

Essentials of Christian Worship

4 -Worship as a Response To God's Grace

Thanksgiving Day – Every Day

From an early age we are taught to say 'thank you' by our parents. It's likely we're unsure what that really means at first, but over time it becomes accepted behavior. However, maybe the concept of thankfulness escapes us, and often turns to a sense of 'entitlement' - that we 'deserve' what we get. How countercultural is the biblical term 'grace', which says we don't have to get what we deserve (for of our sin) because of Christ's sacrifice on our behalf? Our culture prizes the concept of 'meritocracy' - that those who work hard deserve their reward. And yet, Scripture tells us that no amount of work could ever bring peace with God, because our self-righteousness is as 'filthy rags', according to **Isaiah 64:6**.

As James Torrance insists, **Christian worship, in its essence, is a response to the initiative that God has taken in reconciling us to Himself - to the ways in which He has already acted toward us.**¹

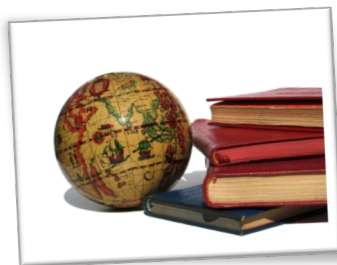
In fact, the Greek word 'Eucharist', the term used in many churches for the Lord's Table celebration, means 'Thanksgiving'. Throughout the Scriptures, whenever God revealed Himself to humans, they responded in worship - built an altar, dug a well, sacrificed an animal, got baptized, or simply declared their spoken worship - like Thomas ("My Lord and my God" - *John 20:27-28*).

Our worship should acknowledge God as:

1. Creator - Col. 1:15:16
2. Sustainer - Ps. 104, Col. 1:17
3. Faithful Covenant Father - John 1:12;
4. Revealer of Himself - Ps. 19, Ex. 20, John 1:14.
5. Saviour/Redeemer - Ps. 106:21, Titus 1:4
6. Empowerer - Acts 1:8



A Brief History Lesson



In many religions, worship is about earning God's favour. In Christianity, worship is acknowledging the fact that God has already provided for us all we need by His grace. **Eph. 2:8-9**

In order to understand better, we need to study the Story of God. Here are three examples from Biblical History to illustrate how God has acted in history:

Example 1 - The Exodus - Ex. 20:2 - the foreshadowing of things to come.

The Passover Feast and the Feast of Leavened Bread were co-opted from a pagan celebration for fertility and prosperity (The Feast of Azymes) and changed into a *thanksgiving* feast to Yahweh for His provision of ALL things! Instead of attempting to **gain favour** from a deity, the Israelites were instructed to '**remember**' that **God had already favoured them, chosen them, freed them, and provided for them**. It is 'responsive' worship at its core, not worship which desires something in return.

¹ James B. Torrance, "Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace", (IVP, Downer's Grove, 1996), p.15.

Example 2 - The Christ Story - the solution to the real problem

While the disciples and all Israel were awaiting a political messiah deliverer, God knew that there was a deeper need. “Behold the Lamb of God...” John 1:29; Rom 1:28-31; Rom. 3:23-24.

Example 3 - The Holy Spirit - the privileged deposit of God in all who would receive Christ.

By sending His Spirit at Pentecost, believers became the vessels for God’s presence and power. Now we are all partakers of Abraham’s original covenant that would make him ‘father of all nations’. Gen. 17:4-5; John 1:12; Gal. 3:7-9; Eph. 1:17.



A Parallel Story – Grace Expanded

The Chart below illustrates the parallel story of God’s grace shown to us:

Old Testament - Israel	New Testament – The Church
Chosen - Ex. 20:2	Chosen – Eph. 1:4
Called Out - Ex. 20:2	Called Out – Rom. 8:30
Liberated - Ex. 20:2	Liberated – John 8:36; Rom. 3:22
Land, Food, Water, Abundance - Ex. 3:15	All needs supplied – Phil. 4:19; Matt. 6:25-27
A Covenant Relationship with God - Ex. 6:7	A New Expanded Covenant - Gal. 3:7
Israel Becomes a Nation – Deut. 7:6	ALL Nations may come – become a Holy Nation in Christ - 1 Pet. 2:9

Whose Covenant Is It Anyway?

It’s God’s covenant - toward us! Once we realize the importance of the covenant that God makes toward us, there is really no question who grace and mercy begin with. Despite our open rebellion toward God, He has lived out His covenant promises faithfully, imprinted on the pages of history!

*“For you are a **people** holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deut. 7:6-8 ESV)*

“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8)

Living Out Our Thanksgiving

We can do that when we:

1. Participate in the community worship gathering - Col. 1:12, 3:17; Eph. 5:20
2. Give generously to the Kingdom - 2 Cor. 8
3. Works of Mercy - unto the least of these – Matt. 25:40
4. Do everything for His glory - Rom 12:1

Discussion questions:

1. Do you ever find yourself worshipping in the hope of 'pleasing' or getting something from God? Think of an example.
2. In what ways can you recall God revealing himself to you in your coming to faith or discipleship?
3. What does God's covenantal promise mean for our salvation in Christ? How does it ensure our salvation?
4. What does it mean to you that God has made a Covenant with all believers?