

# Essentials of Christian Worship

## 7 - Whole-Life Worship

### Not Just A 'Mood' Point...

In a culture steeped in 'living in the moment', or *Carpe Deum* (seize the day) lifestyles, the Gospel-centered worship that transforms us for living out our worship is a tremendous challenge to how we view the worship gathering. It calls us beyond our own pleasure. We should really be asking the question "what good is worship if it only has a momentary effect on my mood or affections?"



If the 'telos' or end goal of our gathered worship is 'discipleship', what is the end goal of *discipleship*? As Gareth Goossen has written, "*The essence of our worship is a focus on God - to love him, to know him, desire what he desires and participate in what he is doing.*"<sup>1</sup> That's a very all-encompassing statement, and meant to be, about worship. But is the emphasis here on acts of liturgical worship, or acts of social justice? Is one more important than the other?

### Deeds, Or Creeds? Or...



A century ago, the Evangelical movement went through a schism of identity. On one hand, many declared that the church was becoming too liberal in its theology, and should get back to preaching the gospel message in order to convert 'the lost'. Still another group countered by saying we should speak with our actions, and enact Christian 'good works' as Jesus did - out of compassion, not as targets for 'conversion' (although the Salvation Army never seemed to shirk back from either).

Fast-forward, and one of the cries of the new Millennial generation is that the Church needs to get back to 'authentic' worship. Many have tried to define just what that is, but what has been coming forward in so-called 'Emergent' churches is a cry for 'deeds' not 'creeds'. In other words, less talk about Jesus, and more living like Him. Yet the balance can too easily be swung to the point that all of our work for social justice can be devoid of any Christian proclamation. And yet, as Scripture itself points out, the Church does not need to take sides. **Colossians 3:16-17** is a perfect example of how worship and social justice should operate together:

<sup>16</sup> *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. (Acts of gathered worship)*

<sup>17</sup> *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.*<sup>2</sup> *(Acts of scattered worship)*

In fact, in his book "The Dangerous Act Of Worship", Mark Labberton declares that **worship should precede social justice**. "*Our worship is meant to be the catalyst for the primary work of God's kingdom.*"<sup>3</sup> He maintains that it is our role to live out The Kingdom in all spheres of life - to be witnesses in word and deed according to **Acts 1:8**.

<sup>1</sup> Gareth Goossen, "Worship Walk: Where Worship And Life Intersect", (Make Us Holy, Kitchener, 2004), p.12.

<sup>2</sup> English Standard Version.

<sup>3</sup> Mark Labberton, "The Dangerous Act Of Worship: Living God's Call To Justice", (IVP, Downer's Grove, 2007), p. 113.

## Shaped By Liturgy

So how exactly does a liturgy shape us into becoming God's outreach agents to the world around us? Labberton insists that worship is about the 're-alignment of power' - that "*much of the twisted soul of injustice is the abuse of power*". Worship is designed to help us divest ourselves of power, and place it at the feet of Christ! In worship:



- we see there is a greater power in the universe than 'me'. **Job 38:4-5**
- we see the powerful example of self-sacrifice in the example of Christ (Communion).
  - **1 Cor. 11:23-26**
- we hear that powers have been disarmed by the Cross.
  - **Col. 2:15**
- we understand the power of Christ's forgiveness in our continued **repentance**.
  - **1 John 1:8,9**
- we see the powerful witness of dying to ourselves through **Baptisms**.
  - **Gal. 2:20**
- we see how power **serves** others
  - **John 13:14-15; Mark 10:42-45**
    - giving ourselves for The Kingdom's purposes.
- we see the power of **community** in defeating loneliness. Acts 2:42-44
- we see the power of **giving** in breaking the chains of materialism and greed. 2 Cor. 9:7, Acts 2:45.

## Worship & Mission Are Indivisible

Worship is what shapes us to catch the heart of God for Mission. John Piper said, "Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish".<sup>4</sup> *Worship* which does not find its expression in *mission* is self-serving - Narcissistic. It's for OUR pleasure, ignoring our social responsibility. **Luke 10:29-32**

And yet *mission* that does not find its source in *worship* is self-inflating - it is a 'works' righteousness. We will tend to address injustice as WE see it, not necessarily as GOD sees it. **Eph. 2:8-10**

## The Last Word Goes To...

Perhaps the prophet Micah had the idea of 'holistic' and acceptable worship in mind when he declared,

*"With what shall I come before the Lord  
and bow down before the exalted God?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?  
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
and to walk humbly with your God."*<sup>5</sup>

***Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.***

***Romans 12:1 (NIV)***

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, "Let The Nations Be Glad", (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:6-8 (NIV)

## Discussion questions:

1. Feelings aren't necessarily worship, but can they play any role in our call to 'whole-life' worship?

2. If deeds and creeds should go together, does it matter in which order they occur? Why or why not?

3. Is there anything you have learned about worship in this series that has been 'eye opening' or made you think about the concept of Christian worship differently? More than one?

4. How will these foundational principles of Christian worship change your approach to worship ministry? To your private and corporate worship?