselves. We come on our terms, in the way and when we choose. We do what we want.

But God has given us in his Word the rules that are to govern our worship. Jesus said, "God is spirit, those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24). We worship God spiritually from the heart, and we worship him in truth, in submission to the Word. We are to do so in accordance with what he has revealed. We do this because he is in heaven, and we are on earth—he is in charge. Or as the preacher puts it in the very end of this passage, God is the one you must fear. Fear God—revere him.

To fear God is nothing other than to remember who he really is, and to remember who we are before him. It is to say with the psalmist:

For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord,⁷ a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him? (Ps 89:6–7)

Scripture refers to the fear of the Lord more than 150 times. It is a major theme in the relationship between our Creator and we his creatures and image bearers. It is the universal duty of all people to fear God.

Psalms 33:8 says,

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

Yet as Romans 3 reminds us in verses 10 through 18, wickedness abounds in this world because there is no fear of God before their eyes. Why do we have world rulers stand and arrogantly declare that they will do their bidding in this world as if there is no God? Because they have no fear of God. Why do we have a culture that says we must allow everyone to identify themselves any way they choose? There is no fear of God before their eyes. Why do we

The “fear of the Lord” motif occurs in three distinct ways in the Old Testament:

- 1. As an expression of corporate Israelite religion—the religious system of worshipping Yahweh.*
- 2. As a description of personal piety—the act of worshipping and obeying Yahweh.*
- 3. As an identification of a religious person, i.e., a worshiper of Yahweh.*

The Lexham Bible Dictionary

slaughter 800,000 babies in the womb every year in this nation and have politicians telling us that this is a medical right? It is because there's no fear of God before their eyes.

But this is not a malady simply in the world; it has washed over our churches, so that we feel very justified to take on any cause in the name of love and justice, and ignore the Word, even twisting the Word for the sake of what we think is just or loving. What's going on? There is no fear of God before the churches. No wonder in too many of our churches, there is little or nothing that encourages reverence and fear of God. Indeed, too often, the exact opposite is what's taking place.

Have you ever just stopped to consider what happens when God reveals himself in Scripture? When Isaiah saw the Lord—“Woe is me.” When the Risen Christ appeared to the Apostle John, he fell down like a dead man.

Hebrews 12:28–29 says,

Let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.

That is a strange, almost foreign idea in many of our churches today. We have such a great emphasis on the imminence of God, in the intimacy that we can have with him through the gospel—and praise God for those truths. But may we never forget that the God to whom we have been given such access is a consuming fire. He is our Father, but he is a fearful God.

How could we ever worship him as we ought to worship? How can we approach this God, who is glorious and fearful? There is only one way: it is the way that he himself has prescribed and provided through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This great, holy, fearful God has delivered up the Son of his love and has placed our sin upon him. He poured out his wrath upon his Son in order that we might be reconciled to him, forgiven of sin, and adopted into his very family, so that we can now call him “Abba”—Father. We know he loves us, but the one who loves us is a consuming fire, and so we worship him with reverence. We worship him with awe.

"Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*

|| CONCLUSION

Throughout history in the Old Testament, God made very plain both the costliness of entering into his presence and the purity required to do so. When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, they had to be exiled from the presence of his holiness. They lost their purity. They could no longer abide in the presence of the holy God. The whole reason that the sacrificial system exists in Old Testament Jewish religion is to signify that the only way this holy God can be approached by sinful people is through atonement, a blood sacrifice for their sins. Animals were sacrificed morning and evening, day after day, season after season, festival after festival, year after year, in order to convince people once and for all of this overarching truth: without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins. If we are going to be accepted by this fearful God, somebody has to die for our sins. And Jesus Christ came as the ultimate sacrifice, the one to whom all those Old Testament sacrifices were pointing. He laid down his life as the sin bearer, so that we might come to know this God, be forgiven, be reconciled, be welcomed into his family, and be given a place at his Table. Because of Christ, we can worship in spirit and truth. Because of Christ, we can come to God, and know him in reverence and awe.

PRAYER: Our Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for revealing yourself to us as the true and living God. We ask that you would come and help us by your Spirit, that we might worship you as we ought. Forgive us, oh God, for the times and the ways that we have thoughtlessly entered into worship. Convict us, turn us, help us, and strengthen us that we might live as a people who know you, declare you, and worship you in spirit and truth with reverence and with awe for Jesus's sake. Amen.

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STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 6: WORSHIPPING GOD REVERENTLY

Tom Ascol

MAIN POINT: God expects people created in his image to come before him reverently.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

MEMORY: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.” (Ecc 5:1)

**BE CAREFUL HOW YOU ENTER INTO
WORSHIP** (Ecc 5:1)

WE ARE ENTERING GOD’S PRESENCE

WE COME TO HEAR WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY

WE MUST PREPARE TO MEET GOD

Think About It

1. What are some implications of the fact that the New Testament calls the gathered church “God’s temple” and “God’s household”?
2. What are some practical ways we can come to hear what God has to say when we gather for worship?
3. In what ways have you come to worship thoughtlessly? What can you do to better prepare to meet with God?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY IN WORSHIP (Ecc 5:2–3)

Think About It

1. In what ways do we sometimes speak rashly in worship?
2. What does Leviticus 10:1 mean when it says that Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord?
3. What are some measures we can take to guard what we say in worship?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU VOW IN WORSHIP

(Ecc 5:4–6)

BE CAREFUL TO FEAR GOD IN WORSHIP

(Ecc 5:7)

Think About It

- 1.** What are some ways that we make vows to God when we worship him?
- 2.** What are some songs you regularly sing that include promises to God?
- 3.** As you sing those promises, what are some prayers you can offer that ensure you are singing with humility and dependence upon God to keep those vows?



LESSON 7: SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IN A SELF- CENTERED AGE

Costi Hinn

MAIN POINT: Spirit-led worship focuses on the glory of Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 16:4–15

MEMORY: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:13–14)

Most Christians would define worship as an expression of adoration or reverence toward the Triune God, he who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But in practice, worship today is often directed elsewhere than to God. Worshipers are often unsure of what to sing, how to express themselves, or on whom the focus really is. In a “selfie culture,” obsessed with our own perfection and how people perceive us, worship tends to be focused somewhere God never intended.

Unfortunately, many Christians today claim to worship God, but in reality they desire the emphasis and the focus to be on themselves. They may sing about God and his glory, but their songs are largely pleasantries, a means to their own end. Often this self-focused worship manifests itself in extreme emotionalism, minimizing truth, and even disorder. Even worse, some Christians today attribute the resulting worship to the Holy Spirit.

And so the question for us as believers is this: What does Spirit-led worship look like in a self-centered age? How are we to worship God with all of our being at a time when even in broader Evangelical churches it seems that people are more interested in themselves than in God?

The Bible teaches that there is true and false worship; not all worship is acceptable to God. Therefore, the call for us is to ensure that we are Spirit-led, Spirit-filled, God-honoring worshipers of the true high and mighty God. The glory of God must be the focus, not us and our preferences. God's holiness calls us to worship with reverence and order, never a casual spirit or one of chaos. God commands worship that is rooted in both spirit and truth.

And we have not been left without a helper—the Holy Spirit is dwelling within all true believers, building, protecting, teaching, and guiding. He will accomplish his work through us for the glory of God. With this in mind, what will characterize spirit-led worship in a self-centered age?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IS CONTROLLED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (Jn 16:4–7)

But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. “I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.”⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Before Christ ascended into heaven, he promised that he would send his Spirit. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would be our helper, and the New Testament explains in several places how the Spirit helps us. One central aspect of the Spirit’s work is that he makes our worship possible. Christians come to enjoy communion with God through the person and work of Jesus Christ, but this happens “in one Spirit” (Eph 2:18).

Later in Ephesians, Paul explains what will characterize worship led by the Holy Spirit:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:18–20)

In contrast to drunkenness, which is out of control, Paul wants believers under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

Pagan worship is out of control; pagan worship glorifies self. One of the most picturesque examples of this contrast between true and pagan worship is found in Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal in the northern kingdom during the reign of Ahab (1 Kgs 18:20–40). Their acts of worship were characterized by loud, ecstatic cries, incessant dancing around the altar, and self-mutilation. All of this physical activity was an attempt to work up the worshipers into an ecstatic state in order to get the god’s attention and persuade him to act on their behalf. And, of

course, no one answered. But in biblical worship, God has already acted on the behalf of the worshiper. In fact, it is God's acts that provide the means for a sinner to draw near to him, and thus it is God who invites those who come with a true heart in full assurance of faith to draw near to communion with him (Heb 10:22).

Therefore, biblical worship is not an attempt to get God's attention, call the Spirit down, or lead worshipers into God's presence; rather, biblical worship is a response to the work that God has already done on behalf of the redeemed worshiper, and through Spirit-controlled worship, believers further grow in their knowledge and love for the Lord.

Paul addresses this aspect of Spirit-led worship in 1 Corinthians 14. Apparently, Christians in the church at Corinth had similar expectations about the Holy Spirit's work in worship being extraordinary experience as contemporary Christians do. Yet Paul corrects their expectation by emphasizing that even if the Holy Spirit works in extraordinary ways in worship, like with tongues or prophecy, "God is not a God of confusion"—in other words, disorder—"but of peace" (v. 33). Paul's

The meaning of eirēnēs ("peace") "is much the same as that of the Rabbinic shalom"—a state of completeness, soundness, and harmony. (TDNT)

argument here appears to be that even within a context of expecting the Holy Spirit to work in miraculous ways, whereas confusion and disorder are evidences that he is *not* working.

On this basis, Paul provides clear principles for order in a worship service, fully consistent with the Holy Spirit's giving of miraculous gifts. "Only two or at most three" people may speak in tongues in any given service, "and each in turn" (v. 27). If there is no one to interpret the tongues, "let each of them keep silent" (v. 28). Only two or three prophets should speak, others should weigh what is said (v. 29), and they should do so one at a time (v. 30). Far from expecting the Holy Spirit to sweep through the congregation, causing worshipers to be overcome with his presence, "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (v. 32). Far from quenching the Holy Spirit, order within corporate worship is exactly how the Holy Spirit works, desiring that "all may learn and all be encouraged" (v. 31). Thus in corporate worship, exactly because of how the Holy Spirit of God works and the purpose of corporate worship to form disciple-worshipers who will properly bring glory to God, "all things should be done decently and in order" (v. 40).

There are some Christians who think that you have not yet had the Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered worship experience until you manifest it in extraordinary ways, and they will defend their emotionalism and their chaos saying, "Don't you dare put God in a box. Don't quench the Spirit." In reality, they are divorcing the Spirit and the Word, as if Christ is trying to bind the Holy Spirit to the Word, and the Spirit is just trying to break free and express himself. This is a mockery of the unity between the persons of the Trinity. The Spirit and the Word are never divorced. Notably, the Holy Spirit's work of "filling" a believer (Eph 5:19) is paralleled in Paul's writings with the Word of Christ "richly dwelling" within a Christian (Col 3:16). Thus, believers should expect that the Holy

Spirit will work today primarily *through* his Word, and he will never act *contrary to* his Word. Spirit-led expressions of worship are never divorced from the Word of God.

Think About It

1. What do you typically think of when you hear “Spirit-led worship”?
2. What are fundamental differences between Spirit-led worship and pagan worship?
3. How should an understanding of the essential relationship between Word and Spirit affect how we worship?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP FOCUSES ON THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Next, Spirit-led worship focuses on the holiness of God. When the Spirit ushered John into the heavenly temple, John beheld the Lord seated on his throne surrounded by angels singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty” (Rev 4:2, 8).

What more do we need than that picture of God? He is so holy—so worthy—that he made his own seraphim with wings just to cover their eyes and their feet so they would not melt in the presence of his explosive glory (Isa 6:2). How dare we offer him anything but reverence in our worship? He is a holy God. When the Bible gives us a glimpse of God, it is not about us; it is about him and his majesty. It is not about even what he can do; it is about who he is.

Meetings with God in Scripture

- Moses “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Exod 3:5)
- Joshua “And the commander of the Lord’s army said to Joshua, “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy.” (Josh 5:15)
- Paul “And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?’” (Acts 9:4)
- John “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” (Rev 1:17)

Do we focus on God and his holiness in our worship? Are our lyrics in the songs that we love, the service we render, and even our prayers marked with adoration for the holiness of God?

So many songs today talk about what God can do, and what he can do is indeed wonderful. Praise God. But what about who he is? He is good. Whether you are experiencing the mountain

peaks of blessing or the valleys of trial, he is steadfast, he is loving, and he is everlasting. He is before all things. All things are for him, to him, through him, and because of him. We should certainly praise God for what he can do, but if he never did anything else but be who he is, that is enough.

Often worship expressions that are focused exclusively on what God does for us tend to direct our attention not to him, but to us. An abundance of worship songs use expressions more fitting for secular love songs than those directed to a holy God. But we do not come to worship to hear more about ourselves; we need more of him.

Honor him. Worship him. Bow to him. Revere him. Fear him. We must learn to recognize the difference between music and worship mostly about us and that which truly adorns who God is, his character, his power, and his glory.

Think About It

1. Do you think Christians today regularly acknowledge the holiness of God? Why do you think this is the case?
2. Are your prayers and praise more often about what God can do for you or who he is? Why do you think this is the case?
3. How should a deep recognition of God's holiness affect our worship?

|| SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP ADMITS THE SINNER THAT YOU ARE (Jn 16:8–11)

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Spirit-led worship also admits the sinner that you are. True worship gives us a right view of the holiness of God, as both Isaiah and John experienced. And the Spirit who leads us to witness the holiness of God will then convict us of sin. Like Isaiah, instead of arrogantly making worship about us, the Spirit leads us to humbly declare that we are unworthy before a holy God. Everything gets put in perspective because of God's holiness. We then say, "I see who you are, and I now know who I am, and therefore I know what I need: it is you." God is fine without us, but we will never be fine without him. He is holy without us; we will never be holy without him. He is and will forever be glorified without us; we will never be glorified without him. He doesn't need us; we need him.

David's perspective after sinning with Bathsheba should help us in this regard. He cries out in Psalm 51:10–17,

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness. ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

That is the heart of worship the Holy Spirit will form within us as we approach our holy God in worship.

Penitential Psalms: 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

We cannot fully appreciate the grace of God until we've come to terms with who he is as a perfect Savior and who

we are as pretentious sinners. Do we love singing about the grace of God though we have not confessed our sins to God? Do we love grace in its cheapest forms because there is no cost for us? Spirit-led worship will cause us to recognize our sinfulness.

“Seeing that in every sacred assembly we stand in the view of God and angels, in what way should our service begin but in acknowledging our own unworthiness? ... In short, by this key a door of prayer is opened privately for each, and publicly for all.” (John Calvin)

Think About It

- 1.** How often is confession of sin a regular part of corporate worship today?
- 2.** How might intentional recognition of our sinfulness toward God lead to a deeper appreciation of his grace and mercy in Christ?
- 3.** Have you ever noticed how many psalms are acknowledgement of the psalmist's sinfulness and a cry to the Lord for mercy?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP PRIORITIZES TRUTH

(Jn 16:12–13)

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

When Jesus made this statement, he was explaining to his disciples that one of the advantages of the Holy Spirit coming was that he would breathe through their very pens to write God's revelation. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles special revelation to disclose the nature and character of God, explain God's requirements, correct sin, and give hope for the future. He gave them the truth necessary to establish Christian doctrine and set the church in order (1 Tim 3:15). Ultimately, he inspired a "prophetic word more fully confirmed" (2 Pet 1:19–21), the canonical Scriptures, given to believers "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). We today do not have the promise of writing new revelation, but we have the Spirit-inspired truth in the final and sufficient Word of God.

Therefore, the Spirit is still leading us into the truth—this is who our God is. In Psalm 25:5, the psalmist writes, "Lead me in your truth and teach me"; Psalm 43:3 says, "Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling"; In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, the life"; and in 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul tells Timothy, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." Time and time again, God leads us by truth and into truth.

"The outward and ordinary means whereby the Holy Spirit communicates to us the benefits of Christ's redemption, are the Word, by which souls are begotten to spiritual life; baptism, the Lord's Supper, prayer, and meditation, by all which believers are further edified in their most holy faith (Acts 2:41-42; Jas. 1:18)." (Charles Spurgeon)

Without Spirit-inspired biblical truth, worship easily devolves into purely physical emotionalism. Is it possible today that some Christians have bought into what is claimed to be of heavenly origin but is actually passion rooted in earthly manipulation? Your passions can lie to you. There is no shortage of passion in the church world today, but we must be certain that our heart responses are rooted in truth. This is why we need to carefully consider the Christian music we enjoy, judging everything through the filter of God's Word, not of how the music feels. What music we choose for worship must be based on the criterion of whether or not it is true compared with Scripture.

Think About It

1. How important is it to recognize the biblical connection between the Spirit and the Word?
2. What is an example of a worship song that is emotionally engaging but devoid of truth?
3. If biblical truth is the primary criterion we use for every aspect of our worship, how would that change our worship services?

|| SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP DECLARES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Jn 16:14)

And finally, this all leads to the fact that Spirit-led worship declares the glory of Christ. He is everything.

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The Holy Spirit is God, equal in essence and glory with the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit is worthy to be worshiped; but according to Scripture, the Spirit's emphasis is on directing the attention to Christ and the glory of God the Father.

This being the case, the Holy Spirit certainly did not come to put the spotlight on us, our preferences, or our feelings; he came to put the spotlight on Christ. That is where all Spirit-led worship begins and ends.

This truth is incredibly important: worship is about the glory of Christ alone. That is Spirit-led worship.

Think About It

1. How would recognizing that the Holy Spirit does not even draw attention to himself affect our worship?
2. In what ways does the Holy Spirit direct our attention to Jesus Christ?
3. In what ways should Spirit-led corporate worship draw attention to the glory of Christ?

PRAYER: Father, help us be those who would pronounce our love for truth. Thank you for your Word and Spirit, which reveal to us your holiness and our unworthiness. But even now you offer the assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ. And so, holy God, our precious Savior and King Jesus Christ, and helper Holy Spirit, please enable us to be true worshipers, those who worship in spirit and in truth. Use us as instruments and witnesses of your glory and goodness in our churches, in our cities, and around the world. We pray and ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 7: SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IN A SELF-CENTERED AGE

Costi Hinn

MAIN POINT: Spirit-led worship focuses on the glory of Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 16:4–15

MEMORY: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:13–14)

**SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IS CONTROLLED BY
THE HOLY SPIRIT (Jn 16:4–7)**

Think About It

1. What do you typically think of when you hear “Spirit-led worship”?
2. What are fundamental differences between Spirit-led worship and pagan worship?
3. How should an understanding of the essential relationship between Word and Spirit affect how we worship?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP FOCUSES ON THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Think About It

- 1.** Do you think Christians today regularly acknowledge the holiness of God? Why do you think this is the case?
- 2.** Are your prayers and praise more often about what God can do for you or who he is? Why do you think this is the case?
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1. How often is confession of sin a regular part of corporate worship today?
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Think About It

1. How important is it to recognize the biblical connection between the Spirit and the Word?
2. What is an example of a worship song that is emotionally engaging but devoid of truth?
3. If biblical truth is the primary criterion we use for every aspect of our worship, how would that change our worship services?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP DECLARES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Jn 16:14)

Think About It

- 1.** How would recognizing that the Holy Spirit does not even draw attention to himself affect our worship?
- 2.** In what ways does the Holy Spirit direct our attention to Jesus Christ?
- 3.** In what ways should Spirit-led corporate worship draw attention to the glory of Christ?



LESSON 8: WORSHIP AS BELOVED CHILDREN

Voddie Baucham

MAIN POINT: Worship that is rooted in our adoption in Christ will produce conformity to Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:1–25

MEMORY: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1–2)

What comes to your mind when someone says, “Wow, those people can worship”? Usually, we talk about the volume of their singing, the emotion they exhibit, the passion that we see from them, or their style. We look at some worshipers with contorted faces and tears, and we tend to think, “Wow, those people really can worship.” Some Christians might even attend churches where they get no spiritual nourishment from the Word, but they are attracted to the excitement and passion of the worship music. What this reveals is that Christians today tend to define worship as music, but is that what worship is?

The apostle Paul addresses the subject of singing in Ephesians 5:19, but he does so in a larger context that helps to set singing in worship in its proper place. Understanding singing in this broader context reveals that our worship is so much more than the songs that we sing. Paul’s discussion of singing in Ephesians 5:19 falls in a passage that is bookended with a focus on Christ’s love for us and his sacrifice for us. Notice verse 1:

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Now notice the same reference to Christ’s love and sacrifice in verse 25:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

This focus on Christ's love and sacrifice in both verse 1 and verse 25 reveals the larger context for his discussion of singing in verse 19. This passage reveals the fundamental essence for our worship, singing being just one part of a larger whole.

WORSHIP IS ROOTED IN OUR ADOPTION IN CHRIST (Eph 5:1–14)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Notice the worship language at the end of verse 2: when Jesus died for us, he was “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Ultimately, our worship is not acceptable to God because of the quality of *our* offerings or the passion of our music; Jesus Christ is the sacrifice that God accepts as a fragrant offering. This reveals that our relationship to Christ is fundamentally important for our worship. Notice how the passage describes us in the first verse: we are God's “beloved children” because Christ loved us and gave himself for us.

Old Testament Offerings

- Lev 1:9 **The Burnt Offering** – “And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a *pleasing aroma* to the Lord.”
- Lev 2:9 **The Grain Offering** – “And the priest shall take from the grain offering its memorial portion and burn this on the altar, a food offering with a *pleasing aroma* to the Lord.”
- Lev 3:16 **The Peace Offering** – “And the priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering with a *pleasing aroma*. All fat is the Lord's.”
- Lev 4:31 **The Sin Offering** – “And all its fat he shall remove, as the fat is removed from the peace offerings, and the priest shall burn it on the altar for a *pleasing aroma* to the Lord. And the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven.”
- Lev 7:5 **The Guilt Offering** – “The priest shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the Lord; it is a guilt offering.”

In other words, our worship is about so much more than the songs we sing because our worship is rooted and grounded in our adoption in Christ. There are a lot of ways that we can define worship, but one key way to define it is simply communion with God and with his people. Worship is communion in this sense because of the reality of our adoption—we are God's “beloved children.”

The apostle refers to the doctrine of adoption several times throughout the book of Ephesians. For example, he says in Ephesians 1:3,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

Our communion with God and with one another is rooted and grounded in this idea of our adoption. Our salvation began with our justification, and it includes our sanctification and future glorification, but we often forget that our salvation also includes our adoption. We have been justified—saved from the penalty of sin; we are being sanctified—saved from the power of sin; and we will be glorified—saved from the presence of sin. But we are also adopted as children of God.

We often forget that important part of our salvation, however, and this leads to a deficiency in our personal experience of our relationship with God. We know that we are justified because of the finished work of Christ, but when we sin, we still conceive of God as a judge, standing with his gavel, ready to condemn us. So when we feel emotionally close to God, things are good, but if we don't feel emotionally close to God, we feel far from him. This often leads us to seek after things that will make us feel emotionally close to God.

It is true that God is a righteous judge and we sinners deserve to die, and it is true that the judge declared us righteous because of the finished work of Christ. But God is not standing with his gavel as our judge now. He has adopted us as his children. Our Father looks upon us with pleasure, just as he looks upon Christ with pleasure, because we have been adopted as fellow heirs with Christ.

So, Paul admonishes us in Ephesians 5 to be imitators of God, not just as forgiven sinners standing before a judge, but as beloved children. He exhorts us in the following verses to forsake sin, not out of fear of judgment, but because we are God's beloved children:

**Ordo Salutis
(the logical order of salvation)**

Justification



Adoption



Sanctification



Glorification

³ *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.* ⁴ *Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.* ⁵ *For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.*

Sinners have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, but we who have been adopted into his family do have an inheritance. The judge says, “Not guilty,” and then the judge also says, “I also issue a degree of adoption so that you are as much my beloved child as Christ who died on your behalf.” We are forgiven, but we also have an inheritance. This is why he calls us in verse 8 “children of light.”

⁶ *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.* ⁷ *Therefore do not become partners with them;* ⁸ *for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),* ¹⁰ *and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.* ¹¹ *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.* ¹² *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.* ¹³ *But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible,* ¹⁴ *for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

The doctrine of adoption is important for our understanding of worship, because when we view worship through a lens that does not include this idea of adoption, we often look at worship as performance. We approach worship as a way to appease God or manipulate him. We think that if we can just be loud enough or cry enough, perhaps we will please God and he will hear us. But this is not the worship of beloved children—this is pagan worship. Biblical worship is the idea of communing with God who is our Father.

Think About It

1. What are the implications of the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is the pleasant offering that God accepts?
2. Why is it important to remember that we are both justified *and* adopted?
3. How does our adoption as God’s beloved children affect our understanding of the nature of true worship?

WORSHIP PRODUCES CONFORMITY TO CHRIST (Eph 5:15–20)

Worship is rooted in our relationship with God by adoption, and second, as has already been clear through the beginning of Ephesians 5, this communion we have with God produces our sanctification. We are justified—declared righteous—and adopted into God’s family, so it makes sense that we will begin to conform to the image of the family that has adopted us. This is why Paul continues in verse 15 with a further explanation of what it will mean for us to be imitators of God as his beloved children:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

Paul explains what will characterize the life of an adopted, beloved child of God by presenting three contrasts in this passage. First, “not as unwise but as wise”—that’s a contrast. Second, “do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is”—that’s a contrast. And third, “do not get drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit”—another contrast.

WISDOM

In contrast to fools, who ignore God’s law and live apart from him, adopted children of God must be wise, actively applying the truth we know about God and his Word to our daily lives. This will cause us to use every opportunity in our lives to serve and worship the Lord. As God’s children, our worship is not restricted to singing on Sunday morning; the entirety of our lives ought to exhibit consecration to the Lord.

UNDERSTANDING

The contrast to foolishness is understanding the Lord’s will. This exhortation connects us to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 1–3 present a glorious picture of the things that are true about us because of the person and work of Christ. And then beginning in chapter 4, Paul shifts to the fruit of the gospel, contrasting the pagans—those who are apart from Christ—with who we are because of Christ. He describes pagan people beginning in verse 17:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!

In contrast, we ought to live according to what we have learned about Christ:

²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Why? Because you are an adopted child of God. As God's children, we engage in this communion with God that conforms us and transforms us. Paul says something similar in Romans 12:1–2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Do you see the similarities here? Paul is arguing that because of your transformed mind, you are able to discern the will of God, very similar to what he is arguing in Ephesians 5:15–17. We do not turn off our minds in order to engage with God in worship, as Christians often assume today. Rather, as Paul emphasizes in Romans 12 and here in Ephesians 5, true worship is engaging our minds with the truth of God's Word such that our minds are transformed and we are able to discern God's will for our lives.

We often miss this reality because we have a poor understanding of the nature of worship and of who the Spirit of God is. We see the Spirit as a force and not a person, and we think that being spiritual means turning off your mind. Yet Paul's emphasis here is that children of God who are living in communion with him will engage their minds with his truth and conduct themselves in wisdom and understanding of his will.

SPRIT-FILLING

Paul further emphasizes this by explaining the nature of the Spirit's work in the third contrast: "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit." This third contrast opens up like a telescope into three commands. What does a Spirit-filled life with Spirit-filled worship look like? You don't have to wonder. He answers the question with three commands that explain this idea of being filled with the Spirit.

The "Telescope" of Paul's Argument in Ephesians 5–6

Three Contrasts:

1. "not as unwise but as wise" (5:15).
2. "do not be foolish but understand what the will of the Lord is" (5:17).
3. "do not get drunk with wine ... but be filled with the Spirit" (5:18).



Three Commands:

1. "addressing one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your hearts" (5:19).
2. "giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:20).
3. "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21).



Three Contexts:

1. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (5:22).
2. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (6:1).
3. "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ" (6:5).

The first evidence we are filled with the Spirit is "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your hearts" (5:19). Notice the expansion of our communion with God to communion also with God's people. Another beauty of the doctrine of adoption is that it not only makes sense of me belonging to God, but it also makes sense of me belonging to other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. Because we all have been adopted by the same Father, there is two-way communion in our worship. And so we sing to one another in communion, and we sing to the Lord in communion. Is our audience one another or the Lord? The answer is yes! We address one another as we sing and make melody to the Lord with our hearts. We encourage one another in the Lord because we not only commune with the Lord, we also commune with one another in our worship.

We often make far too much of the three terms in this command—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Paul is not intending to strictly identify three different kinds of song. No, this is a rhetorical device in which Paul is stressing that we ought to sing a variety of songs to one another and to the Lord.

psalmois – “psalms”; hymnois – “hymns”; ōdais – “songs”

“Since the three terms seem almost interchangeable, and since Ephesians has a tendency to be redundant, it is probably a mistake to distinguish the terms sharply from one another.” (Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, 361)

The second command that explains the nature of Spirit-filling is found in verse 20:

... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Spirit-filled believer will exhibit thankfulness to the Lord.

Think About It

1. Why does our adoption by God in Christ necessarily produce conformity to Christ?
2. Why is a life of conformity to Christ better evidence of true worship than passionate singing or emotional experience in a church service?
3. What are some biblical characteristics of truly Spirit-filled worship?

WORSHIP IS SUBMISSION TO CHRIST

(Eph 5:21–6:9)

The third command that explains what it means to be Spirit-filled is found in verse 21:

... submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This third command, then, expands like a telescope again to reveal three contexts in which Spirit-filled submission of beloved children of God will take place: wives to husbands, children to parents, and slaves to masters.

In other words, our Spirit-filled communion with God because of our adoption in Christ is so much more than a feeling, intense passion, or singing; Spirit-filled worship is about a life of submission to Christ and conformity to his image. And our submission to Christ is manifested by our submission to one another:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (5:22)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. (6:1)

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ. (6:5)

All three of these are contexts in which Spirit-filled children of God exhibit submission to Christ out of reverence to him. If you have a submission problem, it is actually a worship disorder. If we want to truly worship God, we must submit to God by obeying and submitting to those authorities that God has placed in our lives.

In other words, we may say we want Spirit-filled worship, but if our desire is really about how loudly and emotionally we sing our songs—regardless of our communion with God or lack thereof, regardless of our conformity to Christ or lack thereof, regardless of our submission to Christ and the authorities he has placed in our lives or lack thereof, then we really do not want Spirit-filled worship.

You see, one of the reasons we often take a shortcut in worship and reduce it to a performance for God that appeases or manipulates him is that it is a whole lot easier than truly Spirit-filled worship in which we conform to the image of Christ by submitting to him with the entirety of our lives. Enjoying loud, emotional, vibrant singing divorced from communion with God is easier than submitting to him. And further, if we are just singing in worship for the experience, we can end up singing songs that contradict the truth of God's Word, thinking we have met with God because of the emotional experience we had through the hot band. But in essence, we are ripping Ephesians 5:19 out of the fuller context of what Paul is saying in this letter.

But if we place Paul's command to sing in its fuller context, then we will understand that our worship is about far more than just the songs we sing. Our worship is communion with God as his child, because the person and work of Jesus Christ purchased not only our forgiveness but also our adoption. And then we will recognize that our worship is within the context of our conformity to Christ by renewing and transforming our minds with his Word. And we will understand our worship in terms of our submission to Christ and the authorities he has placed over us, submitting as an act of worship.

Worship is not dependent on volume, and it is not dependent on emotion. We may not look like the pagans with sweat pouring down, and we will not sound like them with their raucous music; rather, we have a far deeper connection to the God who redeemed us, adopted us, and with whom we commune in worship because of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Think About It

1. What are some practical ways we will manifest communion with God through submission to God-given authorities in our lives?
2. Why are we often tempted to define worship by emotional experiences?
3. What would you say to someone who has passionate experiences on Sunday but who lives in rebellion to God the rest of the week?

PRAYER: Our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who by virtue of his person and work not only redeemed us, but adopted us as your own, we bow before you as grateful and humble children, beloved children of the most high God. Grant by your grace that as we come before you in worship, we would recognize that our worship is about so much more than the songs that we sing. Grant that we would set our mind's attention and heart's affection on you, praising you for who you are and for what you have done. Let us recognize that we are communing with you, our Father, and with our brothers and sisters around us. Grant that we might never again sell ourselves short by merely seeking emotional experiences based on externals. But instead, grant that our fellowship and communion with you might be as deep as the reality of our redemption in Christ. In his name and for his sake. Amen.

|| **FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

Aniol, Scott. "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: Assessing the Debate." *Artistic Theologian* 6 (2018): 13–18.

Peterson, David. *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993.

Thielman, Frank. *Ephesians*. BECNT. Baker, 2010.



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 8: WORSHIP AS BELOVED CHILDREN

Voddie Baucham

MAIN POINT: Worship that is rooted in our adoption in Christ will produce conformity to Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:1–25

MEMORY: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1–2)

WORSHIP IS ROOTED IN OUR ADOPTION IN CHRIST (Eph 5:1–14)

Think About It

1. What are the implications of the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is the pleasant offering that God accepts?
2. Why is it important to remember that we are both justified *and* adopted?
3. How does our adoption as God’s beloved children affect our understanding of the nature of true worship?

WORSHIP PRODUCES CONFORMITY TO CHRIST (Eph 5:15–20)

WISDOM

UNDERSTANDING

SPIRIT-FILLING

Think About It

- 1.** Why does our adoption by God in Christ necessarily produce conformity to Christ?
- 2.** Why is a life of conformity to Christ better evidence of true worship than passionate singing or emotional experience in a church service?
- 3.** What are some biblical characteristics of truly Spirit-filled worship?

WORSHIP IS SUBMISSION TO CHRIST

(Eph 5:21–6:9)

Think About It

- 1.** What are some practical ways we will manifest communion with God through submission to God-given authorities in our lives?
- 2.** Why are we often tempted to define worship by emotional experiences?
- 3.** What would you say to someone who has passionate experiences on Sunday but who lives in rebellion to God the rest of the week?



LESSON 9: SINGING THE WORD

Laramie Minga

MAIN POINT: The Word of God impels the believer to sing the Word out of joyful obedience, in response to who God is and what he has done, and in the sure hope of spiritual formation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:18–20, Colossians 3:16–17

MEMORY: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16)

Even congregations who have a high view of God are not immune to a misplaced understanding or expectation of singing. Sometimes even the most committed Christians make no attempt to sing in corporate worship, even carrying on full conversations with their neighbor in the pew while others sing around them. Often Christians do not really know why, what, or how we ought to sing. Additionally, often in churches, leaders do very little to help in this matter as they haphazardly approach the inclusion, form, and content of singing in worship.

However, God’s Word reveals that the church has great reasons to sing and that we should be concerned with what and how we sing. Singing the rich truths of God’s Word with joy and thankfulness in our hearts has eternal benefits in the lives of God’s people.

WHY WE SING (Eph 5:19)

The first essential question to address is why we sing in the first place. Singing is commanded by God in Scripture, allows us to express our affections to God, serves in the spiritual formation of the believer, and is a natural expression of community within the body of Christ.

GOD HAS COMMANDED US IN HIS WORD TO SING.

Most people are familiar with the typical mom or dad response to the child who asks why he must do something: “Because I said so.” There are certainly more reasons than this, but in and of itself, obedience to the authority in one’s life is a sufficient reason. Likewise, God’s Word is filled

with instruction on singing. Of the more than four hundred reference to singing, just over fifty of them are direct commands to sing.

Following Israel's exodus out of Egypt, the song that Moses's sister Miriam sang included the command to "Sing to the Lord" (Exod 15:21). After David's successful, second attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem, he led the people in a song of thanks, including the imperative to "sing to him, sing praises to him" (1 Chron 16:9). The Psalms are also filled with commands like this as they repeatedly echo sentiments like "sing praises to the Lord" (e.g., Ps 9:11; 30:4; 68:32), sometimes even stringing several imperatives in a row: "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises!" (Ps 47:6).

These commands in the Old Testament followed God's people into the New Testament. In Ephesians 5:19, Paul clearly instructs believers,

Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.

Obedience to the command to sing is certainly enough reason for us to desire to participate in singing, but God has given us much more than a compulsory rationale to do so.

SINGING ALLOWS US TO EXPRESS OUR AFFECTIONS TO GOD FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

Following David's deliverance from his enemies and Saul, he sang a song that concluded with the words "for this I will praise you" (2 Sam 22:50). The word *for* indicates that all that he had just sung about God served as the motivation for his song. Not once did he express that his singing was a fulfillment of expectation, but rather because God was his "rock and [his] fortress and [his] deliverer" (22:2) and his "shield, and the horn of [his] salvation, [his] stronghold and [his] refuge, [his] savior" (22:3). Throughout the song, David proclaims characteristics of the Lord and his delivering work, and expresses affections of adoration, joy, and thankfulness. Perhaps no book of the Bible greater displays a variety of expressions (e.g., praise, lament, confession, grief, love, and more) than the book of Psalms, which includes more than seventy of David's psalms.

"We have put this music to the living and holy Word of God in order to sing, praise, and honor it. We want the beautiful art of music to be properly used to serve her dear Creator and his Christians. He is thereby praised and honored and we are made better and stronger in faith when his holy Word is impressed on our hearts by sweet music." (Martin Luther)

As it regards the believer today, we have no greater revelation to which to respond in singing than the gospel—the death of Christ on behalf of our sins, his burial, and his resurrection from the grave, conquering and proclaiming victory over sin and death. It is this redeeming work that fuels the singing of heaven, and therefore should be our most compelling cause to burst forth in song.

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, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev 5:9–10)

SINGING DEMONSTRATES THE COMMUNITY WE ENJOY AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

We likely have all attended or watched a Major League baseball game where someone sang “The Star-Spangled Banner” and the 40,000 in attendance joined in the singing. Often you’ll hear an organ began to play “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” and once again, the crowd joins in. This display of singing within a community, one that is not even the church, demonstrates that we are a singing people by design.

When we gather on Sunday for worship and unite our hearts, minds, and voices in singing around the Word of God, we are demonstrating the community we enjoy as a people who have been reconciled to God and one another through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps nothing we do in worship better pictures that we are one in Christ than singing—many people coming together in unison and harmony.

SINGING AIDS THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF BELIEVERS.

That God intends for singing to have a spiritual benefit to the believer is made clear in passages that qualify singing as a form of teaching. Colossians 3:16, another passage that shows God’s mandate to sing, also reveals to us one way that we teach and admonish one another is through singing.

... teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

As we sing, we are not teaching and admonishing one another in the same sense as what takes place in a lecture, sermon, or an accountability small group, but rather as we sing truths, even

ones we don't yet fully grasp, we are planting them in our minds that they may grow as we come back to those truths in song over and over. Whether it's the drive home from church or during a task like preparing a brisket for a Sunday evening dinner, I'm much more likely to sing to myself the songs we sang in worship than I am to quote statements from the sermon. This is not to minimize the preaching of the Word, but rather to demonstrate the power that music carries as a form of teaching, playing an integral part in the sanctification of believers.

Therefore, we sing because God has commanded us to sing, to express Godly affections, to demonstrate the community we have as believers in Christ, and because it helps form us.

Think About It

1. What are some common reasons people might give for why we sing in worship that do not necessarily come from Scripture?
2. What does singing accomplish that cannot be accomplished in any other way?
3. What are some ways music is performed in churches that can actually hinder the biblical purposes for singing?

WHAT WE SING (Col 3:16)

Having established why we are to sing, we now turn to *what* we are to sing. Knowing that God cares how he is worshiped should lead us to be concerned with the substance of what we sing.

WE SHOULD SING PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS.

Before looking at the content of what we sing, it makes sense to first establish what we are to sing on a surface level. Paul in two places instructs us to sing “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Many have attempted to assign a definition to each of these three terms, creating genres of congregational song. However, it is more likely that, because of the interchanging of these terms in the New Testament, Paul is simply using these three terms in series to emphasize the importance of singing. One could argue, however, that the church is expected, but not limited, to sing at least the Old Testament psalms.

“At very least these passages include a mandate to sing Spirit-inspired OT psalms. No matter how narrowly or broadly one interprets the terms, that Paul commands believers to sing psalms is clear. Whether these psalms are paraphrases or versifications is beyond Paul’s purview, but churches wishing to actively apply Paul’s instructions should make efforts to regularly incorporate OT psalms in their corporate repertory.” (Scott Aniol, “Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: Assessing the Debate” AT 6 [2018], 18)

WE SHOULD SING THE WORD.

Before the exhortation to sing, Colossians 3:16 instructs believers,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

We have only one source in which to find the “word of Christ” and that is the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus claimed, “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44), revealing that he was the subject of the Old Testament. Hebrews 1:2 reveals that God’s special revelation following the Old Testament would be revealed through and finalized in his Son, thus confirming the New Testament as the word of Christ as well:

But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

John 4:24, one of the most important biblical statements on worship argues that “those who worship [God] must worship in spirit and truth.” Similar to the implication of Colossians 3:16, to worship in truth is to worship according to the Word. Therefore, our singing should be filled with the Word of God, the only source of truth and the word of Christ.

WE SHOULD SING THE GOSPEL.

More specifically, as we sing the Word, we should concentrate our singing in the gospel. On both a macro level (the whole of Scripture) and micro level (specific passages throughout Scripture) the Word of God carries the shape of the gospel (a good argument for why our services should be shaped by the gospel). The gospel is even the substance of the worship of heaven, as seen in Revelation 5 above. Additionally, our worship is mediated by the gospel. Hebrews 10 makes this clear:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19–22)

Because it is the gospel that makes worship even possible, it should serve as both the fuel and the substance of our singing. All that we sing ought to foreshadow, proclaim, or flow from the gospel.

WE SHOULD SING OUR HEARTS' AFFECTIONS AND THE CAUSE OF THOSE AFFECTIONS.

Our songs should communicate both our hearts' affections (subjective response) and the theological reasons (objective truth) for those affections. To sing only of our hearts' affections would lead us into the trap of emotionalism in which much of contemporary worship music finds itself. At the other extreme, to sing only theological fact, would lead us into cold, dry intellectualism. A combination of these aspects in singing is clearly modeled throughout Scripture. Consider David's song in 2 Samuel 22 again. Throughout the song he states who God and is and the delivering work that God has accomplished. This would be the objective theological truth. He then follows those theological statements with his own response of affections: "For this I will praise you" (22:50).

As an example of this in a well-known hymn, consider the stanzas of "Praise to the Lord! The Almighty" by Joachim Neander. The hymn writer begins each stanza with an expression of praise followed by a cause for that praise. This pattern continues throughout the hymn, along with expressions of adoration, reliance, grief, and wonder.

Praise to the LORD, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy health and salvation.
All ye who hear, now to His temple draw near:
join me in glad adoration!

Praise to the LORD, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
shelters thee under His wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been
granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the LORD, who with marvelous wisdom hath made thee,
decked thee with health, and with loving hand guided and stayed thee.
How oft in grief hath not He brought thee relief,
spreading His wings for to shade thee!

Praise to the LORD, who doth prosper thy works and defend thee;
surely His goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
if with His love He befriend thee.

Praise to the LORD, O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before Him!
Let the amen sound from His people again:
gladly forever adore Him!

WE SHOULD SING A NEW SONG.

Oh sing to the Lord a new song. (Ps 96:1)

Many have pointed to the Psalms' frequent directives to sing a new song as an argument for singing new compositions. While new compositions certainly have their place in worship, this is not the intention of this phrase in the Psalms or in other parts of Scripture (once in Isaiah and twice in Revelation). Rather, to sing a new song in the biblical sense, we are coming before the Lord with a fresh experience of God's faithfulness in our lives. Approaching God in song this way, means that even when we have sung the hymn above for the one-hundredth time it is a fresh expression of our hearts and minds to the truths that song proclaims.

A new song is a song that rises out of the heart of one who has experienced the Lord's salvation, who has experienced the goodness and greatness of God, and even more specifically, one who sings, who responds, who

worships as if the Lord reigns already; as if he has come already to judge the world; as if all the families of the people are already ascribing him the glory due his name; as if the very heavens and earth and seas and fields and trees are singing for joy to him.

God's Word instructs us to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, the Word of God, the gospel, our affections and the cause of those affections, and a new song to the Lord.

"New Song" in Scripture:

Ps 33:3 Sing to him a new song.
Ps 40:3 He put a new song in my mouth.
Ps 96:1 Oh sing to the Lord a new song.
Ps 98:1 Oh sing to the Lord a new song.
Ps 144:9 I will sing a new song to you, O God.
Ps 149:1 Sing to the Lord a new song.
Isa 42:10 Sing to the Lord a new song.
Rev 5:9 And they sang a new song.
Rev 14:3 And they were singing a new song.

Think About It

1. How important is it to sing psalms in corporate worship?
2. In what ways could music actually hinder the Word of Christ dwelling richly in us?
3. Why is it important to sing both in expression of our affections and the reasons for our affections?

|| **HOW WE SING** (Eph 5:20, Col 3:17)

Finally, having considered a biblical case for singing in worship and what the content of our singing should be, we would be remiss not to discuss *how* we should sing. This section is not about the musical considerations, though musicians in the church should consider these matters. Rather, this section addresses how congregations should come before the Lord in singing.

|| **WE SHOULD SING WITH OUR AFFECTIONS.**

Every section of this lesson has involved the affections (not to be confused with emotions or feelings that may accompany the affections). Our affections cause us to sing, inform the substance of our singing, and describe how we approach God in our singing. It's easy to show up on a Sunday, sing, and have hearts that are cold and completely disengaged. This is not what God wants. Consider how God responds to this type of worship:

And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden" (Isa 29:13–14)

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. (Hos 6:6)

The Lord is clear. Externally, the people of God have fulfilled their obligation, but because their hearts' affections didn't match their external expression, God rejected their worship.

In seeking a right approach to God in worship, consider the way Paul closes his instruction on singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs:

... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph 5:20)

... with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:16b–17)

In both of these passages, Paul didn't finish with telling them what they should sing—an external expression. He closes the passages with statements regarding the position of their hearts as they sing. Our singing should be characterized chiefly by thankfulness, a fitting response to the redeeming work of Christ to reconcile sinners to God! Whatever the affection expressed (adoration, joy, godly sorrow, etc.), our hearts should reflect that expression.

WE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AS WE SING.

Before instructing the Ephesian church to address one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, Paul exhorts them,

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.

Paul does not mean a passive filling of the Spirit, such as what took place at Pentecost or what we receive at salvation apart from any effort of our own. Nor did he mean any kind of charismatic understanding of the Spirit focused on feelings or the expectation of an extraordinary experience.

*“‘Spirit filling’ does not come as the result of singing. Rather, ‘Spirit filling’ comes first; singing is the response.... Clear as these passages are in declaring that Christian singing is a response to the Word of Christ and to being filled with the Spirit, it is hard to keep from turning the cause and effect around. Music, with its stimulating power, can too easily be seen as the cause and the ‘Spirit filling’ as the effect.” (Calvin Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World*, 19–20)*

Because of the imperative language, we know Paul was admonishing them to actively pursue Spirit-filling. Additionally, because of the parallel to his instruction in Colossians 3:16 to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” we can conclude that to actively be filled with the Spirit is to regularly consume the Word of God. In this way, both our singing (the what) and our lives (the how) are shaped

and filled by the Word of God, thus fulfilling the exhortation to be filled with the Spirit.

WE SHOULD SING SKILLFULLY.

We should sing skillfully, with excellence. This final instruction on how we should sing is both external and internal. All that has been stated above, especially regarding why we sing, should lead us to not only sing, but to sing with excellence, for God is worthy of this. Not only is he deserving of our best, but he has commanded it.

Sing to him a new song; play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts. (Ps 33:3)

While the description of *skillfully* is specifically in relation to playing an instrument, the concept naturally would apply beyond this to all aspects of music in the assembly in the same way that instrumentalists would also participate in the expressions assigned to singing. The adjective is relative of course, as singers and instrumentalists in the congregation are at different levels of skill. The point is that we should strive for our best and to always be improving, for he is worthy!

Our singing should be accompanied by our hearts' affections as we strive to be filled with the Spirit and sing skillfully to the Lord.

Think About It

1. Why is it important to recognize that music does not fill us with the Spirit, but rather that singing is the result of the Spirit filling us with the Word?
2. What will characterize "skillful" singing in corporate worship?
3. How has your understanding of singing in worship changed as a result of this lesson?

|| CONCLUSION

As we have seen from God's Word, we sing in worship because God has commanded it, but also because we are impelled to because of who God is and what he has done and because of the spiritual benefit singing has in our lives. This spiritual benefit is only a reality if our singing is rightly filled with the Word, the gospel, and our affections. Those godly affections are a result of being filled with the Spirit that should characterize our singing as we gather with the people of God.

As we gather each Sunday to worship, we have choices to make in our singing. Are we filling ourselves with the Spirit and letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly so that we might grow in godly affections and thus desire to sing in obedience to God as an outpouring of our affections? Some of these postures are done in preparation, while others we actively pursue in the moment. And some things regarding our singing, particularly what we sing, are chosen for us, yet we still have an obligation to desire from our leaders and encourage them towards that which should form the substance of what we sing. Are you committed to this effort? You should be, for he is worthy.

PRAYER: Lord, we thank you for the gift of singing that helps the Word of Christ richly dwell in us and allows us to respond to your truth with the affections of our hearts. Help us to be discerning in what we sing and fervent in our desire to glorify you and edify the congregation through our corporate song. In Christ's name, Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 9: SINGING THE WORD

Laramie Minga

MAIN POINT: The Word of God impels the believer to sing the Word out of joyful obedience, in response to who God is and what he has done, and in the sure hope of spiritual formation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:18–20, Colossians 3:16–17

MEMORY: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16)

WHY WE SING (Eph 5:19)

GOD HAS COMMANDED US IN HIS WORD TO SING.

SINGING ALLOWS US TO EXPRESS OUR AFFECTIONS TO GOD FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

SINGING DEMONSTRATES THE COMMUNITY WE ENJOY AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

SINGING AIDS THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF BELIEVERS.

Think About It

- 1.** What are some common reasons people might give for why we sing in worship that do not necessarily come from Scripture?
- 2.** What does singing accomplish that cannot be accomplished in any other way?
- 3.** What are some ways music is performed in churches that can actually hinder the biblical purposes for singing?

WHAT WE SING (Col 3:16)

WE SHOULD SING PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS.

| WE SHOULD SING THE WORD.

| WE SHOULD SING THE GOSPEL.

| WE SHOULD SING OUR HEARTS' AFFECTIONS AND THE CAUSE OF THOSE AFFECTIONS.

| WE SHOULD SING A NEW SONG.

Think About It

- 1.** How important is it to sing psalms in corporate worship?
- 2.** In what ways could music actually hinder the Word of Christ dwelling richly in us?
- 3.** Why is it important to sing both in expression of our affections and the reasons for our affections?

HOW WE SING (Eph 5:20, Col 3:17)

WE SHOULD SING WITH OUR AFFECTIONS.

WE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AS WE SING.

WE SHOULD SING SKILLFULLY.

Think About It

- 1.** Why is it important to recognize that music does not fill us with the Spirit, but rather that singing is the result of the Spirit filling us with the Word?
- 2.** What will characterize “skillful” singing in corporate worship?
- 3.** How has your understanding of singing in worship changed as a result of this lesson?



LESSON 10: THE BLESSEDNESS OF WORSHIP

Phil Johnson

MAIN POINT: Lifting heartfelt and holy worship to the Lord is a blessing to the worshiper.

MAIN PASSAGE: Psalm 134

MEMORY: “May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!” (Ps 134:3)

Worship is not primarily for the benefit of the worshiper. If you choose a church based on what entertains you or makes you feel good, you're doing it wrong, because true worship is an offering to God. It is not a performance for the congregation; it is not a shot of adrenaline to make the worshiper feel good. True worship must, above all, aim to please God, not to please the worshiper.

But there is a balance to that truth as well, and it is this: if you truly seek to worship in spirit and in truth, if your worship flows from a heart of love for God, it will produce in you a heavenly joy and delight. You will be blessed as you bless God from a pure heart.

Psalm 134 highlights that side of this equation—the blessedness of true worship. This psalm occupies a unique place in the Hebrew Psalter. It is the last of fifteen short psalms that are all labeled “A Song of Ascents.” They are all grouped together in the Psalter, starting with Psalm 120, and the fact that they are grouped together like this suggests that these Psalms functioned as a kind of portable song book.

Most of the songs in this grouping are short and focused on one very specific theme: worship. Most of the fifteen Songs of Ascent mention Zion, or the temple, or the city of Jerusalem, and they all have praise as a major theme. They include other topics, but the one central theme that ties all of them together is worship, specifically the formal and corporate worship that takes place in Jerusalem on Mount Zion in the temple complex.

And therefore, the vast majority of commentators believe that these fifteen psalms were a collection of songs that were set aside especially to be sung by pilgrims who were making the uphill journey to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. This would make perfect sense of the inscription “A Song of Ascents,” because Jerusalem is situated in an elevated region—no matter where you are coming from, in order to get to Jerusalem, you have to go up. The Psalms of Ascent were filled with themes that directly pertained to that ascending journey. Their brevity and simplicity

makes them very easy to memorize; all of them are also, therefore, suited to group singing as families would ascend to Jerusalem for a feast.

The three annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem—Unleavened Bread, Harvest, and Ingathering—were commanded by the Law:

Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God. (Exod 23:14–17)

The final psalm of this collection, Psalm 134, is fittingly an invocation of blessing on people who have come to worship. It is a short three verse psalm, and its theme is the blessedness of worship. In fact, the word “bless” appears in each of the three verses. Verses 1 and 2 urge worshipers to bless the Lord, and verse three calls on Yahweh to bless the worshipers.

The psalm seems to have been written for antiphonal voices. The first two verses appear to be the voice of the pilgrims who come to the temple, and verse 3 seems to be sung by the people who are mentioned in verse 1, namely the servants of the Lord who stand by night in the house of the Lord. These are the priests and Levites who worked the night shift at the temple. And so, the pilgrim worshipers would sing verses 1 and 2 and the temple workers on duty at night would answer with verse 3. As the final psalm in the Songs of Ascents, this may have been a farewell benediction sung when the celebration was over, just as the worshipers began their journey back home. They would have gathered in the temple courts in the early hours of the morning, preparing to journey back home, and this psalm may have been what they sang as they departed.

The three verses in this psalm also provide the simplest of biblical worship liturgies in three parts: a call to worship, a doxology, and a benediction.

A CALL TO HEARTFELT WORSHIP (Ps 134:1)

Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!

This call to worship is addressed to the night guard and the priests who ministered at the temple overnight. It is both an invitation and a command to the temple's night staff. The temple always had priests, Levites, guards, and even musicians on duty. Qualified worshipers were welcome to come at any hour, and the night shift was not to be treated as an afterthought—it was important. As a “copy of heavenly things” (Heb 9:23), the service of the earthly sanctuary needed to mirror the perpetual worship that takes place around the throne of God in heaven.

Therefore, people were on duty at the temple around the clock throughout the year. And the night shift had to be especially watchful. First Chronicles 9 describes the duties of the large retinue of guards around the temple:

The gatekeepers were on the four sides, east, west, north, and south. ²⁵ And their kinsmen who were in their villages were obligated to come in every seven days, in turn, to be with these, ²⁶ for the four chief gatekeepers, who were Levites, were entrusted to be over the chambers and the treasures of the house of God. ²⁷ And they lodged around the house of God, for on them lay the duty of watching, and they had charge of opening it every morning. ²⁸ Some of them had charge of the utensils of service, for they were required to count them when they were brought in and taken out. ²⁹ Others of them were appointed over the furniture and over all the holy utensils, also over the fine flour, the wine, the oil, the incense, and the spices. ³⁰ Others, of the sons of the priests, prepared the mixing of the spices, ³¹ and Mattithiah, one of the Levites, the firstborn of Shallum the Korahite, was entrusted with making the flat cakes. ³² Also some of their kinsmen of the Kohathites had charge of the showbread, to prepare it every Sabbath. ³³ Now these, the singers, the heads of fathers' houses of the Levites, were in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night. (1 Chron 9:24–33)

Some of the rabbinical records suggest that there were also groups of unusually devout worshipers who were in the habit of visiting the temple to pray in the middle of the night. Luke 2:37 describes one of these, a widow named Anna. Luke says of her, “She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day.”

The night shift at the temple also consisted of some of the highest-ranking priests, because the burnt offerings had to be kept burning all night. The sons of Aaron were strictly instructed not to let that fire go out:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁹ “Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering shall be on the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning

on it. ¹⁰ And the priest shall put on his linen garment and put his linen undergarment on his body, and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and put them beside the altar. ¹¹ Then he shall take off his garments and put on other garments and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. ¹² The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. ¹³ Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out. (Lev 6:8–13)

So night duty at the temple was a responsibility that could not be taken casually, yet like any ritual or routine, the tasks had to be done methodically. This illustrates a common problem with well-ordered worship: it becomes tedious very easily. It is easy to become inattentive or to succumb to the dullness of repetition and then begin to perform your tasks mindlessly or heedlessly. We sometimes sing our hymns that way, sadly.

And so, the call to worship in this early morning psalm specifically targets those whose duty it was to lead and worship. In fact, there's a not-so-subtle irony about this, isn't there? The people whose job it is to lead in worship are being called to worship. This is literally what you would call preaching to the choir. Indeed, even the choir frequently needs a call to worship.

WORSHIP WITH THE WHOLE HEART

And to underscore the urgency of this call to worship, it starts with an exclamation. The opening words translated “come” is a term designed to seize the attention of the people to whom you are speaking. It is the same word that is translated “behold” at the beginning of Psalm 133. It expresses a sense of earnest importance and lends emphasis through whatever statement immediately follows it. The sense of it

hinnēh (“come”) – Here!, There!, Look!, Now! a marker used to liven narrative, change a scene, emphasize an idea, call attention to a detail. (DBL)

here is exactly like the English word “look!” This is telling the temple staff, “Don’t lose sight of what you’re doing; don’t just go through the motions; and above all, don’t fall asleep on the job. What you are doing is of eternal importance, so put your hearts in it.” It is an urgent wake-up call: you serve a jealous God; give him the praise that is due him.

In other words, this is more than merely a generic call to worship. It would have been applicable to every person at the temple, of course, but it is specifically directed at those who have a particular calling to ministry. And thus, in a special way, this would apply to anyone who is serving the Lord in any kind of regular fashion. Men and women alike, priests and temple guards, janitors,

nursery workers, even the person who sweeps the floor—“Bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord, who stand by night in the house of the Lord!”

The Hebrew word for “stand” in this call to worship is consistently used in Scripture to speak of the duty that is performed by those who served in the temple.

Deut 10:8 “At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD to *stand* before the LORD to minister to him and to bless in his name, to this day.”

Deut 18:7 “And ministers in the name of the LORD his God, like all his fellow Levites who *stand* to minister there before the LORD ...”

1 Chron 23:30 “And they were to *stand* every morning, thanking and praising the LORD, and likewise at evening.”

2 Chron 29:11 “My sons, do not now be negligent, for the LORD has chosen you to *stand* in his presence, to minister to him and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.”

Remember, the sacrificial furnishings in the temple did not include any chairs. The priests stood, signifying the unfinished nature of their service. In fact, the work of atonement was never really ever complete until Christ himself finally offered one sacrifice for sins forever. That is the very point of Hebrews 10:11–13:

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

Psalms 134 recognizes that all those people who were working in Solomon’s temple were standing, and the call to worship is specifically directed to those who “stand by night in the house of the Lord,” men and women whose job it is to care for the details of worship in the early morning hours.

Thus the context of this call to worship is a tacit recognition that anything routine can be too easily taken for granted and be done half-heartedly. So, this is a formal call to wake up from the listless stupor of liturgical routines and bless the Lord with a whole heart.

BLESS THE LORD

Scripture uses the word “bless” in several ways.

“Bless” in Scripture

Gen 1:22 “And God *blessed* them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’”

Gen 2:3 “So God *blessed* the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.”

Gen 24:60 “And they *blessed* Rebekah and said to her, ‘Our sister, may you become thousands of ten thousands, and may your offspring possess the gate of those who hate him!’”

Luke 24:30 “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and *blessed* and broke it and gave it to them.”

To bless something is to consecrate it by either saying words or making a pronouncement that confers or invokes divine favor on a purpose or object. With that definition, how do we bless the Lord? We certainly cannot confer any good or benefit on him; we cannot increase his happiness. We certainly cannot sanctify him in the sense of adding to his holiness.

Nevertheless, we are commanded to bless him. We bless him by saying words that call him holy, by attributing to him the honor that is due. In other words, to bless the Lord is to praise him. It is as simple as that—to hallow his name and to ascribe glory to him. And specifically, this verse speaks of praising him with thanksgiving.

And so, this first verse is a call to worship—a call to wholehearted, alert, heartfelt, grateful worship as opposed to simply going through the motions. “Put your heart in it”—that is the sense of this call to worship.

Think About It

1. In what ways do you sometimes find yourself heartlessly engaged in the regular routines of worship?
2. What are some practical ways you can ensure that you are worshiping with your whole heart?
3. In what ways can we bless the Lord in our worship?

|| A HUMBLE DOXOLOGY (Ps 134:2)

Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!

The second part of this order of worship is the doxology—an utterance of praise to God. This is both a response and a repetition of the call to worship from verse 1; it both answers and echoes the call to worship.

The physical response of uplifted hands is often in the Old Testament associated with prayer. This was a gesture that signified holiness; because God is holy, those who come before him in prayer must themselves be holy (Lev 11:44, Num 15:40). Uplifted hands were a symbol that acknowledged the need of the worshiper for holiness. According to this verse, the hands were to be lifted to the holy place, meaning toward the holy of holies, the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.

Lifting Hands in Prayer

- 1 Kgs 8:38–39 “Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart and stretching out his hands toward this house, then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways.”
- Ezra 9:5 “And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.”
- Ps 28:2 “Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary.”
- Ps 141:2 “Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!”
- 1 Tim 2:8 “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.”
-

Even today Judaism has a special ceremony known as the raising of the hands. This is part of the Jewish liturgy, during which a priest pronounces the formal blessing that is found in Numbers 6:24–26:

The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Physical gestures have the advantage of counteracting the feeling of listlessness or dullness that the psalm seems to be addressing. But the point is not mainly the gesture, but what the gesture means. It is a symbol of humble supplication and childlike dependence.

Think About It

1. What are some different ways you might obey the spirit of the command to “lift up your hands” in blessing the Lord?
2. Why is there an emphasis upon holiness when we approach God in prayer?
3. In what ways might we approach God in worship without a proper focus on holiness?

|| A CONFIDENT BENEDICTION (Ps 134:3)

May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!

After the call to worship and the expression of worship, a new voice speaks in verse 3, so that this Psalm is apparently written to be sung antiphonally like a responsive reading. The departing worshipers sing verses 1 and 2, and verse 3 is the Levitical response. Those who stand by night in the house of the Lord have heard the call to worship; they have joined in the doxology of verse 2, lifting their hands in holiness; and now they respond with a benediction.

This is a perfect closing line to this very brief psalm and a fitting end to the fifteen Psalms of Ascent. Verses 1 and 2 both invoke the worshipers' blessing to the Lord: “Bless the Lord.” Verse 3 is a plea that the worshipers themselves might be blessed. And this time, the blessing comes from God.

Importantly, the pronoun “you” is singular, emphasizing a focus on the individual. This is not a prayer for material prosperity, it is a wish for the joy and contentment that is the birthright of those who have found God's favor and who worship him in spirit and in truth. Worship should be a joy and delight, and this is a prayer for that kind of spiritual blessedness. It is a prayer that God would grant from Zion the same favor and fellowship with God and his people that the pilgrims had come to Zion in order to find.

He is, after all, the Lord who made heaven and earth. All the blessings that we truly need are all at his disposal; that should be an encouragement. This psalm itself is given to us by the Holy Spirit as a reminder and a summons to seek those blessings in our prayer and in our praise of the most high God. “May he bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth.”

Think About It

1. What is the difference between praying for personal spiritual blessing and praying for material blessing?
2. Why does the fact that God made heaven and earth bring encouragement to worshipers?
3. What are some practical ways this simple worship order can impact your approach to worship?

PRAYER: Father, we are grateful for the fellowship and encouragement we find when we gather with the people of God, when we lift our hearts and hands and voices in praise to you. May we be faithful to proclaim your Word, to praise your name, and to bless you with full hearts, not in a perfunctory or mechanical way, but in spirit and in truth. We thank you for the Lord Jesus, for the salvation he purchased for his people. May we be found in that number on the last day, and may our praise extend through all eternity. We pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

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STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 10: THE BLESSEDNESS OF
WORSHIP

Phil Johnson

MAIN POINT: Lifting heartfelt and holy worship to the Lord is a blessing to the worshiper.

MAIN PASSAGE: Psalm 134

MEMORY: “May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!” (Ps 134:3)

A CALL TO HEARTFELT WORSHIP (Ps 134:1)

WORSHIP WITH THE WHOLE HEART

BLESS THE LORD

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways do you sometimes find yourself heartlessly engaged in the regular routines of worship?
- 2.** What are some practical ways you can ensure that you are worshiping with your whole heart?
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LESSON 11: GOSPEL-ORDERED WORSHIP

Matthew Sikes

MAIN POINT: Scripture-regulated, gospel-ordered worship will build up Christ's body to glorify him.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 14

MEMORY: "But all things should be done decently and in order."
(1 Cor 14:40)

For a Christian, all of life ought to be one of worship—responding with actions and affections to God's character and works as expressed in his Word and made possible through the gospel of Jesus Christ. However, Scripture commands that believers gather together (Heb 10:25) as the temple of God (Eph 2:21–22), in order that we might corporately worship him.

Yet many questions arise as we consider what we do when we gather for worship. How do we determine our order of worship? Why do we do the things that we do in the way that we do them? Why do we sing certain hymns in certain places in the service? Do our prayers in worship serve specific purposes, or are they simply prayers scattered throughout so that we have a certain number of them? Why do we read Scripture passages other than the sermon text throughout the service?

First Corinthians 14 specifically addresses these questions. This chapter serves as the culmination of Paul's argument on the true nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. Paul defines spiritual gifts in chapter 12, in chapter 13 he stresses that love is supreme, and then in chapter 14 he discusses the practice of gifts in gathered worship. And in the midst of a rebuke about improper practice of the spiritual gifts at the church in Corinth, Paul provides a foundational understanding of the nature and purpose of corporate worship.

Paul has two overarching concerns in 1 Corinthians 14: intelligibility in communication and worship that is decent and orderly.

Tongues and Prophecy in the Church Today

Prophecy – the delivery of direct, divine revelation to the degree that one who prophesies can always unequivocally say, “Thus says the Lord” (Deut 18:18–19).

Tongues – the ability to speak in a known language that the speaker has never learned as a sign of judgment to unbelieving Israel (Acts 2:4, 8; Isa 28:11–12)

Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 14 regarding the specifics of prophecy and speaking in tongues does not directly apply to the church today— these spiritual gifts have ceased since (a) the sign of tongues served a very limited function that is no longer necessary, and (b) since we now have a “prophetic word more fully confirmed” (2 Pet 1:19) in the complete canon of Scripture, God no longer delivers new revelation through human prophets. But what we do learn from this passage is relevant: worship must be ordered around the authority and sufficiency of God’s Word, and it must be done so in a way that builds up the body in love.

INTELLIGIBILITY IN WORSHIP IS NECESSARY FOR EDIFICATION (1 Cor 14:1–25)

EDIFICATION IS THE GOAL OF CORPORATE WORSHIP (vv. 1–5)

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. ² For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. ³ On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. ⁴ The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. ⁵ Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

Notice the emphasis in this passage on the edification of the body in corporate worship. We might wonder, “isn’t the goal of worship to glorify God?” Certainly God’s glory is the goal of all of life, including our worship. But Paul’s emphasis here is on this important truth: worship that is truly glorifying to God will necessarily be edifying for the body.

For example, why does Paul continue to emphasize the priority of prophecy over speaking in tongues in verse 1? Verse 2 tells us the answer: “one who speaks in a tongue speaks *not to men but to God*.” Someone speaking in tongues edifies himself but not others (v 4), and so Paul discourages speaking in tongues in corporate worship unless an interpreter is present (v 5). On the other hand, he says in verse 3, “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation,” and so Paul encourages prophecy in worship.

Oikodomeō [build up] – process of building, building, construction; to edify (BDAG)

v3: “for their upbuilding”

v4: “builds up”

v5: “built up”

v12: “building up”

v17: “being built up”

v26: “building up”

In other words, in these first five verses, Paul lays the foundation for the purpose of the corporate worship of the church—it must build up or edify the body. He uses construction language to signify the fact that the church, as God’s new covenant people, serve as the *temple* of the living God. This temple must be built up; this is the goal of corporate worship.

Paul stresses this idea in Ephesians 4:11–16:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

This passage further clarifies the goal of corporate worship—the edification of the body, which leads to the whole body growing into maturity in Christ. We clearly learn from these verses that worship is not about an individual having an emotional encounter that ignores the other worshipers. Corporate worship is not even about 200 people coming together and privately worshipping God at the same time. Rather corporate worship *is corporate*—it is building up the body in love.

CORPORATE WORSHIP MUST BE INTELLIGIBLE (vv. 6–25)

Paul continues his argument by stressing the principle that corporate worship that builds up the body must first be *intelligible*. He illustrates the ineffectiveness of unintelligible worship in verses 6–12:

Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ⁸ And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, ¹¹ but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. ¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

Paul notes that if he were to speak uninterpreted tongues to the church, he would be ineffective, because he would not edify the body. He further uses musical illustrations: flutes and harps that do not produce distinct tones will not be understood as serving their proper function. Likewise, a bugle producing an indistinct sound to call troops for battle will not fulfill its purpose. Indistinct sounds into the air will be unintelligible to all in the congregation.

Therefore, Paul emphasizes again, corporate worship is about edification—“strive to excel in building up the church,” he again proclaims. In worship we must strive for communication that is intelligible and will thus edify and build up the body in love for the purpose of glorifying our God and sanctifying his people.

Paul then moves to a direct application of this principle of intelligibility in worship beginning in verse 13:

Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, in

church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.²¹ In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord.”²² Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.

Paul argues that both our minds and spirits must both be engaged in worship for the goal of edification. Furthermore, in order for worship to be edifying it must genuinely be *corporate*—that is, the entire body must be engaged. Worship is not an observational activity.

Furthermore, Paul notes beginning in verse 23 that worship that is intelligible and edifying will also necessarily be evangelistic:

If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds?²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all,²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you.

Paul lays out the important principle here that corporate worship of the church is primarily about the church coming together to be built up, not about attracting unbelievers. Yet, when worship is God-centered and builds up the body, it will be evangelistic as unbelievers are called to account by all and fall on their faces, worshiping God, and declaring that he is among us! This will happen because, as we will see in more detail soon, our services will be saturated with the gospel.

Think About It

1. In what ways does Paul emphasize the importance of edification in corporate worship?
2. Why is it important to recognize that the central purpose of corporate worship is edification of the body?
3. What are some ways corporate worship today often hinders edification?

CORPORATE WORSHIP MUST BE INTENTIONALLY ORDERED AROUND GOD'S WORD (1 Cor 14:26–40)

After establishing the necessity of intelligibility for corporate worship that is edifying, Paul moves to address the issue of the ordering of worship, arguing that orderly and decent worship is necessary for edification and the glory of God.

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. ²⁷ If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. ²⁸ But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. ³⁰ If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.... ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.

Paul stresses again that corporate worship of God is for building up the body (v 26) and concludes that in order for this to happen, worship must be done *decently and in order* (v 40). His specific instructions regarding the practice of tongues and prophecy stress this—these gifts must be practiced in an orderly fashion. While we no longer have the gifts of tongues and prophecy today, the principle remains: corporate worship should be done decently and in order.

While Paul does not prescribe a specific order for worship, he does mandate that our worship have an order. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to give careful thought to the way we order our worship so that it glorifies God, builds up the body, and calls unbelievers into account.

The fundamental principle that should undergird the orderliness of our worship is that our services must be centered on the Word of God, both in content (the specific elements) and form (the way that our services are shaped). Beginning in verse 36, Paul stresses the authority of Scripture for worship:

Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. ³⁸ If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

If we truly believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, then we will recognize that to go beyond the biblically prescribed elements of corporate worship infringes on Christian liberty and hinders the mandate for corporate worship to build up the body in love.

Rooting our worship services in Scripture will involve three aspects: the essence of worship, the elements of worship, and the shape of worship.

THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

At its core, corporate worship is a dialogue between God and his people. As with our salvation, God is always the initiator of worship. God speaks first, and then we respond to him; this is the essence of worship throughout Scripture.

After God reveals himself to us, we draw near to him with reverence and awe because our God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:28). Any service of worship that begins with a man-centered, casual, and flippant approach to God is not worship of the one, true, living God—it is something else. Any worship that centers on something other than God and his glory is in fact idolatry.

This is one of the reasons that our preparation for entering worship is so important. Do we come to corporate worship with an attitude of reverence and awe, or do we enter mindlessly without having given any thought to what we are about to engage in, expecting the leaders to rouse us to an emotional high using catchy rhetoric and emotional music?

We must always remember that the essence of worship is God-centered, Word-centered, Christ-Centered edification of the body of Christ—a rhythm of revelation and response between God and his people.

THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

While we do not find a specific mandate in Scripture for the exact ordering of our worship, we do, however, find certain prescribed elements that give us the parameters of what should and should not be allowed in worship. The sufficient Word has given those ordinary means of grace that, through their regular use, will build up the body.

Paul commands Timothy, in the context of teaching him how to behave in the house of God, “devote yourself to the **public reading of Scripture** (1 Tim 4:13). He repeats similar commands in Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27.

Paul also commands Timothy to “devote yourself ... to exhortation, to teaching” (1 Tim 4:13) and “**preach the Word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

Third, Paul commands that “supplications, prayers, **intercessions**, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and for all who are in high positions” (1 Tim 2:1). He commands the Colossians to “continue steadfastly in prayer” (4:2), and to the Ephesians he admonishes, “praying at all time in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication . . . making supplication for all the saints” (6:18).

A fourth biblically-prescribed element is **singing**. In both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, Paul commands gathered believers to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, thereby “singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Eph 5:19) and “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col 3:16).

Fifth, Paul commanded the Corinthian church, “On the first day of the week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come” (1 Cor 16:2). Although in its immediate context this refers to giving that was taken to needy believers in Jerusalem (v. 3), Paul indicates that elders should be paid (1 Tim 5:17–18), and so it is fitting that such regular, weekly **giving** be used for that purpose as well, in addition to caring for the particular needs of members in the congregation (Acts 6:1, 1 Tim 5:3) and other material functions of the church.

Sixth, Christ commanded in his Great Commission to the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

And finally, Paul told the Corinthian church that he passed on “**the Lord’s Supper**” to the church, having received it from the Lord himself (1 Cor 11:20, 23).

These are the only corporate worship elements given to the church in the New Testament for the purpose of building up the body. To add or subtract from these God-ordained elements would be to distrust the sufficiency of God’s Word in giving us what we need to equip us for every good work (2 Tim 3:17).

THE SHAPE OF WORSHIP

Finally, we arrive at the important question of how we order or shape our worship services. Again, as we have not been given a mandated order of worship in Scripture, we are left to use biblical principles for the ordering of our services. What we know for certain is that how we order our services is very important; otherwise, Paul would not have written to explain to the Corinthian church of the necessity of decent and orderly worship.

How we order our worship is important because it communicates what we believe about God and how we relate to him. Worship that is edifying must be thoroughly God-centered, and worship that is thoroughly God-centered will focus on the preeminence of Christ in all things. More specifically,

Christ-centered worship will revolve around on the person and the work of Christ—that is, the gospel.

Our worship must be filled with the content of the gospel, but the gospel also impacts the order of our worship. At the heart of why and how we worship, we are remembering what God has done for us in the gospel in such a way that we are built up by the gospel.

For example, when God founded the annual Passover observance, he proclaimed, “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast” (Exod 12:14). In calling this feast a “memorial,” God meant more than simply a passive remembrance of the first event of Passover; this is clear by the fact that the Hebrews were meant, not merely to recount the event of the first Passover, but to actually *reenact* the event. In so doing, the people of Israel for generations to come would not only remember the facts of the exodus from Egypt, but they would also be formed by the event as if they had been there themselves as a means to renew their covenant with God.

This same emphasis on remembrance is found at the heart of our observance of the Lord’s Supper, which serves as the climax of the service and a sort of microcosm for the whole of worship.

Anamnēsis [remembrance] – “the means for causing someone to remember” (Louw-Nida)

While celebrating the Passover memorial himself, Jesus Christ established a new ordinance, complete with a carefully prescribed liturgy, and commanded his disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me.” This “remembrance” is an active reenactment of the death of Christ on behalf of his people in such a way that we are built up by the gospel.

This principle of remembrance through a reenactment of the gospel should inform the entirety of the service. How we tell the story of the gospel in our worship is a re-presentation of the gospel, which reminds us of the truth that is for God’s people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

*“Corporate worship is nothing more, and nothing less, than a re-presentation of the gospel in the presence of God and his people for his glory and their good.” (Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 120)*

Worship serves as a sort of renewal of the reality of our position and grace in Christ that directly confronts the false narratives that we are surrounded by in the world, and even in our own hearts.

If the purpose of our corporate worship is to build up believers in the gospel, wouldn’t it only make sense that our services not only be filled with the content of the gospel but also ordered by the gospel?

The gospel is a story with specific elements that we can re-present in our worship:

1. God is the holy Creator and Sovereign over all.
2. We sinners are confronted with our need for forgiveness.

3. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
4. Christ has atoned for our sins by his broken body and shed blood.
5. We respond with thanksgiving and a life devoted to growing in his Word and being conformed to the image of Christ.

This gospel message has a logical flow that corresponds to the message of the entirety of Scripture. The Bible is God's story of redemption of his people—it is the gospel, and so the examples of worship we have in Scripture model this reenactment of the gospel.

For example, the worship patterns that God had established for Israel at Mt. Sinai were not arbitrary. The order of worship God prescribed reflects his redeeming work in which in the assembly, God's people reenact through the order of what they do God's atoning work on their behalf. The encounter at Sinai began with God's initiative: "The Lord called out to [Moses] out of the mountain" (Exod 19:5)—God himself called Moses, Aaron and his sons, the elders, and all the people to draw near to worship him (24:1). The people had to remain at a distance, however (v. 2), emphasizing the fact that sin cannot come fully into the presence of God. For this very reason, this worship service continued with necessary consecration of the people. Moses presented God's "rules" to the people as a way to reemphasize their own sinfulness and then offered the necessary sacrifices of atonement so that they would be accepted (vv. 3–8). God communicated his approval and acceptance of them based on the atoning sacrifice when the leaders of the people "saw the God of Israel, ... and he did not lay his hand" against them (vv. 9–11). The ultimate expression of the fact that they were now welcome in his presence for communion with him was that "they beheld God, and ate and drank" (v. 11). Once again, to eat and drink before the presence of God was a powerful statement that the people had gained acceptance with God, not through their own work, but through the means that he had established.

This first service of worship for Israel followed a progression that became standard for the worship of God's people from that time forward. This same theological pattern characterized the progression of sacrifices within the tabernacle assemblies, moving from the sin offering to the guilt offering to the burnt offering to the grain offering and finally the peace offering. The same structure appears at the dedication of the tabernacle (Lev 9) and later Solomon's temple (2 Chron 15–17).

This pattern is modeled also in Isaiah's vision of heavenly worship (see Lesson 3) and in John's vision as well (see Lesson 12).

From creation to consummation, the corporate worship of God's people is a memorial—a reenactment—of the "theo-logic" of true worship: God's call for his people to commune with him through the sacrifice of atonement that he has provided, listening to his Word, responding with praise and obedience, and culminating with a beautiful picture of perfect communion with God in the form of a feast. This reenactment in a corporate worship service of God's work for us is what will progressively build us up in the gospel.

This is why historic worship services, intentionally structured on the basis of this theological pattern, have always followed a standard order: worshipers begin with God's call for them to worship him, followed by adoration and praise. They then confess their sins to him and receive assurance of pardon in Christ. They thank him for their salvation, they hear his Word preached, and they respond with dedication. And the climax of all historic Christian worship has always been expression of communion with God through celebrating the Lord's Table. To eat at Christ's Table is the most powerful expression that Christians are accepted by him, memorially reenacting Christ's death until he comes again. All of the Scripture readings, prayers, and songs in this order are carefully chosen for their appropriateness in a particular function within the service structure shaped by the true reality of worship in the world without end.

We could summarize this biblical pattern in this way:

God reveals himself and calls his people to worship
God's people acknowledge and confess their need for forgiveness
God provides atonement
God speaks his Word
God's people respond with commitment
God hosts a celebratory feast

Worship now that is shaped by the true spiritual realities of heavenly worship is what God has designed to sanctify us to live by faith in light of those realities, just like the saints of old. Paul says in Titus 2:12, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,"—so he's talking about the gospel that brings salvation, but then notice what else he says the gospel does: "training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age." In other words, the gospel that saved us is also the gospel that sanctifies us—the gospel that reconciled us to God, that brought us near to him, is the gospel that will continue to grow our relationship with him. We don't just believe the gospel for salvation and then leave it behind; even as believers, we must continually renew ourselves in the gospel so that it continues to train us and cultivate our relationship with God.

Thus the biblical essence of worship—a rhythm of revelation and response—is embedded in the biblical elements of worship within the gospel shape of worship:

1. **Revelation:** God reveals himself and calls us to worship.
2. **Adoration:** We recognize the greatness of God and praise him for it.
3. **Confession:** When we acknowledge the holiness of God, we also recognize our unworthiness to draw near to him because of our sin.
4. **Propitiation:** As Christians, we are assured of pardon through the sacrifice of Christ, which makes worship possible.
5. **Proclamation:** The Word of God is taught.
6. **Dedication:** We respond to the Word of God with consecration.
7. **Supplication:** We bring our requests before the Lord.
8. **Communion:** We celebrate free access to God because of Christ's death on our behalf.

9. **Commission:** God sends us into the world to serve him. Just as the service began with God's Word, it ends with a word of blessing from him.

This order of worship represents the process and the logic of the gospel that characterizes the life of God's people from the beginning, and it serves as the foundation of our holy living and continuous sanctification.

Think About It

1. Why is it important that God's Word regulates the essence, elements, and shape of our worship?
2. What elements do churches today commonly include in their worship that have not be prescribed by Scripture?
3. How would a gospel-shaped worship order impact the way we approach corporate worship?

PRAYER: Lord, we thank you that you have given us the sufficient means for our edification through your Word. Help us to trust your Word as we approach corporate worship, so that you might be glorified, we might be built up in the gospel, and unbelievers will be called to account. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

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STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 11: GOSPEL-ORDERED
WORSHIP

Matthew Sikes

MAIN POINT: Scripture-regulated, gospel-ordered worship will build up Christ's body to glorify him.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 14

MEMORY: "But all things should be done decently and in order."
(1 Cor 14:40)

INTELLIGIBILITY IN WORSHIP IS
NECESSARY FOR EDIFICATION (1 Cor 14:1–25)

EDIFICATION IS THE GOAL OF CORPORATE WORSHIP (vv. 1–5)

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways does Paul emphasize the importance of edification in corporate worship?
- 2.** Why is it important to recognize that the central purpose of corporate worship is edification of the body?
- 3.** What are some ways corporate worship today often hinders edification?

**CORPORATE WORSHIP MUST BE
INTENTIONALLY ORDERED AROUND GOD'S
WORD** (1 Cor 14:26–40)

THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

Think About It

- 1.** Why is it important that God's Word regulates the essence, elements, and shape of our worship?
- 2.** What elements do churches today commonly include in their worship that have not be prescribed by Scripture?
- 3.** How would a gospel-shaped worship order impact the way we approach corporate worship?



LESSON 12: THE WORSHIP OF HEAVEN

Steven Lawson

MAIN POINT: Heavenly worship is the model for our earthly worship.

MAIN PASSAGE: Revelation 5

MEMORY: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”
(Rev 5:12)

Worship is our ultimate priority. God has created us for his own glory, and so we ought to worship God in a way that brings him greatest glory. The most perfect picture of what God-glorifying worship should be like has been given to us in two glimpses of heavenly worship: Isaiah 6 (see Lesson 3) and the book of Revelation.

In Revelation 5, we read about a worship service that has already taken place in heaven two thousand years ago. This explosion of praise occurred upon the ascension and exaltation and enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ following his crucifixion and resurrection, when he was seated at the right hand of God the Father.

What we see in this passage is worship in its purest form, without any addition of manmade traditions or impurities. It is good for us to examine this worship in heaven because many today are looking in all the wrong places for how they should worship. They are looking horizontally rather than vertically. They are adapting their worship so that it mimics the world around them. And in this new way of doing church, exposition is replaced with entertainment, preaching is replaced with performances, congregational singing is replaced with concerts, doctrine is replaced with drama, and theology is replaced with theatrics.

This is why we need to revisit this passage again, seeking to understand the distinctive hallmarks of worship in its purest form.

|| THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (Rev 5:1)

The first thing that dominates this worship scene is the sovereignty of God. We see this clearly in verse one. This worship scene begins where every worship service must begin: with the recognition that God is upon his throne and that his sovereignty rules and reigns overall.

Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

The “him” refers to God the Father, seated upon the throne. That he is seated upon the throne means that he is presiding over the affairs of the universe. God is reigning and ruling every moment of every day. There are no more sabbatical rests for God as he had on the seventh day of creation. Every moment of every day God is upon his throne in heaven, and he is orchestrating all of the events upon this earth.

What is remarkable is that John writes this during the darkest hour of the church, as the church is oppressed, under the dominance of the Roman Empire, and as believers are being scattered around as emperor worship is exploding onto the scene. In the heavenly scene of Revelation 5, it is not Caesar upon his throne in Rome, but it is God upon his throne in heaven who is in control of the universe.

We note that in his right hand, in this hand of supreme authority, there is a scroll. This official document, mentioned eight times in Revelation 5, becomes one of the chapter’s dominant

*“In ancient times, papyrus rolls were used for public and private documents. Usually the writing was on one side only—the inside part, arranged in successive vertical columns. Occasionally a scroll was written on both sides; in that case it was called an ‘opisthograph.’ ... Scrolls, or folded sheets, were sealed with wax blobs impressed with a signet ring to protect the contents or guarantee the integrity of the writing. Only the owner could open the seals and disclose the contents.” (Alan F. Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 465–66)*

features. The contents of this scroll are known by alone, who is the author of its writings. This book is a sealed mystery and is unknown to human eyes. It cannot be changed. What is written in this book is already predetermined for the future, irrevocably sealed up with seven seals.

What is recorded in this book that will set heaven erupting with worship and praise? Contained in this book is the

unfolding world events and coming judgements upon this earth that will be brought by Almighty God himself. It is God’s prewritten, predetermined final act for this age—the end of all things as well as the means to finally accomplish those ends. God is sovereign, and he has already recorded with infinite and precise detail everything that will unfold in the future.

The attention to the sovereign rule of God is how John's vision began in chapter 4. When John first enters into heaven, what captures his attention is not the people there or the streets of gold; as soon as John enters into heaven, what dominates his vision is a throne standing in heaven. This is where the scene began in Isaiah 6. Isaiah "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple." Worship in its purest form begins with the elevation and the exaltation of God over all things.

Think About It

1. Why is it important that our worship begins with a recognition of the sovereignty of God?
2. What is revealed when our worship focuses primarily on our needs and desires?
3. How might a focus on God's sovereignty impact the way we approach worship?

|| THE INABILITY OF MAN (Rev 5:2–4)

As this scene unfolds, we see not only the sovereignty of God, but we also see the inability of man.

And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?"³ And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it,⁴ and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it.

The angel is crying out, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" In other words, Who is able to bring human history to its appointed end? Who is able to overturn evil with good? Who can usher in the kingdom of God on the earth?

Verse 3 provides the answer: no one. This reveals the complete inability of any created being to carry out with perfect fulfillment the predetermined plans of God for this world. No angel, no earthly ruler, no church, no pastor, no governmental official was able to break open the seals and execute its content.

The same is still true today. The answers to our problems lie not in this world, not in Washington, not in New York, in Hollywood, nor in London, nor in Moscow. There is no one on planet earth who can bring the Kingdom of God to its appointed end.

And in verse 4, the magnitude of the emptiness of this search came down hard on John. He wept as if over the death of a loved one. The futility of the world was too bleak for John to face, and the present hour seemed completely out of control to John. It appeared that evil would triumph over good and that sin would triumph over righteousness.

Here we see the complete inability of man to solve his own problems and to carry out the will of God on his own here upon the earth. And in every worship service there must be this recognition of the complete inability of man contrasted with the sovereignty of God.

Think About It

1. How does recognizing the supreme sovereignty of God naturally lead us to recognize our own inability?
2. Why is it important that we regularly recognize our own inability when we worship?
3. How can this recognition of human inability impact what we do in worship?

|| THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST (Rev 5:5–7)

In verse 5, we see an unexpected interruption.

And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

The elder cannot bear to see John weeping anymore, and he actually gently rebukes him: Stop weeping! He reveals that the solution to the problem of man's inability is to focus upon the Lion of Judah, Jesus Christ. Christ is represented here as a Lion—as one who is ferocious and kingly and dominant and conquering. This is none other than the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords who is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He is the legal heir to the throne.

He has conquered so as to open the book and its seven seals. He has already overcome by the victory of his death upon Calvary's cross, by the power of the resurrection, and by the triumph of his ascension to the right hand of God the Father. All authority in heaven and earth has been given unto him. He alone will be able to bring human history to its appointed end.

And this is the message that we must bring in our worship service: the supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. When someone comes into our churches, they should witness a dominant victorious note of the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

CROSS

John begins to catch a renewed vision of this supreme dominance of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so in verse 6 he looks for this Lion:

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. ⁷ And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.

What is this? A defenseless lamb? Slain? John sees Jesus Christ, slain as a sacrificial animal upon Calvary's cross. He is supreme, and he has earned the right to break open the seals because of his sacrificial atonement. This is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." This is why he said in 1 Corinthians 1:22, "We preach Christ crucified." This is why we come to the Lord's Table again and again, to be reminded of the supreme importance of the sin-bearing substitutionary death of Jesus Christ upon Calvary's cross, in which he bore the sins of his people and carried them far away. This sin-bearing death propitiated the righteous anger of God; it has reconciled Holy God and sinful man, and brought the two together through the blood of the cross. This death of Christ has redeemed those who are enslaved to their sin and to Satan and has bought them with the price of his own blood. Forever and ever, throughout all of the ages to come, we shall be staring at those nail-pierced hands in his glorified body and it will cause our hearts to rise in worship and declare his greatness.

RESURRECTION

But it says that though he was slain, he is standing. He has come back from the dead, and he is standing in triumph and dominion over this world. Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and earth. He has authority to send the Holy Spirit, he has authority to convert his enemies, he has authority to open spiritually blind eyes, he has authority to answer prayer.

Here Jesus is represented with seven horns, the number of perfection, symbolizing that he is all-powerful and that he is able to conquer all in combat. None can stand up against him when he exerts his will. And he has seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth, meaning he sees in every direction. Nothing occurs behind his back that he does not see. He is omniscient, and nothing surprises him. He receives no news from the earth of which he did not already know. This is an invincible combination: seven horns and seven eyes—he is omnipotent and omniscient.

In verse 7, he boldly approached the throne of God—he comes to the very epicenter of the universe, the seat of all power and all authority. He took the scroll from his Father, assuming the reigns of human history. He possesses it all. And when he comes back at his second coming, he will simply say, “mine.”

This is the worship scene in heaven, and it is being run by a theocracy—by the vote of one, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It is a government in heaven that is of the Lord, by the Lord, and for the Lord. This is what is dominant in this worship service in heaven, the reality of Christ upon his throne, and so it should be in our worship services.

Think About It

1. Why must a focus on the supremacy of Christ in our worship be preceded by a focus on the sovereignty of God and the inability of man?
2. How can we make the death and resurrection of Christ central in our worship?
3. Why is a focus on Christ's atonement still necessary for Christians?

THE HUMILITY OF THE WORSHIPERS (Rev 5:8)

In verse 8, we see the response of the angelic beings and the twenty-four elders, who represent all of the redeemed people of God:

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

In response to the exaltation of the Lamb, all of heaven is humbled—no one is left standing. They each hold a harp, which is an instrument of joy and gladness and celebration, and golden bowls, which are full of a sweet smelling aroma that represents the prayers of the saints ascending upward to God.

And this posture of submission in heaven before Christ must be the lowly posture of every church as it humbles itself beneath the mighty hand of God. We come not into the worship service strutting like peacocks as though we're doing God a favor to show up on Sunday. We come into his presence acknowledging our own unworthiness and our lowliness of heart and submission under his right to rule over our lives. At the very least, we need to come in humble submission and surrender our lives to the mighty hand of God.

Think About It

1. What are some ways we sometimes come to worship presumptuously?
2. Name a few realities about Christ that should humble us in worship.
3. What are some practical ways we can make sure we are coming to worship in an appropriate humility and submission to the Lordship of Christ?

|| THE FERVENCY OF PRAISE (Rev 5:9–14)

We come finally in verse 9 to the fervency of their praise.

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,¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

The response of the people begins in humility, but in more than just quiet submission—there is fervent singing to the Lamb. Christianity is a singing religion. These worshipers sing a new song with new meaning, a new awareness of Christ’s honor and glory. They recognize that Christ is the only one worthy to execute the contents of the scroll, and so they respond by singing of his worthiness. Only Christ is worthy to direct human history to its God-ordained end; he earned that right by humbling himself to the point of death, even death upon a cross. And by this death he purchased for God a people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.

And then in verse 10 we that see that Christ has “made them to be a kingdom.” Out of the kingdom of darkness, they are now brought into the kingdom of light and praise to our God—a community of worshipers now have access to the throne of God.

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,¹² saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”

“Myriads of myriads” is the highest number in the Greek language. Countless hosts of worshipers are singing in recognition of the power and wealth and wisdom and might—what he already possesses—and in honor and glory and blessing—what we will give to him.

¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

This is anticipatory of the end of the age, when “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil 2:10). You will either bow the knee to Jesus in this life, or you will bow the knee to Jesus in judgement of the world to come. But this passage anticipates the end of the age when all of humanity will confess Jesus Christ is Lord. They give praise to the Father—he who sits on the throne—and the Son, two distinct persons yet ruling together and both worthy of equal worship.

mirias [myriad] – a very large indefinite number—countless, innumerable, many (Louw-Nida)

And the four living creatures kept saying “Amen.” They cannot stop saying this, perhaps in antiphonal form on both sides of the throne. And the elders fell down—they could not remain standing in the presence of God in the midst of the power of this worship scene. They’re not standing up erect or running around in circles—they are falling down on their knees in worship.

Principles from Heavenly Worship (Isaiah 6, Revelation 4–5)

The two biblical visions of heavenly worship establish some important foundational principles for our worship. **First**, the similarities of heavenly worship between Isaiah’s vision and John’s vision reveal that this is eternal worship. For this reason, **second**, earthly human worship is not something new for us, unique to us, or initiated by us; worship is perpetually taking place in the world without end. When we worship, we are entering into something eternal. **Third**, we enter into this eternal worship, not of our own initiative or merit, but only at the invitation from God and on basis the of God’s atoning work. In both eras, God called the sinner into his temple; they did not seek him out or initiate the encounter. And in both eras, acceptance into God’s presence was permitted only after the sinner’s guilt was atoned for by means that God himself provided. **Fourth**, the theological pattern of heavenly worship in both visions reflects that initiating call of God and his atoning work that enables sinners to be in his presence. The pattern of Revelation, Adoration, Confession, Propitiation, Instruction, Dedication, and Communion provides a contour to the worship of heaven that magnifies the true reality of eternal worship and the only means by which sinful humans are able to participate. Consequently, **fifth**, worship is not us performing for God, but a reenactment of God’s work for us. Everything about the eternal worship into which Isaiah and John enter is initiated by God, provided for by God, and shaped by his covenant relationship with his people. God is the primary actor. All of the actions of the worshipers are in response to God’s work and actually a reenactment of God’s covenantal work.

The worship in heaven should be the template to form the structure of our worship. And the tone of the worship in heaven should be the tone of our worship on earth. Let us worship as these worshiped in heaven.

Think About It

1. Why is praise more glorious when it is preceded by a focus on God's sovereignty, man's inability, and the supremacy of Christ?
2. How can we make sure that praise is truly directed toward God and not simply emotionalism?
3. In what ways should heavenly worship set the standard for our earthly worship?

PRAYER: Father in heaven, this worship scene that took place two thousand years ago continues to reverberate within our souls as though it took place this morning. The reality of all that is represented in that scene must dominate our individual lives. It must dominate our churches. May the worship of heaven be the worship upon the earth, in of our churches and of our personal lives. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

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STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 12: THE WORSHIP OF HEAVEN

Steven Lawson

MAIN POINT: Heavenly worship is the model for our earthly worship.

MAIN PASSAGE: Revelation 5

MEMORY: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”
(Rev 5:12)

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (Rev 5:1)

Think About It

1. Why is it important that our worship begin with a recognition of the sovereignty of God?
2. What is revealed when our worship focuses primarily on our needs and desires?
3. How might a focus on God’s sovereignty impact the way we approach worship?

|| **THE INABILITY OF MAN** (Rev 5:2–4)

Think About It

1. How does recognizing the supreme sovereignty of God naturally lead us to recognize our own inability?
2. Why is it important that we regularly recognize our own inability when we worship?
3. How can this recognition of human inability impact what we do in worship?

|| **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST** (Rev 5:5–7)

| **CROSS**

RESURRECTION

Think About It

4. Why must a focus on the supremacy of Christ in our worship be preceded by a focus on the sovereignty of God and the inability of man?
5. How can we make the death and resurrection of Christ central in our worship?
6. Why is a focus on Christ's atonement still necessary for Christians?

THE HUMILITY OF THE WORSHIPERS (Rev 5:8)

Think About It

1. What are some ways we sometimes come to worship presumptuously?
2. Name a few realities about Christ that should humble us in worship.
3. What are some practical ways we can make sure we are coming to worship in an appropriate humility and submission to the Lordship of Christ?

|| **THE FERVENCY OF PRAISE** (Rev 5:9–14)

Think About It

- 1.** Why is praise more glorious when it is preceded by a focus on God's sovereignty, man's inability, and the supremacy of Christ?
- 2.** How can we make sure that praise is truly directed toward God and not simply emotionalism?
- 3.** In what ways should heavenly worship set the standard for our earthly worship?



STUDIES IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

WORSHIP

STUDENT EDITION

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STUDENT HANDOUT

LESSON 1: THE REFORMATION OF WORSHIP

Josh Buice

MAIN POINT: The deformation of worship necessitates a bold reformation.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Timothy 3:14–16

MEMORY: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16–17)

Think About It

1. In what ways do you see the culture around us negatively affecting the church?
2. In what ways do you see modern evangelical churches failing in their public worship?
3. How would you define worship?

WHAT IS WORSHIP?

REFORMING WORSHIP THROUGH PASTORAL OVERSIGHT (1 Tim 3:14)

REFORMING WORSHIP BY THE WORD (1 Tim 3:15a)

Think About It

- 1.** What do you think is mostly impacting how churches worship today?
- 2.** Why do you think Christians do not believe that the Bible is enough to regulate how we worship God?
- 3.** If you committed to worshipping only as God has explicitly prescribed in the New Testament, what elements would you have to eliminate from your services?

REFORMING OUR PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHURCH (1 Tim 3:15b)

HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD

PILLAR AND BUTTRESS OF THE TRUTH

Think About It

- 1.** What does the phrase “household of God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
- 2.** What does the phrase “church of the living God” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?
- 3.** What does the phrase “pillar and buttress of the truth” indicate about the nature of the church and our worship?

REFORMING OUR CONFESSION OF FAITH

(1 Tim 3:16)

THE DEFORMATION OF WORSHIP REQUIRES A BOLD REFORMATION

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways do you notice truth under attack in our day?
- 2.** How has attack on truth contributed to the deformation of the worship of evangelical churches today?
- 3.** In what ways can a return to the truth of God's Word serve to reform the church's worship?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 2: THE FOUNDATION OF
WORSHIP

Paul Washer

MAIN POINT: We must build our worship on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 3:9–17

MEMORY: “For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11)

STEWARDS UNDER AUTHORITY (1 Cor 3:9)

Think About It

1. In what ways do church leaders sometimes reveal that they think they are co-owners of God’s church?
2. What do the metaphors of God’s field and God’s building emphasize about the nature of the church and its worship?
3. What are implications of the reality that church leaders are stewards of God’s possession?

LAYING THE FOUNDATION (1 Cor 9:10–11)

A FOUNDATION OF GRACE, WISDOM, AND POWER

A FOUNDATION OF CHRIST

Think About It

- 1.** What are some man-made foundations upon which some churches are built?
- 2.** What are some results of building churches on our own foundation?
- 3.** If the foundation of our churches is truly Christ, his gospel, and his Word, how will that affect our worship?

BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION

(1 Cor 3:12–15)

Think About It

1. What are some examples of enduring building materials?
2. What are some examples of insufficient building materials churches use today?
3. In what ways will proper building of Christ's church result in true worship?

DESTROYING GOD'S TEMPLE (1 Cor 3:16–17)

Think About It

1. How is building the church upon the foundation of Christ and his Word related to true worship?
2. What implications does the warning in 1 Corinthians 3:17 have for those who lead the church's worship?
3. What are some ways you haven't trusted in the sufficiency of God's Word for your church and its worship?



STUDENT HANDOUT
**LESSON 3: WORSHIPPING A THRICE-
HOLY GOD**

James White

MAIN POINT: Worshipping a thrice-holy God compels faithful proclamation of God's message of judgment and salvation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Isaiah 6

MEMORY: "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'" (Isa 6:8)

THE HOLY LORD IS ON HIS THRONE
(Isa 6:1–2)

Think About It

1. What are some parallels between our present age and Israel during Isaiah's day?
2. How would seeing God high on his throne have given Isaiah comfort? How can this recognition give us comfort?
3. If God created seraphim to worship the Lord, how much more is it our purpose to worship God?

THE LORD IS THRICE HOLY (Isa 6:3–7)

WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD LEADS TO CONVICTION

GOD MAKES PROVISION

Think About It

- 1.** Why should God's holiness lead to our confession of sin?
- 2.** How might the necessity of confession impact corporate worship?
- 3.** Why do you think many Christians today do not think they need to confess sin any longer?

WORSHIPING A THRICE-HOLY GOD COMPELS FAITHFUL PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MESSAGE (Isa 6:8–13)

A MESSAGE OF PURE JUDGMENT

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Think About It

- 1.** Why must the message of the gospel always include an announcement of judgment upon sin?
- 2.** How can gospel-infused worship compel us to proclaim the gospel to those who do not believe?
- 3.** How can the promise of a believing remnant compel us to proclaim the gospel?

WORSHIP OF THE THRICE-HOLY GOD IS WORSHIP OF JESUS

JESUS IS GOD

JESUS IS WORTHY OF OUR WORSHIP

JESUS IS THE ONLY MEANS TO ENTER GOD'S PRESENCE

Think About It

1. Why is it important to recognize that the one whom Isaiah saw was Jesus Christ, the second person of the godhead?
2. How does this recognition compel us to worship Christ?
3. How does this recognition impact our proclamation of Christ?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 4: TRUE WORSHIP

John MacArthur

MAIN POINT: True worship is any expression of obedience, praise, honor, adoration, and gratitude offered to the true God by a regenerate soul who knows the truth about God and loves him.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 4:19–24

MEMORY: “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.” (Jn 4:23)

WORSHIP BASED ON GOD’S COMMANDS

Think About It

1. Based on God's commandments regarding worship in the Old Testament, what would render worship vain?
2. How important are external acts of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.
3. How important are internal aspects of worship in rendering worship either true or false? Name some examples in the Old Testament and today.

VAIN WORSHIP

Think About It

4. What are some ways churches in the past have taken the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
5. What are some ways that contemporary churches may take the Lord's name in vain in their worship?
6. In what ways have you personally taken the Lord's name in vain in how you have approached him in worship?

|| TRUE WORSHIP

| THE SOURCE OF TRUE WORSHIP

| THE OBJECT OF TRUE WORSHIP

THE LOCATION OF TRUE WORSHIP

THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

Think About It

1. How would recognizing that God the Father is the source and object of true worship affect how we worship?
2. Does the fact that worship is not limited to a geographical location minimize the importance of physically gathering for worship? Why or why not?
3. What aspects of our worship facilitate worship in truth? What aspects facilitate worship in spirit?



STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 5: DRAWING NEAR TO GOD THROUGH CHRIST

Scott Aniol

MAIN POINT: Worship is drawing near to communion with God through Christ by faith.

MAIN PASSAGES: Hebrews 10:19–25, 12:18–24

MEMORY: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

THE CALL TO DRAW NEAR IN WORSHIP
(Heb 10:22)

DRAWING NEAR TO GOD IN WORSHIP

Think About It

1. What would this idea of “drawing near” to God mean for our understanding of what it means to worship God?
2. If the essence of worship is that God has called us to draw near to him, who initiates worship?
3. If God is holy, who can draw near to him?

WE CANNOT DRAW NEAR BECAUSE OF SIN

Think About It

1. Discuss the incident of Uzzah and the ark from 1 Chronicles 13. What did David fail to do in his attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem? Why was Uzzah killed?
2. Discuss the incident of King Uzziah from 2 Chronicles 26. What was Uzziah’s core problem?
3. Read Isaiah 6:1–13. Notice the relationship between Isaiah’s vision and King Uzziah. What implications for worship can be drawn from this passage?

THE BASIS FOR DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:19–21)

WE HAVE ACCESS INTO THE HOLY PLACE

WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Think About It

- 1.** Discuss what was necessary for an Old Testament Jew to draw near to the presence of God in the temple.
- 2.** Read Leviticus 16. What can the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement teach us about the nature of the gospel and worship?
- 3.** Consider the popular title of “worship leader.” Based on what we have seen in Hebrews 10, who is the only true worship leader?

THE MEANS OF DRAWING NEAR IN WORSHIP (Heb 10:22)

Think About It

- 1.** Why is faith necessary for Christian worship?
- 2.** Discuss reasons you should worship even if you don't "feel" like it.
- 3.** Discuss implications for corporate worship that come from the wonderful truth that when we worship through Christ, we are joining in with the true worship of heaven.



STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 6: WORSHIPING GOD REVERENTLY

Tom Ascol

MAIN POINT: God expects people created in his image to come before him reverently.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

MEMORY: “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil.” (Ecc 5:1)

**BE CAREFUL HOW YOU ENTER INTO
WORSHIP** (Ecc 5:1)

WE ARE ENTERING GOD’S PRESENCE

WE COME TO HEAR WHAT GOD HAS TO SAY

WE MUST PREPARE TO MEET GOD

Think About It

1. What are some implications of the fact that the New Testament calls the gathered church “God’s temple” and “God’s household”?
2. What are some practical ways we can come to hear what God has to say when we gather for worship?
3. In what ways have you come to worship thoughtlessly? What can you do to better prepare to meet with God?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY IN WORSHIP (Ecc 5:2–3)

Think About It

1. In what ways do we sometimes speak rashly in worship?
2. What does Leviticus 10:1 mean when it says that Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire” before the Lord?
3. What are some measures we can take to guard what we say in worship?

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU VOW IN WORSHIP
(Ecc 5:4–6)

BE CAREFUL TO FEAR GOD IN WORSHIP

(Ecc 5:7)

Think About It

- 1.** What are some ways that we make vows to God when we worship him?
- 2.** What are some songs you regularly sing that include promises to God?
- 3.** As you sing those promises, what are some prayers you can offer that ensure you are singing with humility and dependence upon God to keep those vows?



STUDENT HANDOUT LESSON 7: SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IN A SELF-CENTERED AGE

Costi Hinn

MAIN POINT: Spirit-led worship focuses on the glory of Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: John 16:4–15

MEMORY: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16:13–14)

**SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP IS CONTROLLED BY
THE HOLY SPIRIT (Jn 16:4–7)**

Think About It

1. What do you typically think of when you hear “Spirit-led worship”?
2. What are fundamental differences between Spirit-led worship and pagan worship?
3. How should an understanding of the essential relationship between Word and Spirit affect how we worship?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP FOCUSES ON THE HOLINESS OF GOD

Think About It

- 1.** Do you think Christians today regularly acknowledge the holiness of God? Why do you think this is the case?
- 2.** Are your prayers and praise more often about what God can do for you or who he is? Why do you think this is the case?
- 3.** How should a deep recognition of God's holiness affect our worship?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP ADMITS THE SINNER THAT YOU ARE (Jn 16:8–11)

Think About It

1. How often is confession of sin a regular part of corporate worship today?
2. How might intentional recognition of our sinfulness toward God lead to a deeper appreciation of his grace and mercy in Christ?
3. Have you ever noticed how many psalms are acknowledgement of the psalmist's sinfulness and a cry to the Lord for mercy?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP PRIORITIZES TRUTH

(Jn 16:12–13)

Think About It

1. How important is it to recognize the biblical connection between the Spirit and the Word?
2. What is an example of a worship song that is emotionally engaging but devoid of truth?
3. If biblical truth is the primary criterion we use for every aspect of our worship, how would that change our worship services?

SPIRIT-LED WORSHIP DECLARES THE GLORY OF CHRIST (Jn 16:14)

Think About It

- 1.** How would recognizing that the Holy Spirit does not even draw attention to himself affect our worship?
- 2.** In what ways does the Holy Spirit direct our attention to Jesus Christ?
- 3.** In what ways should Spirit-led corporate worship draw attention to the glory of Christ?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 8: WORSHIP AS BELOVED CHILDREN

Voddie Baucham

MAIN POINT: Worship that is rooted in our adoption in Christ will produce conformity to Christ.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:1–25

MEMORY: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” (Eph 5:1–2)

WORSHIP IS ROOTED IN OUR ADOPTION IN CHRIST (Eph 5:1–14)

Think About It

1. What are the implications of the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is the pleasant offering that God accepts?
2. Why is it important to remember that we are both justified *and* adopted?
3. How does our adoption as God’s beloved children affect our understanding of the nature of true worship?

WORSHIP PRODUCES CONFORMITY TO CHRIST (Eph 5:15–20)

WISDOM

UNDERSTANDING

SPIRIT-FILLING

Think About It

- 1.** Why does our adoption by God in Christ necessarily produce conformity to Christ?
- 2.** Why is a life of conformity to Christ better evidence of true worship than passionate singing or emotional experience in a church service?
- 3.** What are some biblical characteristics of truly Spirit-filled worship?

WORSHIP IS SUBMISSION TO CHRIST

(Eph 5:21–6:9)

Think About It

- 1.** What are some practical ways we will manifest communion with God through submission to God-given authorities in our lives?
- 2.** Why are we often tempted to define worship by emotional experiences?
- 3.** What would you say to someone who has passionate experiences on Sunday but who lives in rebellion to God the rest of the week?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 9: SINGING THE WORD

Laramie Minga

MAIN POINT: The Word of God impels the believer to sing the Word out of joyful obedience, in response to who God is and what he has done, and in the sure hope of spiritual formation.

MAIN PASSAGE: Ephesians 5:18–20, Colossians 3:16–17

MEMORY: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Col 3:16)

WHY WE SING (Eph 5:19)

GOD HAS COMMANDED US IN HIS WORD TO SING.

SINGING ALLOWS US TO EXPRESS OUR AFFECTIONS TO GOD FOR WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED.

SINGING DEMONSTRATES THE COMMUNITY WE ENJOY AS THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

SINGING AIDS THE SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF BELIEVERS.

Think About It

- 1.** What are some common reasons people might give for why we sing in worship that do not necessarily come from Scripture?
- 2.** What does singing accomplish that cannot be accomplished in any other way?
- 3.** What are some ways music is performed in churches that can actually hinder the biblical purposes for singing?

WHAT WE SING (Col 3:16)

WE SHOULD SING PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS.

WE SHOULD SING THE WORD.

WE SHOULD SING THE GOSPEL.

WE SHOULD SING OUR HEARTS' AFFECTIONS AND THE CAUSE OF THOSE AFFECTIONS.

WE SHOULD SING A NEW SONG.

Think About It

- 1.** How important is it to sing psalms in corporate worship?
- 2.** In what ways could music actually hinder the Word of Christ dwelling richly in us?
- 3.** Why is it important to sing both in expression of our affections and the reasons for our affections?

HOW WE SING (Eph 5:20, Col 3:17)

WE SHOULD SING WITH OUR AFFECTIONS.

WE SHOULD BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT AS WE SING.

WE SHOULD SING SKILLFULLY.

Think About It

- 1.** Why is it important to recognize that music does not fill us with the Spirit, but rather that singing is the result of the Spirit filling us with the Word?
- 2.** What will characterize “skillful” singing in corporate worship?
- 3.** How has your understanding of singing in worship changed as a result of this lesson?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 10: THE BLESSEDNESS OF
WORSHIP

Phil Johnson

MAIN POINT: Lifting heartfelt and holy worship to the Lord is a blessing to the worshiper.

MAIN PASSAGE: Psalm 134

MEMORY: “May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!” (Ps 134:3)

A CALL TO HEARTFELT WORSHIP (Ps 134:1)

WORSHIP WITH THE WHOLE HEART

BLESS THE LORD

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways do you sometimes find yourself heartlessly engaged in the regular routines of worship?
- 2.** What are some practical ways you can ensure that you are worshiping with your whole heart?
- 3.** In what ways can we bless the Lord in our worship?

A HUMBLE DOXOLOGY (Ps 134:2)

Think About It

1. What are some different ways you might obey the spirit of the command to “lift up your hands” in blessing the Lord?
2. Why is there an emphasis upon holiness when we approach God in prayer?
3. In what ways might we approach God in worship without a proper focus on holiness?

|| A CONFIDENT BENEDICTION (Ps 134:3)

Think About It

1. What is the difference between praying for personal spiritual blessing and praying for material blessing?
2. Why does the fact that God made heaven and earth bring encouragement to worshipers?
3. What are some practical ways this simple worship order can impact your approach to worship?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 11: GOSPEL-ORDERED
WORSHIP

Matthew Sikes

MAIN POINT: Scripture-regulated, gospel-ordered worship will build up Christ's body to glorify him.

MAIN PASSAGE: 1 Corinthians 14

MEMORY: "But all things should be done decently and in order."
(1 Cor 14:40)

INTELLIGIBILITY IN WORSHIP IS
NECESSARY FOR EDIFICATION (1 Cor 14:1–25)

EDIFICATION IS THE GOAL OF CORPORATE WORSHIP (vv. 1–5)

CORPORATE WORSHIP MUST BE INTELLIGIBLE (vv. 6–25)

Think About It

- 1.** In what ways does Paul emphasize the importance of edification in corporate worship?
- 2.** Why is it important to recognize that the central purpose of corporate worship is edification of the body?
- 3.** What are some ways corporate worship today often hinders edification?

**CORPORATE WORSHIP MUST BE
INTENTIONALLY ORDERED AROUND GOD'S
WORD** (1 Cor 14:26–40)

THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

THE ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP

THE SHAPE OF WORSHIP

Think About It

- 1.** Why is it important that God's Word regulates the essence, elements, and shape of our worship?
- 2.** What elements do churches today commonly include in their worship that have not be prescribed by Scripture?
- 3.** How would a gospel-shaped worship order impact the way we approach corporate worship?



STUDENT HANDOUT
LESSON 12: THE WORSHIP OF HEAVEN

Steven Lawson

MAIN POINT: Heavenly worship is the model for our earthly worship.

MAIN PASSAGE: Revelation 5

MEMORY: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”
(Rev 5:12)

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD (Rev 5:1)

Think About It

1. Why is it important that our worship begin with a recognition of the sovereignty of God?
2. What is revealed when our worship focuses primarily on our needs and desires?
3. How might a focus on God’s sovereignty impact the way we approach worship?

|| **THE INABILITY OF MAN** (Rev 5:2–4)

Think About It

1. How does recognizing the supreme sovereignty of God naturally lead us to recognize our own inability?
2. Why is it important that we regularly recognize our own inability when we worship?
3. How can this recognition of human inability impact what we do in worship?

|| **THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST** (Rev 5:5–7)

| **CROSS**

RESURRECTION

Think About It

4. Why must a focus on the supremacy of Christ in our worship be preceded by a focus on the sovereignty of God and the inability of man?
5. How can we make the death and resurrection of Christ central in our worship?
6. Why is a focus on Christ's atonement still necessary for Christians?

THE HUMILITY OF THE WORSHIPERS (Rev 5:8)

Think About It

1. What are some ways we sometimes come to worship presumptuously?
2. Name a few realities about Christ that should humble us in worship.
3. What are some practical ways we can make sure we are coming to worship in an appropriate humility and submission to the Lordship of Christ?

|| **THE FERVENCY OF PRAISE** (Rev 5:9–14)

Think About It

- 1.** Why is praise more glorious when it is preceded by a focus on God's sovereignty, man's inability, and the supremacy of Christ?
- 2.** How can we make sure that praise is truly directed toward God and not simply emotionalism?
- 3.** In what ways should heavenly worship set the standard for our earthly worship?

