

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 1, Number 2 ♪ February 2006

THEME: The Priority of Worship

FIRST THINGS FIRST

The Great Commission which Jesus gave to His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) shows us God's heart for the world and His desire for all of His children to be faithful instruments in carrying the message of the gospel to all peoples. The Commission does not stop with evangelism, however, and includes in its scope the full-orbed ministry of discipling: that process by which people are not only brought to saving faith but are also mentored in *the* faith, being gradually brought to maturity, that they might obey the commands of Jesus and ultimately become disciplers themselves.

Many churches (as well as other Christian organizations), recognizing the pivotal importance of the Great Commission, have built it into their mission or purpose statements, either explicitly or implicitly. However, the Great Commission, as pivotal as it is, is *not* the cornerstone of our Christian walk and service; it is *not* the bottom line. The Great **Commandment** is. Jesus explained in Mark 12:30 that the "great commandment in the law," that is, the sum and focus of all its provisions, is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." We are to be first and foremost *lovers of God*; and we are to express that love through a life and lifestyle of *worship*.

Worshippers are what God is seeking, first and foremost (John 4:23)—not evangelists, pastors, missionaries, teachers, housewives or Christian professional people. Throughout the Scriptures we see God's great quest for worshippers: as He looks for Adam and Eve in hiding, as He provides in the Old Testament sacrificial system the means for a sinful people to approach Him, as He sends His Son to the cross that the way into His presence might be opened once and for all, as He sends His blood-bought church into all the world with the gospel—it is all because *He is seeking worshippers*, those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

The primary way a Christian glorifies God is in the vertical relationship of *worship*, which at its root is the response of the heart to the Lord's gracious initiative in one's life, a response of adoration and love for

God for who He is and what He has done (worship in truth) which wells up into outward expression out of the inner man (worship in spirit). Both the Old and New Testaments are clear that true worship begins on the inside, where only God can see (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15; Philippians 3:3; 1 Samuel 15:22).

John Piper has written: "Worship is the only Christian activity which is an end in itself." That is, every other spiritual endeavor—evangelism, edification, fellowship, teaching, discipling—has as its ultimate aim the development of *more and better worshippers*.

The Great Commission actually grows out of the interworking of the first and second greatest commandments, to love God and to love our neighbor: if we truly love God, we will follow through with the love of neighbor which He commands and enables; and the greatest love we can show to our neighbor is to help him become a lover of God, a worshiper, in his own right. Our outreach and discipling should have as its goal *more* worship being offered up for God's glory. This fact is suggested by the Great Commission itself, for the culmination of the discipling process (after baptizing, that is, bringing new converts into identification with God and the Church, Matt. 28:19) is said by Jesus to be "teaching them to obey all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:20); and Jesus Himself said the *most important* thing He commanded them was to love God! So the Great Commission has as its *ultimate* goal the fulfillment of the Great Commandment; and the Great Commandment feeds and fuels motivation for pursuing the Great Commission.

The Great Commission is, as John Piper says of missions (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, p. 17), "a temporary necessity"—but our call to love God and worship Him will continue forever. By all means, let us be about fulfilling the Great Commission . . . but first things first! Let us first and foremost seek to love God with our entire being—heart, soul, mind and strength—and to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). May our lives and services of worship then overflow with a grateful aspiration to "make disciples of all the nations," that they too might worship Him and love Him and serve Him forever, to the glory of His name.

Worshippers are what God is seeking, first and foremost

QUOTABLES

Reflections on the Priority of Worship

“The purpose of this Christian society called the ‘Church’ is, first: to glorify God by our worship.”

(Billy Graham [!], *Peace with God*, 194)

“The worship of God is the most blessed of all earthly vocations. There is no higher or nobler task to which we can give our energies and devote our time. God is first. God is worthy. And we are privileged to enjoy personal fellowship with Him.”

(Ronald Allen & Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, 10)

“Nothing else can so transform the church, nurture its ministries, and revitalize its fellowship as the encounter God makes available to us through worship. As a result of worship, the church finds itself empowered to move beyond its walls, finding its neighbors and loving them.”

(Craig A. Loscalzo & Lloyd L. Mims III, “Worship Leadership” in *Preparing for Christian Ministry: An Evangelical Approach*, 198)

“The Father seeks to commune with you in worship. He is not looking for your money, your glory, or your strength. He is looking for your heart. C. S. Lewis said, “It is in the process of being worshiped that God communicates His presence to men.” If you are not worshipping God, but you are serving Him (or so you think), you are making a big mistake. To pray without worship is mockery. To sing without worship is sounding brass. To work without worship is an insult to God. To teach without worship is ignorance. To serve without worship is hypocrisy. To witness without worship is perjury. God wants your worship.”

(Adrian Rogers, *Love Worth Finding Daily Devotional*, March 27, 2004)

“There can be no scattered people of God without the gathered people of God. There can be no good works, fruit bearing, Kingdom extension, evangelism, mercy, or missions without worship.”

(Skip Ryan, *Worship: Beholding The Beauty of The Lord*, 55)

“The end we ought to propose to ourselves is to become, in this life, the most perfect worshipers of God we can possibly be, as we hope to be through all eternity.”

(Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 27)

“We’re here to be worshipers first and workers only second. The work done by a worshiper will have eternity in it.”

(A. W. Tozer)

“Why did Christ come? Why was He conceived? Why was He born? Why was He crucified? Why did He rise again? Why is He now at the right hand of the Father?

The answer to all these questions is, ‘In order that He might make worshipers out of rebels; in order that He might restore us again to the place of worship we knew when we were first created.’

Now because we were created to worship, worship is the normal employment of moral beings. It’s the normal employment, not something stuck on or added, like listening to a concert or admiring flowers. It is something that is built into human nature.” (A. W. Tozer, “O Worship the King”)

“We are saved to worship God. All that Christ has done for us in the past and all that He is doing now leads to this one end.”

(A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?* 9)

“Though we sing with the tongues of men and angels, if we are not truly worshipping the living God, we are noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. Though we organize the liturgy most beautifully, if it does not enable us to worship the living God, we are mere ballet-dancers. Though we repave the floor and reface the stonework, though we balance our budgets and attract all the tourists, if we are not worshipping God, we are nothing.

Worship is humble and glad, worship forgets itself in remembering God; worship celebrates the truth as God’s truth, not its own. True worship doesn’t put on a show or make a fuss; true worship isn’t forced, isn’t half-hearted, doesn’t keep looking at its watch, doesn’t worry what the person in the next pew may be doing. True worship is open to God, adoring God, waiting for God, trusting God even in the dark.

Worship will never end; whether there be buildings, they will crumble; whether there be committees, they will fall asleep; whether there be budgets, they will add up to nothing. For we build for the present age, we discuss for the present age, and we pay for the present age; but when the age to come is here, the present age will be done away. For now we see the beauty of God through a glass, darkly, but then face to face; now we appreciate only part, but then we shall affirm and appreciate God, even as the living God has affirmed and appreciated us. So now our tasks are worship, mission and management, these three; but the greatest of these is worship.”

(N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church*, 8-9)

“If God is to be first in our life, worship must get top priority.”

(Bruce Leafblad, *Music, Worship, and the Ministry of the Church*, 24)

“I am absolutely convinced that [worship] is the highest priority in God’s Word.”

(David Jeremiah, sermon tape)

“It is often said that the church’s priority task is evangelism. But this is really not so. Worship takes precedence over evangelism, partly because love for God is the first commandment and love for neighbor the second, partly because, long after the church’s evangelistic task has been completed, God’s people will continue to worship.”

(John R.W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of First Timothy and Titus*, 59)

“In one sense, worship is the whole point of everything. It is the purpose of history, the goal of the whole Christian story. Worship is not one segment of the Christians life among others. Worship is the entire Christian life, seen as a priestly offering to God. And when we meet together as a church, our time of worship is not merely a preliminary to something else; rather, it is the whole point of our existence as the body of Christ.”

(John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 11)

“Let us engrave this useful lesson upon our hearts, that we should consider it the great end of our existence to be found numbered among the worshipers of God.”

(John Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 52)

“While many churches are struggling with this issue of style, a more critical issue, and one which the Spirit of God is impressing upon all churches, is the priority of worship. We are realizing that God wants to be the first priority of the church--not His programs, not His children, not the lost and dying, but Himself. The major issue these churches are facing is: Are we going to return to our first love? Are we going to establish worship as the first priority of the church?”

(Don McMinn, *The Praise Transition*, 15-16)

“In a priesthood of believers, worship is the common and essential vocation.”

(Paul A Richardson, “Spiritual Formation in Corporate Worship,” *Review and Expositor* 96 [1999]: 531)

“Why does God mean for us to know Him and to grow in the knowledge of God? And there is only one answer that Scripture gives us to that: and that is that we might worship Him. Everything will disappear as we enter His presence and glory, except this. It is the chief business of the church of Jesus Christ in this world, because it is the permanent occupation of the church of Jesus Christ in the world to come, that we should worship God. . . . What is the ultimate activity of the people of God? It is that we might spend ourselves, heart and soul and mind and strength, in worshiping Him.”
(Eric Alexander, “Worship God!” [sermon tape])

“The scholastic maxim *Actio sequitur esse* reminds us that action is always in accordance with the essence of the person who acts. This does not reduce good works and acts of charity to insignificance, of course, but it does make them matters of secondary significance, *effects* rather than *causes*. Of primary significance is our vital union with God, our “new creation” in Christ, our immersion in the Holy Spirit. It is this union that purifies the heart. When the branch is truly integrated into the vine—united with the vine and receiving its life from the vine—then good spiritual fruit is a natural consequence (John 17). Action follows essence.”
(Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 86)

“Whatever else God calls us to do, we are called to worship, to do so together and to do so in the promised company of Jesus Christ. . . . It is in worship, that through song, prayer, and preaching, our theology is formed, our discipleship encouraged, and our spirits nourished.
(John Bell, *Common Order*, ix)

“Surely that which occupies the total time and energies of heaven must be a fitting pattern for earth.”
(Paul E. Billheimer, source unknown)

“If I were to ask you, what was the greatest activity in which the people of God could ever engage; if I were to ask you what was the highest ambition that any man or woman created by God could ever have; if I were to ask you what would remain when every other activity in this world has fallen away-- what would you say?

“The answer is this: it is to offer to God *acceptable worship*. This is why God has formed the universe and created human beings. This is why God has sent His Son to redeem a people. This why God is sanctifying and purifying the Church of Jesus Christ and preparing them for glory. It is in order that He might have a people who will bring Him acceptable worship. And when you focus it down to your own life, this is why God has made you. This is why God has given you a tongue and lips and a voice; this why God has created every faculty of your being, that it might be engaged in the proper worship of Almighty God.”
David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (quoted by Eric Alexander in “Worship: The Chief End of Man” [sermon tape])

“Worship is an end in itself; it is not a means to something else. Karl Barth has appropriately declared that the ‘church’s worship is the OPUS DEI, the work of God, which is carried out for its own sake.’ When we try to worship for the sake of certain benefits that may be received, the act ceases to be worship; for then it attempts to use God as a means to something else. We worship God purely for the sake of worshiping God.”
(Franklin Segler, *Understanding, Preparing for, and Practicing Christian Worship*, 3)

“God has provided His salvation that we might be, individually and personally, vibrant children of God, loving God with all our hearts and worshiping Him in the beauty of holiness.”
(A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?* 14)

GUEST ARTICLE

THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP (THE NON-NEGOTIABLES)

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(Condensed for *Worship Notes*)

What is corporate worship? How is it practiced? These are very important questions and should occupy the attention of all who would be a part of this eternally significant calling.

It should be unnecessary to point out the fact that Worship is primarily about God. Because of the inherent selfishness of mankind, we all tend to make it about ourselves. We regard a worship service as significant only when it meets “MY” needs:

Did I like the music? Did I consider it appropriate and satisfying?

Did I hear what I wanted to hear in the sermon? Did it feed me?

Did my kids like it or were they bored?

If worship isn't about encounter with the person, power and presence of God, which naturally leads to commitment and obedience, then we can't claim to have worshiped!

What, then, is involved in the meaningful practice of Christian worship? Since there is no prescribed order for the practice of Christian worship in the scriptures, we must distill from the biblical record what God expects of His people as the body gathers for worship. Scripture speaks of a changeless, righteous, holy God to whom all creation owes adoration and allegiance (worship). We are here by order of His will, we are sustained by His provision, we have been redeemed by His merciful grace and we will give answer to Him for how we have responded to Him in confession and service.

Some scriptural essentials of worship are:

- 1) We must *acknowledge God as God*. His glory is the reason we gather. This implies a ready willingness to center our hearts and minds upon Him and His pleasure.
- 2) We must give honest, vital *attention to His Word* in order to understand the person, will and work of the God we worship. Scripture must be read with enthusiasm and clarity, must be allowed to speak for itself into our hearts and lives. The amount of time and importance given to reading His Word surely lets the people (and God) know how important it is to us.
- 3) We must *sing* to inform our revelation of God as well as our response to Him. Singing

as a congregation is an act of worship through which we rehearse His truth as a community. The music must be selected with His pleasure in mind and His glory in view. The scripture encourages variety in our singing, “hymns, songs and spiritual songs.”

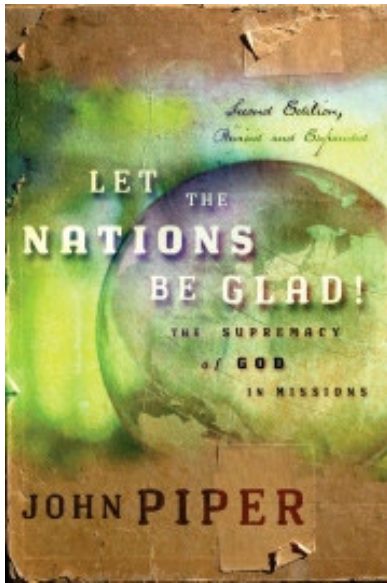
- 4) We must *pray* intentionally and specifically. In prayer we give praise to our Triune God and declare our complete dependence upon Him to meet our needs. We should include prayers of intercession, praise, confession, missions, spiritual awakening, humanitarian issues, etc.
- 5) We must *remember* what God has done. Israel was told to build places of remembrance so they would not forget the marvelous benefits of being properly related to God Almighty. Our worship should remind us of the greatness and goodness, holiness and justice of God. And in the Lord's Supper we are reminded of the sacrifice, mercy and victory involved in Jesus' death and resurrection.
- 6) We must *give* of ourselves and our money. Throughout scripture, worship has always involved sacrificial giving. Through giving the giver is blessed and the work is supported. It puts action and investment into our worship. Scripture reminds us that “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”
- 7) We must *proclaim* God's eternal truth, the infinite Word of God, not man's finite views and speculations. Proclaiming God's truth has been generally compromised in our day. Too often we're afraid the truth hurts too much and we have to “temper” and make it “accessible” for today's “consumer.” Preachers must present biblical truth; hearers must listen and apply it—we are to be “hearers of the Word, but doers also.”
- 8) Worshipers must *respond* to and *act* upon the truth. Otherwise we haven't truly worshiped. Responding to God is to take action, to bear His Name in witness, to show the world what God is like by living “godly in Christ Jesus!” We are to love unconditionally, forgive willingly and immediately, give liberally and honor God in word and deed.

These are eight of the essentials in the practice of worship, though there may well be others. But if these eight were consistently present in our worship gatherings as well as rehearsed and intentional components, the Church would be more effective in the societies we are on earth to impact!

BOOK NOOK

Featured volume:

*Let the Nations Be Glad:
The Supremacy of God in Missions*
(2nd ed.; Baker, 2003)



From the time John Piper (Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis) shook up a missions conference at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon in the early nineties by declaring that missions was *not* the main purpose of the church, his emphasis that missions is a vital *means* to a more glorious *end* (worshippers from all nations) has become well known and well taken. Indeed, from the very first paradigm-shattering words of the book (see below) Piper lays out this view; indeed, the Lord used these words to transform this writer's view of God, missions and worship, and indeed the entire first chapter of the book is an excellent summary of his view of the priority of worship as the ultimate goal and trajectory of all life and ministry (including missions). And in the second edition he adds a chapter (chap. 7) expounding on his view of worship as something far bigger than Sunday morning services (in order to clarify his insistence on worship being the Church's ultimate goal).

Other chapters on prayer and suffering contribute also to Piper's God-centered, Word-saturated treatment of missions—and the whole endeavor succeeds remarkably in demonstrating the book's subtitle: "The Supremacy of God in Missions." Missions is *His* work (in which we get to participate by grace) which He will sovereignly accomplish to His everlasting glory.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER I

"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 in 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. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. 'The Lord reigns; let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad*!' (Psalm 97:1). 'Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy!*' (Psalm 67:3-4).

"But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish." (p. 17)

"God is pursuing with omnipotent passion a worldwide purpose of gathering joyful worshippers for himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of His name among the nations. Therefore let us bring our affections into line with His, and, for the sake of His name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts, and join His global purpose." (p. 43)

NEW BOOKS ON WORSHIP IN 2004-5

(see January issue for others)

Worship at the Next Level: Insight from Contemporary Voices

(in honor of Robert E. Webber)

ed. Tim A. Dearborn and Scott Coil (Baker, 2004)

Living in Praise: Worshipping and Knowing God

David F. Ford and Daniel W. Hardy

(Baker 2005; revised and updated edition of *Jubilate: Theology in Praise*, published in 1984 by Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd.)

The Oxford History of Christian Worship

ed. Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield

(Oxford University Press, 2005)

THE LIGHTER SIDE

ENTER THE WORSHIP LEADER

A new species has emerged in our services: the worship leader. In a day when the leadership of worship services is increasingly being shared by many, it is not uncommon for a congregation to appoint a person to lead the congregational singing. There are several variations of this worship leader:

- * ***Enthusiasticus*** - joyful and excited to a degree often unattainable by most on a Sunday morning
- * ***Spurgeonus*** - actually a frustrated preacher who offers lengthy homilies between songs. Bring your knitting; you should get the front of a jumper done before the sermon.
- * ***Aerobus*** - a Jane Fonda fitness video junkie. Wants worshippers to clap, stamp, sway, raise hands and dance in the one action. Look for the signs in the foyer warning those with heart conditions, pregnant women and children under five not to enter.
- * ***Watchlus*** - has no concept of time. Aims to sing through the entire set of overhead transparencies in one sitting (or standing).
- * ***Crippilus*** - insists that everybody should stand for a minimum half hour while two or three songs are sung many times over. Unfit worshippers crumple after about fifteen minutes or two songs whichever comes first.
- * ***Confusus*** - loves new songs and teaches these every Sunday. Prefers complicated melodies and loves it when greeted by vacant stares or total cacophony. The latter passes for singing in the Spirit.
- * ***Spiritus*** - leaves it to the Holy Spirit to guide in the selection of songs as the service happens. This accounts for missing overheads, mental and musical breakdowns at the key board and general disarray. There is no one to stand up for the Spirit who has actually had no part in the proceedings at all.
- * ***Triumphalus*** - prefers songs of wealth, health and victory. Steers clear of songs about the cross, suffering and servant hood as no one needs to be down today, do they?
- * ***Mysticus*** - leads with eyes closed, Mona Lisa expression and body in semi-kneeling position. Possible lower back pain may be the problem.

(from *Music in Worship: Striking the Right Note!* by John Simpson)

EVENT



July 11-15, 2006
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Join us for over 40 seminars and panels to discuss topics related to music and the arts, missions, and indigenous worship around the world.

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LINKS

- ✚ *Institute for Reformed Worship (Erskine Seminary)*
www.erskineseminary.org/academics/irw.htm
- ✚ *Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Art (Fuller Theological Seminary)*
www.brehmcenter.org
Fred Bock Institute of Music www.brehmcenter.org/Bock/bock.shtml

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP PLANNING

Computer Resources

- ✚ *Computer Bible program* (many available): concordance function allows for easy design of responsive and other readings
- ✚ *Free-form database* (many available): build a searchable database of quotes from books, articles, and other sources (*InfoSelect* from www.miclog.com used for quotes on pages 2-3)



WORSHIP NOTES is a free monthly email digest of reflections, views, news and reviews about 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 or unsubscribe, and to find more information and resources, please go to www.worr.org.