

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 1, Number 1 ♪ January 2006

THEME: Defining Worship

WORSHIP: A BIBLICAL DEFINITION

Worship, in its most basic understanding, presupposes a *fundamental distinction* between the *worshiper* and the *object of worship*. Even in the most banal use of the term, e.g. where famous athletes or musicians are said to be worshiped by their fans, there is still the idea that those persons' abilities or appeal are far superior to those of normal people. When it comes to God, of course, the distance is infinite: God is totally unique in all of the universe. He *made* the universe, and everything which exists besides Him owes Him its existence; He only has no beginning, no cause, no limits or limitations. In spite of man's exalted stature of being created in the image of God, there is still an infinite chasm which separates him as creature from the one Creator.

Yet sin foolishly seeks to mar that distinction, to bridge that chasm. This was the fundamental issue in the serpent's temptation of Eve in the garden: "you will be *like God*." (Gen. 3:5) The attack was on God's total uniqueness as the Creator and Lord of all, on the fundamental distinction between Him and all of His creatures, including Eve (and Adam, and Satan). There was in the garden (and has been ever since) a presumptuous attempt to lower God to a more creaturely level, and so to raise man to God-like status. Needless to say, this is an affront to God; and it also constitutes a denial of man's proper place in the created order and a refusal to acknowledge God's unique place and to respond appropriately.

This is exactly what we see in Romans 1. In verse 21 Paul states that sinful mankind "***did not honor Him as God or give thanks.***" And this in spite of being able to observe His power and greatness in the works of nature (v. 20). Paul's phrase in v. 21, though used in the negative of what natural man steadfastly refuses to do, suggests what the appropriate response of human creatures *should* be to their Maker: they should "*honor Him as God*" (i.e., accord to Him the unique place which He as the Creator God rightly holds, "ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name" Ps. 96:8) and "*give thanks*" for all of His good gifts. This fits the familiar

paradigm of praising God for *who He is* ("honor Him as God") and for *what He has done* ("give thanks").

Adam and Eve turned from honoring their Creator as uniquely God, and instead of giving thanks for all the "very good" (Gen. 1:31) things which God had made and placed into their care (Gen. 1:28), they desired more, even though it meant disobeying Him and attempting to usurp His unique position. Thus in Romans 1 Paul is really describing the situation surrounding the Fall, as well as the ensuing consequences in all following generations. At the root of the problem of sin was (and is) an issue of *worship*, a failure to honor God as God and to give Him thanks.

From the perspective of the entire book of Romans, we see that in fact Paul is painting this dark picture of fallen man's state in Romans 1 so that the light of the gospel will shine all the more brilliantly as he develops it in the chapters to come. And indeed we see already in Romans 1 a clear indication that that is

where Paul is heading; for in the verses immediately preceding those we have looked at, he speaks of the "gospel" being "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes," and that as a result one can indeed become a "righteous man." (1:16-17)

Paul is promising nothing less than the *restoration of worship* through Christ and the reversal of man's downward spiral of sin (1:18-32)

through the power of God's redeeming love displayed in the gospel. By God's gracious saving work (which Paul will expound beginning in chapter 3), it will indeed be possible for men and women to "honor Him as God" and to "give thanks." Because of these "mercies of God" (as Paul will summarize the preceding chapters in 12:1), believers will be urged to present their entire selves to God as a fitting and appropriate "spiritual service of worship."

And so, in one of the darkest chapters in the Scriptures, we find embedded a gleaming jewel, a precious and beautiful description of what worship truly is and should be: attitudes and acts whereby we

honor Him as God
and
give thanks.

At the root of the problem of sin was (and is) an issue of *worship*

QUOTABLES

Definitions of Worship

“The best biblical definition of worship I know is to ‘glory in his holy name’ (Psalm 105:3), that is, to revel in the unique wonder of who he is and has revealed himself to be.”

(John R. W. Stott, *Christian Basics*, 119)

“Worship is the activity of the new life of a believer in which, recognizing the fullness of the Godhead as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and His mighty redemptive acts, he seeks by the power of the Holy Spirit to render to the living God the glory, honor, and submission which are His due.”

(Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, 20-21)

“Worship is both a life lived and an event in which to participate. In and through worship, believers, by grace, center their lives (heart, soul, mind and strength) on the Lord, humbly glorifying God in response to His attributes, His acts, and His Word.”

(Dave Hall, “What’s in the Middle?” [adapted from Bruce Leafblad])

“Worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father.”

(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 30)

“Worship is the echo in the human heart of the excellency and the supremacy of God.”

(John Piper, “Worship: The Fuel and Goal of Missions,” taped message)

“Worship is honor and adoration directed to God.”

(John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority*, 14)

“Worship is *our response to the glory of God:*
Recognizing His glory with our minds,
Cherishing His glory with our hearts,
Proclaiming His glory with our mouths,
Celebrating His glory in all of life.”

(Ron Man)

“Exactly what is worship? I like King David’s definition. ‘Oh magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together’ (Ps. 34: 3 NASB). Worship is the act of magnifying God. Enlarging our vision of him. . . . Of course, his size doesn’t change, but our perception of him does.”

(Max Lucado, *Just like Jesus*, 82)

“Worship is to feel in the heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery . . . which we call Our Father Which Art in Heaven.”

(A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel*, 4-6)

“Worship is the celebrative response to what God has done, is doing, and promises to do.”

(John E. Burkhardt, *Worship: A Searching Examination of the Liturgical Experience*, 17)

“Our worship is a thankful, joyful appropriation of Christ and of His Worship of the Father, through the Spirit, so that all that is of Christ is ours by Grace through the Spirit.”

(David W. Torrance, “*The Word of God in Worship*,” 12)

“[Worship is] faith expressing itself in obedience and adoration.”

(David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, 283)

“Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose - and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin.”

(William Temple, *Readings in St. John’s Gospel, First Series*, 68)

GUEST ARTICLE

How to Evaluate Songs for Congregational Worship

Scott Christensen

OBJECTIVE CRITERIA (*Lyrics* – where principles must control preferences):

- 1) **Are the lyrics Biblical and doctrinally sound?** Do the lyrics distinctively and accurately reflect Biblical language or ideas? Do they contain Scripture and/or scripturally inspired thoughts? Do the lyrics reflect sound theology and Christian practice? Is there continuity with the historic orthodox doctrines of the faith?
- 2) **Are they spiritual and God-centered?** Do the lyrics stimulate spiritual reflection and contemplation of truth? Do they induce genuine praise, thanksgiving, contrition and joy that is God-directed? Do they leave one delighting in God's character and deeds or upon ourselves and/or worldly values? *Worship must glorify God.*
- 3) **Are they edifying and instructive?** Do the lyrics enhance one's understanding of truth? Do they bring helpful words of encouragement, admonishment and exhortation to godly Christian living? *Worship must edify believers.*
- 4) **Are they profound and substantial?** Do the lyrics elevate or trivialize the message? Do they honor or dishonor God's character and deeds? Is there a shallowness cast over truth and Christian experience or a thoughtful engagement with it?
- 5) **Are they clear and understandable?** Do the lyrics clearly communicate the message in an understandable way? Is the message obscured by outdated language or overly popular language that will soon be outdated? Is there an enduring quality to the words chosen?
- 6) **Are they addressed to the heart and mind?** Do the lyrics address the heart as well as the mind (i.e. songs that provoke proper affections of the heart as well as godly intellectual reflection)? Is there a balance between songs that are weighty and thought provoking (i.e. songs that focus on deep truths) as well as those that are simple (but not trivial), meditative, repetitive (e.g. note Psa. 136) and responsive in nature?
- 7) **Are they marked by variety?** Do the lyrics reflect a balance in emphasis (cf. Eph. 5:19 & Col. 3:16 – *psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*)? Do they reflect songs addressing God directly (first & second person) as well as those which speak about God (third person)? Do they focus on God's character as well as His deeds? Do they reflect doctrine and theology (what we believe) as well as experience and practice (what we do)? Do they emphasize a corporate dimension (the church) as well as a personal dimension? Do they reflect the wide

variety of responses of worship (i.e. contrition, thankfulness, joy, praise, peace, celebration, reflection, exaltation, etc...)? Is the variety of songs primarily devoted to God as the subject (rather than ourselves)? *God is the focus of our worship.*

SUBJECTIVE CRITERIA (*Music* – where preferences must be guided by principles – Phil. 4:8):

- 8) **Is the music wholesome?** Does the musical style reflect worldly values or that which can be distinctively identified with historic standards of artistic truth, dignity and beauty?
- 9) **Is it excellent and creative?** Does the music appeal to standards of musical excellence? Does it have a well crafted form with good melody, harmony and rhythm? Is it original and artistic, rather than formulaic or derivative?
- 10) **Is it memorable and singable?** Does the song have a memorable tune? Does the music help one to remember the lyrics lodging its truth in the heart and mind? Does the song lend itself to the average person to learn and sing? Does it have a reasonable melody and rhythm that allows for easy congregational singing or can be adapted for such? Is the vocal range within acceptable limits for most people to sing? *Congregational singing should not require professional abilities.*
- 11) **Is it compatible?** Does the music fit the lyrics? Do the two go well together as an appropriate expression of the message or meaning of the song? Does the music lend itself to the spirit and content of lyrics for worshipping God that is distinct from music for mere enjoyment? Does the music hinder or enhance the message of the lyrics given the particular kind of emphasis (e.g. the mood – joyful, solemn, majestic, etc...)?
- 12) **Is it stylistically balanced?** Does the music reflect a balance and variety of different styles (cf. Psa. 150) that communicate to a broad range of tastes and aesthetics (e.g. seniors and well as young people) while retaining wholesome and excellent values? Is there a balance between historic hymns and songs as well as contemporary musical styles? Is there an appreciation and utilization of the wide variety of aesthetic expressions and creative abilities God has endowed us with?

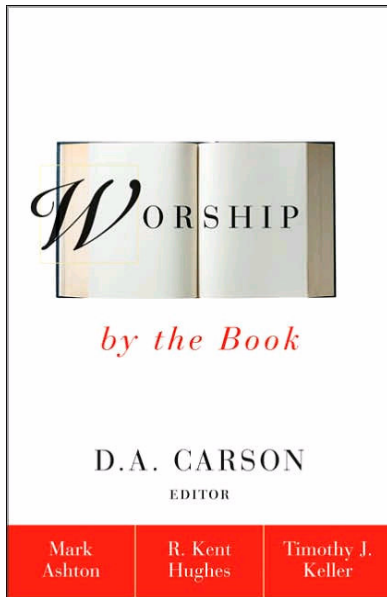
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BOOK NOOK

Featured volume:

Worship by the Book

edited by Donald A. Carson
(Zondervan, 2002)



Donald A. Carson, leading New Testament scholar (serving as Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and author of almost 50 books) and sometimes hymnwriter (see www.christwaymedia.com), earlier showed his interest in the study of worship when he edited a collection of articles entitled *Worship: Adoration and Action* in 1993 (re-published in 2002 by Wipf and Stock Publishers).

Chapters 2-4 feature pastors of prominent Anglican, non-denominational and Presbyterian congregations respectively, who give interesting insights as to how their own theology of worship is carried out in practice in their churches. But it is chapter 1, authored by Carson himself, which is particularly valuable: it alone is worth the price of the book. In this chapter Carson offers his own expanded definition of worship (see below), which he then proceeds to unpack before ending with a helpful list of practical applications. His treatment is sane and gracious, full of rich biblical insights yet pastorally sensitive and realistic. And his analysis of different writers' contributions to the worship

debate is also quite incisive and insightful.

The fifty pages of this chapter comprise a fascinating “mini-theology” of worship which could form the basis for intensive study and fruitful discussion among pastors, worship leaders, church lay leaders and worship committees.

Carson's expanded definition of worship (Chapter 1, "Worship under the Word," p. 26)

Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, *human worship* of God properly responds to the redemp-tive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, *Christian worship* is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. Such worship therefore manifests itself both in adoration and in action, both in the in-dividual believer and in *corporate worship*, which is worship offered up in the con-text of the body of believers, who strive to align all the forms of their devout ascription of all worth to God with the panoply of new covenant mandates and examples that bring to fulfillment the glories of antecedent revelation and anticipate the consummation.

NEW BOOKS ON WORSHIP IN 2004-5

Exploring the Worship Spectrum: Six Views, ed. Paul A. Basden (Zondervan, 2004)

With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship, Reggie Kidd (Baker, 2005)

A More Profound Alleluia: Theology and Worship in Harmony, ed. Leanne Van Dyk
(Calvin Institute) (Eerdmans, 2005)

Created for Worship: from Genesis to Revelation to You, Noel Due (Mentor [U.K.], 2005)

Worship: Beholding the Beauty of the Lord, Skip Ryan (Crossway Books, 2005)

WORSHIP EVENTS

PRIORITY OF WORSHIP: A Workshop Emphasizing Worship

(sponsored by the Georgia Baptist Convention)

January 26, 2006

Georgia Baptist Conference Center

Norman Park, GA

and

January 27, 2006

Calvary Baptist Church

Jesup, Georgia

mw.gabaptist.org/common/content.asp?PAGE=486

CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON WORSHIP

January 26-28, 2006

Calvin College

Grand Rapids, Michigan

www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos

CHURCH MUSIC WORKSHOP

February 2-4, 2006

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Fort Worth, Texas

www.swbts.edu/cmw2006

LINKS

- ✚ *Calvin Institute of Christian Worship* www.calvin.edu/worship
- ✚ *Institute for Christian Worship* (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville KY) www.sbts.edu/icw
- ✚ “Worship Quote of the Week” (email subscription) www.wqotw.org
- ✚ “Worship Matters” (worship blog by Bob Kauflin of Sovereign Grace Ministries) www.worshipmatters.com

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP PLANNING

Celebration Hymnal (Word Music/Integrity Music): Worship Resource Edition

- ✚ *Concordance of Song Texts* (particularly helpful)
- ✚ *Indices*: Scripture readings, Scriptures references, tune names, metrical, topical

The Worship Sourcebook (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship/Baker Books)

- ✚ Readings and guidelines for every part of the worship service
- ✚ Readings centered around biblical themes and events of the Christian year

The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts (Soli Deo Gloria Publications)

- ✚ Metrical, rhyming paraphrase of all the Psalms (with meter indications to allow singing to familiar tunes)
 - ✚ All surviving hymn texts (365), also with meter indications
 - ✚ Topical and title indices

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

James Brown, Director of Music, Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis TN,
for proposing the idea of this newsletter

Scott Christiansen for providing the guest article for this issue



WORSHIP NOTES is a free monthly email digest of reflections, views, news and reviews concerning biblical worship. It is produced by Ron Man as a publication of *Worship Resources*, a department of Greater Europe Mission devoted to “strengthening the body of Christ in the U.S., Europe and around the world by promoting the priority, understanding and practice of God-centered, Christ-exalting, Biblically-based worship.” To subscribe, please go to www.worr.org and click on “Worship Notes” at the top. There are many other free resources there also.