

PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

Rev. Chandler Smith

As submitted for course project at William Carey University

The concept of Christian worship is a great mystery in my opinion. The issue is: how and why would a holy God welcome such unholy, unclean people into his presence and accept their gratitude and surrender? I suspect that this mystery will keep many people from entering a relationship with Christ, largely because of a misunderstanding of the very thing that solves the mystery: the grace of God displayed through Jesus Christ. Apart from grace, there is no redemption and apart from redemption there is no authentic Christian worship. In this philosophy and theology of worship I will communicate my beliefs regarding the topic of Christian worship and how it is only by the immeasurable grace of God through Christ that we can come in our brokenness before a perfect, holy God.

In *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship* by A.W. Tozer, Tozer makes the following statement when discussing the creation of man: “God stood man upon his feet and said, ‘Look around, this is all yours; and look at Me, I am yours; and I’ll look at you and I’ll see in your face the reflection of my own glory. That is your end, that is why you were created, that you might worship Me and enjoy Me and glorify Me and have Me as yours forever.’”¹ In the same discussion Tozer says, “God’s purpose for creating Adam and Eve is summed up in what they could do for God that nothing else in the whole creation could do. Adam and Eve could worship God, and God anticipated that worship.”² Tozer is making a simple, but rich point: God designed us, his creation, to worship him as Creator and to bring him the greatest glory. Scripture teaches us in Isaiah 43 that God created us for the purpose of giving him the greatest glory³, verse seven,

1. A.W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014): 22.

2. Ibid.

3. Isaiah 43:7 (Christian Standard Version)

and “that they might declare my praise” in verse twenty-one.⁴ Don McMinn in *The Practice of Praise* says that “Worship is the ultimate priority and the highest privilege of mankind.”⁵ It is my belief that the foundational design of humankind is to worship God and to *reflect* his glory that he may *receive* glory.

There are two fundamental questions that we must answer: First, what is worship? Second, why should we worship God? Addressing the issue of defining worship, I have personally concluded that worship is our response to who God is and to what he has done through Christ. Harold Best says, “Worship is the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing God.”⁶ Best is also making the point that our true worship is a response of pouring ourselves out before God because of who he is and how he has chosen us and redeemed us. My definition is informed by Scripture and authors like A.W. Tozer, Harold Best, and Warren Wiersbe. I hold to that definition strongly and teach my congregation with that definition in mind. With worship defined we now must answer the question of why we should worship God. The most basic answer is: because he is worthy. What makes God worthy? Humanity worships God as creature worshiping Creator, this is the ‘who he is’ part of the definition. He is the One who spoke the world into being and who formed man from the dust of the earth. Colossians 1:16 says, “For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things have been created through him and for him.”⁷ We also worship because of the work of redemption God did by providing Christ as the propitiation for sin. 1 John 2:2 says,

4. Isiah 43:21 (Christian Standard Version)

5. Don McMinn, *The Practice of Praise* (Nashville, TN: Word Music, 1992): 61.

6. Harold Best, *Unceasing Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003): 18.

7. Colossians 1:16 (Christian Standard Version)

“He himself [Jesus Christ] is the atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins, and not only for our sins, but also for those of the whole world.”⁸ The work of redemption through Christ, this ultimate act of loving sacrifice, is the ‘what he has done’ part of the definition. Scripture teaches that God performed this work for the sake of all mankind being reconciled to himself and saved from the curse of sin, all for the glory of God. Revelation 5:9-10 shows us the future of believers from all nations worshipping because God bought us for himself through Christ.⁹ What can be seen is that the theology of worship is hinged on who God is and what he has done: God is Creator, man is creation, creation is fallen, Creator redeems creation, creation worships in subjection to the Creator and Redeemer. We see and understand this evolution of worship as the answer to the fundamental questions posed at the beginning of the paragraph. Dr. Constance Cherry says in *The Worship Architect*, “The starting place in understanding Christian worship is to recognize that worship flows from the person and work of God.”¹⁰ Worship begins and ends with God.

I believe that authentic worship carries with it a missional burden. Once there is an encounter with God in worship there must be a desire to bring others into that glorious communion. Scripture bids us to tell other people who God is and what he has done. Psalms 96:1-3 says, “Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!”¹¹ God has a heavy concern that his glory is

8. 1 John 2:2 (Christian Standard Version)

9. Revelation 5:9-10 (Christian Standard Version)

10. Constance Cherry, *The Worship Architect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010): 3.

11. Psalms 96:1-3 (English Standard Version)

made known to the nations. We can and must be involved in that by calling the nations to attend to who God is and what he has done. Pastor John Piper said:

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory.¹²

Piper is asserting that we must go on mission to evangelize because people who do not know God cannot worship God. Piper goes on to say in the same sermon that the joy and delight we have in worshiping and knowing Christ should compel us to reach the nations for God and stir up worship among them.¹³ Dr. Constance Cherry says in *The Worship Architect*, "Biblical worship results in advancing the kingdom of God for the glory of God."¹⁴ There are other places in Scripture that enjoin us to go to the nations with urgency for the sake of God's glory. Passages like Revelation 7:9-10 point to future glorification and total unity in Christ when all nations are gathered before the throne in worship.¹⁵ 1 John 2:2 referenced earlier in this paper calls attention to the total covering of the blood of Christ for all who would believe. In summary, authentic worship, the Word, and the great treasure of the Gospel and of redemption that we possess should compel us to let missions be an outflow of our worship. I believe the Scriptures are clear

12. John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010): 35.

13. Ibid.

14. Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 31.

15. Revelation 7:9-10 (Christian Standard Version)

in their mandate that we declare the glories of God to the nations so that all people will be drawn to worship God.

I believe that true encounters with God in worship are transforming experiences. For instance, when Saul encountered God on the road to Damascus he was radically transformed inwardly and was given another direction and mission. His way of thinking was changed, and he was being sanctified by God. Likewise, we are transformed by God when we meet him and commune with him. We also share this process of sanctification. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of God and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.”¹⁶ When there is an encounter with God, he changes us to be more like him and to reflect his glory. Expounding on this transformation, Warren Wiersbe in *Real Worship* calls it a “metamorphosis” or a changing from one form to another.¹⁷ The Emmaus Disciples in Luke 24 share a similar experience with Paul when they meet God and are brought from one place to another in their understanding of who God is. Dr. Cherry discusses this in *The Worship Architect*:

Luke 24:13-35 tells a marvelous story of just such a [transformative] journey. Much dialogue took place between Jesus and the disciples traveling the road together from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection. The episodes of the conversation are readily seen. For example:

- Jesus engaged the disciples by inquiring what they were discussing.
- They responded incredulously and rehearsed the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth.
- Jesus explained the Scriptures to them.
- They invited Jesus to lodging and fellowship.
- Jesus broke bread.
- They recognized him in the action.
- They darted off to tell others that Jesus was alive.

16. 2 Corinthians 3:18 (Christian Standard Version)

17. Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2000): 29.

Yet when you look at the entire story, you see that Jesus succeeded in weaving the dialogue into something much more significant than mere conversation. There was a transformation in the disciples that took place over time as a result of the whole conversation. Their encounter with Jesus was not a journey because they were traveling the same road together. Rather, their encounter was a journey because they progressed spiritually from their place of origin (grief and confusion), through necessary terrain (explanation of the Scriptures), and finally, to their destination (recognizing the risen Lord).¹⁸

Encounters with the living God are part of the sanctification process. Each time we commune with God in worship, he makes us more like himself until we are finally glorified at the end of time. Worship is a pattern of revelation and response¹⁹, as seen in the two instances above. The revelation of God in worship leads to the metamorphosis of the worshiper from one depth of spiritual understanding to the next depth. I believe that God wants to transform us to a greater depth of glory when we meet with him in worship.

When Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, Jesus says in verse twenty-three, “But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in truth.”²⁰ In the conversation leading up to verse twenty-three, Jesus sees that this woman has a faulty understanding of what matters to God. Jesus essentially tells her that the Father is not interested in the legalistic traditions of worship on separate mountains because of heritage but rather God is seeking people who worship in the deepest part of their spirit in total submission to God and who worship with legitimate and intimate knowledge of the Truth of who God is and what he has done and how he has revealed himself.²¹ Just as God is not looking for

18. Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 15-16.

19. Ibid, 4-5.

20. John 4:23 (Christian Standard Version).

21. David Matthis, “Worship in Spirit and Truth,” *Desiring God*, January 5, 2014, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worship-in-spirit-and-truth>.

legalistic worshipers, he is also not desperate for or even desiring great performers or people who attempt to appear more spiritual by being overly expressive, but rather He is looking for those with surrendered and thankful spirits. Mike Harland said, “God is not impressed with outward expressions of worship that do not come from our surrendered and grateful hearts, no matter how excellent we may think our expressions of worship are. True worship comes from within.”²² I am thoroughly convinced that authentic worship manifests in unapologetic surrender and overwhelming thankfulness to God for who he is and what he has done. God has revealed Himself through His Word and has shown us his most intimate desire to be glorified through our enjoyment of him.

I believe that God intended for man to have a private creature-worshipping-Creator relationship but also to worship in corporate settings in a community of believers. Hebrews 10:25 admonishes believers not to neglect meeting together for worship and edification.²³ There is a scriptural command to worship corporately. The communal nature of the church is most evident in Acts 2. When Peter finished his message during Pentecost the Scripture says that the people devoted themselves to the apostles’ teachings, to fellowship with one another in their homes, and they were of one mind and purpose. The believers were committed to worshipping together.²⁴ This was the true ignition of the Church. Worship is for community and unites people under the purposes of glorifying God and enjoying Him forever. Bob Kauflin says in his book *Worship Matters*,

22. Mike Harland and Stan Moser, *Seven Words of Worship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008): 88.

23. Hebrews 10:25 (Christian Standard Version).

24. Acts 2:42-47 (Christian Standard Version).

We gather to declare- to ourselves, to each other, and to God- what we *know* to be eternal reality. There is one God, who is sovereign over the universe and every detail of our lives. We have rebelled against him. He sent His Son to die in our place for our sins. And through Jesus Christ we have forgiveness and peace with God. There are many things we can proclaim during and after a time of corporate worship. God's glory is unending, and his perfections are infinite. But the fuel of our praise will always be the gospel of Christ who has redeemed us and brought us to God.²⁵

Corporate worship gatherings provide believers with an opportunity to encourage other believers, to be equipped for missions, and to be united with others in exalting Christ. As Kauflin said, corporate worship is a time for uniting as a community of believers and declaring the finished work of Christ that made our own resurrection possible.²⁶ David writes in Psalm 34:3, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!"²⁷ Wayne Grudem quotes Edmund Clowney in *Systematic Theology* saying, "Reverent corporate worship, then, is not optional for the church of God...Rather, it brings to expression the very being of the church. It manifests on earth the reality of the heavenly assembly."²⁸ It is good for believers to be gathered corporately, unified under the redemptive work of Christ to respond with adoration, giving God the greatest glory for all he has done for us and for who he is.

It is my belief that the liturgical calendar should be observed in worship as a practical way of exercising the tenets expressed in this philosophy of worship. In *Ancient-Future Time* Robert Webber says, "The simple, unadorned purpose of the Christian year is to proclaim the gospel of God's saving deeds with Christ, especially in his death and resurrection. The Christian

25. Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Book, 2008): 134.

26. Ibid.

27. Psalm 34:3 (English Standard Version).

28. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994): 1004.

year represents the historical unfolding of the life of Christ and his sure return.”²⁹ If worship is our response, our celebration of who God is and what he has done, then observing this calendar that causes us to reflect on and participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ is an avenue for the work and person of Christ to continually be at the forefront of all of our worship activities. Why the liturgical calendar, though? Webber says that the purpose of the liturgical calendar is “to become so thoroughly identified with God’s saving events that we live in the pattern of dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ.”³⁰ The Christian calendar causes us to be active in the gospel and to live our redemption daily as our true worship.

My philosophy of worship focuses on the centrality of Christ’s redemptive work and person, the missional burden of authentic worship, the transformative journey of communion with God, worship in spirit and in truth, corporate worship gatherings, and the implementation of the Christian calendar.

29. Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality Through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004): 31.

30. Ibid, 33.

Bibliography

- Best, Harold. *Unceasing Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Cherry, Constance. *The Worship Architect*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.
- Harland, Mike and Stan Moser. *Seven Words of Worship*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.
- Kauflin, Bob. *Worship Matters*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.
- Mathis, Dave. "Worship in Spirit and Truth." *Desiring God*.
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/worship-in-spirit-and-truth>
- McMinn, Don. *The Practice of Praise*. Nashville, TN: Word Music, 1992.
- Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Tozer, A.W. *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*. Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014.
- Webber, Robert. *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality Through the Christian Year*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.
- Wiersbe, Warren. *Real Worship*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2000.