THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP

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Introduction

Worship has been around since the creation to recognize the Creator, and is extremely important to the church. “Worship is the single activity that both unifies and transcends time.”¹ However, the method in which the believer has worshipped God has changed and looks different. So one must ask the question, what is the proper way to worship God? Or what are the non-negotiable parts that must be included to worship?

In this paper we will develop a philosophy to determine what worship is, what should be included in worship today, and how important theology is to the leader of the worship experience.

Defining Worship

There are three terms in the bible that help us to understand worship. The first word is הָוָּדַעַת, which literally means to bow down. This word “emphasizes the way an Israelite thought of approaching the to the holy presence of God.”² The second Old Testament word we must look at is דָּבָּר meaning to serve. “The highest designation of the Hebrew in his engagement with the worship of God is just this word servant.”³ In the New Testament the word most often used for worship is προσκυνέω. This word carries the same meaning as to bow

¹ Timothy J. Ralston, “Pastoral Theology and Leadership II” unpublished class notes for PM302 Pastoral Theology and Leadership II (Dallas Theological Seminary, rev 2007) 1.


³ Ibid.
down prostrate in submissive worship.⁴ These words describe the humble attitude of the believer when worshiping God, and today’s worshippers should understand this as well.

Also one must be a believer in God to rightly worship the Him. The believer has accepted the new covenant that Christ instituted with his death on the cross (Luke 22:20). In the Old Testament believers in God’s promise participated in remembering God’s covenant with them in gathering together in a festival of celebration. “A covenant is a treaty between two or more parties and is usually based on some significant event in history and includes both the benefits and obligations of the parties who enter into the agreement.”⁵ So one must be a believer who accepts God’s covenant to rightly remember God’s promises in worship of Him. The third word, remembering (מִרְצָה) God’s promise is extremely important in worshiping God because it covers the entire timeline before and beyond God’s covenant with his people. “Remembering is the central act of worship.”⁶ This is why one must be a believer to rightly worship God.

To rightly worship God one must acknowledge God’s identity. The gathering of the believers in worship illustrates the deity of Jesus, the power of the resurrection, and the identity of the Triune God. This is an important part of worship. The church is called one body (Eph 4:4; 1Co 12) with Jesus as the head (Eph 5:23). If Jesus had never risen from the dead then the believers would not have a reason to gather together in unity with hope in God’s promise of the Son coming again with the gift of eternal life.

The unity of the different parts of the body is a testimony to the Triune God that operates within Himself. We worship through the Spirit, who is the seal of our salvation; because of the Son, who is the way of our salvation; to the Father, who is the giver of our

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⁶ Timothy J. Ralston, “Pastoral Theology and Leadership II” unpublished class notes for PM302 Pastoral Theology and Leadership II (Dallas Theological Seminary, rev 2007) 9.
salvation. God is Holy, Holy, Holy; and is full of glory (Is 6:4). And although He is transcendent, He chose to be imminent by emptying himself and humbling himself to the extent of death on the cross for mankind (Phil 2). The incredible fact that the all-powerful God would go to this length for the sake of humankind in light of their rejection of God demands worship from those who believe. In John 4:23 Jesus says, “God is seeking true worshippers.”

Because of this a definition of worship should include the act of humble submission of a believer in remembrance of God’s identity, works, covenant, and future promise. This is best defined by Ross saying that “worship is the celebration of being in covenant fellowship with the sovereign and holy triune God, by means of the reverent adoration and spontaneous praise of God’s nature and works, the expressed commitment of trust and obedience to the covenant responsibilities, and the memorial reenactment of entering into covenant through ritual acts, all with the confident anticipation of the fulfillment of the covenant promises in glory.”

**Method of Worship**

Jesus said that one must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). The most likely understanding of this is genuinely and truthfully. The authentic approach was covered in the previous approach of the believer, but the truth aspect is best understood through the method in which properly testifies and remembers God’s covenant with the believer.

Throughout history the two parts of worship that are consistent no matter the time period are always remembering through the reading or reciting of God’s word, and a symbolic ritual act of remembrance and proclamation. In the new covenant this act is the Lord’s Supper. This act remembers the Son’s sacrifice proclaims his death until he comes again (1Co 11:26). So

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9 Timothy J. Ralston, “Pastoral Theology and Leadership II” unpublished class notes for PM302 Pastoral Theology and Leadership II (Dallas Theological Seminary, rev 2007) 3-5.
true worship in the gathering of the church should at least include the reading of scripture and taking of the Lord’s Supper.

This act of worship must be done in unity of the body in a worthy manner (1Co 11:27-29). A body cannot be divided and be healthy, nor can one worship in disunity and properly worship God. So it is essential that prior to worship there must be a time of preparation for the Lord’s Supper before taking it. Most services include this in during the worship service with thanksgiving, prayer, hymns, and liturgy remembering the identity and promises of God.

This time of preparation is important, so it is proper to have the taking of the Lord’s Supper at the end of the worship service since it is the culmination of worship and the proclamation of the Christ’s death until He comes (1Co 11:26).

The taking of the Lord’s Supper is the sign of the covenant. All people may attend the worship service, but only believers should take part in the taking of communion. This is usually done through a profession of faith that they “believe Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried. On the third day he rose again and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead.”10 This profession of faith is culminated with the baptism of the believer in recognition that the individual is now apart of the church body and can take the Lord’s Supper. This keeps the taking of the Lord’s Supper a holy act of the church body in worship.

**Importance of the Worship Leader**

Therefore, the worship leader is the main communicator of God’s truth to the congregation in the worship of the church. The songs, prayer, thanksgiving, and liturgy all

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communicate the truths of God, mankind, sin, and hope in salvation. Because of this important message the worship leader must be a good theologian.

Many will leave a worship service and not remember exactly what the message the pastor preached. But nearly all can sing at least one of the songs of the worship service word for word. The worship songwriters are writing some of the most important theology in the church today. “For in a very real sense the worship minister is already a theologian whether he accepts the title or not.”

The worship leader also controls the flow of worship. The transitions, pace, context, and skill are all important to guide the congregation to a place where they are ready and prepared for hearing of the word of God and taking the Lord’s Supper. The transitions must be smooth enough to not distract the worshiper from what is important. The pace should move the worshiper properly through the truths of God in remembrance. The context should be theologically correct, so the worshiper will be able to properly know their God. The skill of the worship leader and team should be good enough that they are not a hindrance to the worshiper’s focus on who is being worshiped that day. These points all express the importance of the artistic ability of a good worship leader.

**Conclusion**

A proper philosophy of worship should communicate that worship is for God by the believer through humility, service, and remembrance including the reading of scripture and the taking of the Lord’s Supper by the believers. So the worship leader is the most important communicator, artistically leading the worship of God to prepare the congregation properly for the reading of the word and the Lord’s Supper.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY


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