

♪ Worship Notes ♪

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THEME: Teaching Worship

The Critical Need for Preaching and Teaching on Worship in the Church

(perhaps you could share this with your pastor)

The Biblical Need

The central question of human history is: *Whom are you going to worship?* Adam and Eve in their rebellion answered the question wrongly, turning instead to self-worship and the worship of created things (Gen 3:1-6; Rom 1:21-25); that is our legacy through Adam (Rom 5:12). Jesus Christ, on the other hand, answered the question rightly when Himself tempted by Satan: "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" (Matt 4:10). And through His redeeming work He has in turn made possible what A. W. Tozer termed the making of "worshippers out of rebels."¹

If pastors are to faithfully communicate the big picture and scope and trajectory of God's written revelation to their congregations, they must reflect the fundamental conflict and goal of human history: the appropriate worship of our worthy God. That is their fundamental and highest calling: to call people to be what God is seeking: worshippers (John 4:23).

The Theological Need

The biblical paradigm for all of God's dealings with mankind takes on the form of *revelation and*

response. God always takes the initiative to make Himself known and to draw people into relationship with Himself (*revelation*); but the cycle is not complete unless there is a complementary *response* on the part of the creature. Worship is in essence the totality of our grateful, obedient response to God's initiative in revelation and redemption.

The goal of preaching and teaching the Scriptures is not knowledge *about* God. Rather it is to *know* God and to respond to him appropriately with a heart of love and worship. As John Stott has put it: "There should be no theology without doxology. . . . The true knowledge of God will always lead us to worship, as it did Paul. Our place is on our faces before him in adoration."²

The Christological Need

Our worship is acceptable and pleasing to the Father not because of its quality or excellence or "up-to-date-ness," but rather because of the excellence of the Son, in whose perfect offering of praise the Father takes great delight, and therefore in ours as well as it is subsumed and gathered up into Christ's own offering.

This grace-oriented, Christ-exalting and unifying understanding of the power behind all true worship must be proclaimed clearly over the reigning cacophony behind so much practice of worship in our churches today—where marketing techniques, growth orientation, seeker-driven methods, and a worship-equals-singing posture have been winning the day.

Biblical Principles of Worship*

#12 These truths must be taught and re-taught.

¹ *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church* (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania: Christian Publications, no date), 23.

² John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downer Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 312.

The Historical Need

Three historical factors have figured strongly into the neglect of worship in many Western churches in the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

1. The neglect of preaching and doctrine in the church of the late Middle Ages, which gave rise to the Reformation. As so often is the case, the pendulum has swung to the other extreme, with an overbearing emphasis on teaching and preaching as the only important part of the service (which denies the fullness of the revelation-response paradigm of Scripture).

2. The reinforcement of this tendency through American revivalism of the nineteenth century. In public evangelism meetings, music and singing were seen merely as preliminaries and preparation of the people for the “main event”: the message. As James White has pointed out, this orientation was then imported into church services in the American free church as the normal pattern for worship.³

3. The evangelical movement of the twentieth century, where we see again the needed defense of the Scriptures, of doctrine, and hence of teaching and preaching in the church. The corporate praises of the people were again subjected to an inferior if not inconsequential position--as merely a warm-up for the evangelistic or expository message.

Pastors need to espouse and model a proper balance of revelation and response in their approach to corporate worship.

The Contemporary Need

The last thirty years have seen an explosion in interest in, and focus on, worship in churches. But at the same time, worship has erupted out of its former benign neglect to become the leading hot button and center of controversy in the church today. What is desperately needed today is the teaching of a unified, transdenominational, transcultural, biblical understanding of worship; coupled with a call to extend grace to others who may differ in their application of that understanding.

³ James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 159-61.

The Cultural Need

At issue in the current worship debates is the interface of worship and culture in the context in which a local church finds itself. The church dare not sell out to the surrounding culture, but cannot ignore it either. Like any art form, Christian worship allows for much creative expression but within defined parameters. The Bible gives those parameters as well as that freedom. This reflects the reality that “worship is the most universal [following unchanging biblical guidelines] and at the same time the most particular [embodying distinct cultural expressions] of the activities in which Christian communities engage.”⁴

The New Testament does not give us a lot of specifics about how to do worship in the local congregation, but there are a host of biblical principles which can be drawn from the pages of Scripture to guide the leadership of local churches in fashioning biblically appropriate yet culturally meaningful expressions of worship. Pastors need to be “read up” and “prayed up” so that they will be able to lead the discussions about worship which will inevitably arise in their churches and guide the leadership in developing what form that church’s expression will take within those biblical parameters.⁵

The Pastoral Need

There is a critical need for pastors to help their congregations to biblically navigate the treacherous worship waters of our day. There is a tremendous (and seemingly irreconcilable) diversity when it comes to people’s tastes and preferences in worship. It’s “every man for himself,” as God’s children ignore the biblical injunctions to “not insist on [one’s] own way,” to “consider one another

⁴ Erickson and Lindner, “Worship and Prayer in Ecumenical Formation,” *Theological Education* Vol. 34, Supplement (1997):23.

⁵ Two recent studies by Presbyterians have sought to moderate that tradition’s Regulative Principle with a recognition of the needed balance of biblical non-negotiables and allowable freedom in the details: John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996); and R. J. Gore, Jr., *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle* (Phillipsburg NJ: P&R Publishing, 2003).

more important than yourself,” and to “be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (1 Cor 13:5; Phil 2:3; Rom 12:10). In Byron Anderson’s words, we have been “catechized by consumerism.”⁶

Pastors must be “part of the solution, and not part of the problem” by:

1. being worshipers themselves
2. not abdicating their part in worship planning, leading and evaluating to the musicians solely.
3. guiding the church leadership through a careful study of both the biblical guidelines for worship, and also of the corporate culture of their congregation; and then lead the way, in dialogue with the people, in helping the leadership to chart a course for that church’s worship life.
4. being diligent to preach and teach on worship: reminding the people that worship is for God, not for their own entertainment or fulfillment; and calling them to apply biblical principles of church unity, mutual caring and self-sacrificing love to the church’s worship life—in defiance of the rampant individualism of our age, which so infuses most of our debates about worship styles and forms.

The Homiletical Need

According to John Piper: “Preaching is not conversation. Preaching is not discussion. Preaching is not casual talk about religious things. Preaching is not simply teaching. Preaching heralding of a message permeated by the sense of God’s greatness and majesty and holiness. . . . The Word of God is to come teaching the mind and reaching the heart; showing the truth of Christ and savoring the glory of Christ; expositing the Word of God and exulting in the God of the Word.”

That’s why Piper defines preaching as “expository exultation.” Preaching is in itself an act of worship and a modeling of worship.

The Missiological Need

John Piper has famously stated: “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is.

Missions exists because worship doesn’t” (*Let the Nations Be Glad*, 11).

An important corollary understanding of this concept is to see the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:35-40) as primary, and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) as a hugely important means to that even greater end. The love for God enjoined in the Great Commandment is vertical in its focus, purely God-centered and -directed, and is eternal in its scope (hence is in fact *worship*); the Great Commission, on the other hand, is by definition man-centered and -directed and (as Piper says about missions) “a temporary necessity.”

In addition, when we consider that the culmination of the discipleship process involves “teaching them to obey all that [Jesus] commanded [them]” (28:20), we should take note that, according to Jesus himself, the *most important* of those commanded things is in fact the *Great Commandment!*

Hence the ultimate consummation of the Great Commission is teaching disciples to be whole-hearted worshipers.

The Personal Need

Pastors of course want to course turn their people’s hearts towards God. That means they must turn them towards *worship*. John Stott has written:

If worship is right because God is worthy of it, it is also the best of all antidotes to our own self-centredness, the most effective way to “disinfect us of egotism,” as one writer put it long ago. In true worship we turn the searchlight of our mind and heart upon God and temporarily forget about our troublesome and usually intrusive selves.⁷

As the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” God is seeking *worshipers* (John 4:23). That’s what He wants first and foremost from every member of the congregation, and that must therefore be the pastor’s highest goal.

** Biblical Principles of Worship
(treating twelve principles, of which the twelfth is dealt with here) may be downloaded
at www.worr.org/articles.*

⁶ Anderson, “Worship and Theological Education,” *Theological Education*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2003):120.

⁷ John Stott, *Christian Basics* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969), 119.

QUOTABLES

The Importance of Teaching on Worship

“The key is that Worship Principles (these or others) cannot merely be acted on; to become effective, they must be taught and retaught and re-taught (in all manner of ways at all levels of a church) until they become the culture of a church. They need to become ‘values’ of the worshipers themselves, or things will always degenerate back to people’s preferences based on whatever meaningful experiences they’ve had. The power of ‘I like what I know’ and/or ‘this is cool’ are very hard to overcome, until people come together to say: This is about Jesus and about the whole body.”

(Craig Allen)

“Ten Reasons Seminaries Should Teach Worship and Music

1. Worship is central to every pastor’s ministry.
2. Music is central to evangelical worship, and the new worship has intensified this centrality: music forms 50 percent of the service.
3. A peer relationship between pastors and musicians is demanded in contemporary worship.
4. Worship requires interdisciplinary study. Seminaries, as an institution, are most able to offer the variety of resources needed to provide a platform for teaching worship.
5. Worship aids spiritual formation.
6. Pastors need a theology of worship and music and a better understanding of the arts.
7. Musicians need theological grounding and a better understanding of ministry and the nature of the church.
8. Pastors and musicians should share classes, practicums, and become comfortable with each other prior to their partnership in ministry.
9. Pastors should experience numerous, varied, quality worship experiences in seminaries and have opportunities to design and execute them.
10. Some pastors and musicians have gifts in both preaching and music. Why should only one be developed?”

(Barry Liesch, *The New Worship*, 238-39)

“Two major roles of leaders in worship:

1. Theological: to represent God in the dialogue (to represent the God who convenes worship). In most churches people don’t hear God speak with an audible voice on Sunday morning God has appointed spokespersons. He’s been appointing people, not to tell what they think, but to speak what He thinks. And that’s why we are people of the Book; and that’s why the Word must be integrated into the entire service of worship, not just be an act for preaching. The conversation depends on the Word at every point where God speaks in the dialogue. God isn’t limited to one medium of communication (the preacher, the choir, etc.)

2. Pastoral: to assist the people in their response to God.

(Bruce Leafblad, “Leading in Worship” [taped message])

“Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. Therefore, acceptable worship is impossible without preaching. For preaching is making known the Name of the Lord, and worship is praising the Name of the Lord made known. Far from being an alien intrusion into worship, the reading and preaching of the word are actually indispensable to it. The two cannot be divorced. Indeed, it is their unnatural divorce which accounts for the low level of so much contemporary worship. Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the Word of God is expounded in its fullness, and the congregation begins to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before His throne. It is preaching which accomplishes this, the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. That is why preaching is unique and irreplaceable.”

(John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 82)

“Thomas Adams speaks sternly against the assumption that listening to sermons is all that matters, reminding us that preaching must lead on to prayer and praise:

Many come to these holy places, and are so transported with a desire of hearing, that they forget the fervency of praying and praising God. . . .all our preaching is but to beget your praying; to instruct you to praise and worship God. . . .I complain not that our churches are auditories, but that they are not oratories; not that you come to sermons (for God’s sake, come faster), but that you neglect public prayer; as if were only God’s part to bless you, not yours to bless God. . . . Beloved, mistake not. It is not the only exercise of a Christian to hear a sermon; nor is that Sabbath well spent that despatcheth no other business for heaven. . . . God’s service is not to be narrowed up in hearing, it hath greater latitude; there must be prayer, praise, adoration.

Here, too, surely is a word for Christian people today.”

(J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, 254-255)

“What, then, does it mean to worship God? It is to ‘glory in his holy name’ (Ps. 105:3), that is, to revel adoringly in who he is in his revealed character. But before we can glory in God’s name, we must know it. Hence the propriety of the reading and preaching of the Word of God in public worship, and of biblical meditation in private devotion. These things are not an intrusion into worship; they form the necessary foundation of it. God must speak to us before we have any liberty to speak to him. He must disclose to us who he is before we can offer him what we are in acceptable worship. The worship of God is always a response to the Word of God. Scripture wonderfully directs and enriches our worship. (John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian*, 174)

“Many who work in children’s music ministry see the need to provide a good time for the children and produce a program that parents and friends will find entertaining, but the need to involve children in worship and train them as worship

participants and leaders is too frequently ignored.”

(Connie Fortunato, “Renewing Our Passion for Teaching and Training Children to Worship”)

“Worship is not some mystical activity; it derives from knowing God. This is how we learn to worship God. And as He reveals Himself to us, we are enabled to be absorbed with His glory and majesty and beauty, His righteousness, His truth, His love, His mercy, and so on. And we worship Him, because we are coming to know Him. The more you know God, the more you will worship Him in spirit and truth.”

(Eric Alexander, “Worship God” [Revelation 19:10] [taped message])

“Preaching is not an end in itself. Preaching is a means to an end. The purpose remains an encounter with God. If my preaching allows such an experience, it can be understood as a rightful offering to God, a worship experience. As a worship event, preaching recognizes the Bible’s central role in nurturing the life and practice of the church in the world.”

(Craig A. Loscalzo & Lloyd L. Mims III, “Worship Leadership” in *Preparing for Christian Ministry: An Evangelical Approach*, 201)

“Make the mission of your preaching worship.

Make the matter of your preaching the glories of God manifest in Scripture.

Make the manner of your preaching an authentic exultation in Him.

Make the means of your preaching an engagement with the Word and prayer, protected from the evil influences of the contemporary world.” (John Piper, “Preaching as Worship” [taped message])

“Christian preaching, as part of the corporate worship of Christ’s church, is an expository exultation over the glories of God in his Word, designed to lure God’s people from the fleeting pleasures of sin into the sacrificial path of obedient satisfaction in him.”

(John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 39)

GUEST EXCERPT

“Preaching As Worship”

John Piper

Let me point to three biblical reasons for believing this—that preaching is meant to be and to kindle God-exalting worship.

First, I believe it because the Word of God says that everything is to be done in a worshipful, God-centered way: “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31); “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col 3:17). If everything is to be radically oriented on magnifying the glory of God and exalting the name of Jesus, how much more preaching. Whatever preaching deals with—and it is to deal with everything—it must be done with a view to begetting and sustaining worship—the valuing and cherishing and displaying of the glory of God.

Second, I believe that preaching is meant to exalt the centrality of God because the Word says that God himself exalts his own centrality in all that he does. And preaching is one of the great things that God does. God’s Word in Isaiah 48:11 is like a great banner flying over all his acts from creation to consummation: “For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.” He chose us and predestined us for his glory (Eph 1:6), he created us for his glory (Isa 43:7), he saved us for his glory (Eph 1:14); he sanctifies us for his glory (2 Thess 1:12). All God does he does to magnify his glory in the earth. Preaching is one of the great things that God does. It is God’s work. And therefore the mission of preaching is the mission of God: “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps 46:10). Our aim is worship—the valuing and cherishing and displaying of the greatness and the glory of God.

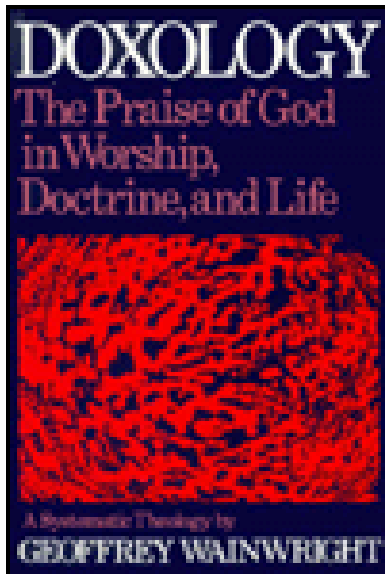
Finally, I believe that preaching is meant to exalt the centrality of God because the NT teaches that the appointed end of preaching is faith, and faith is the primary covenant requirement of God, precisely because it humbles us and amplifies the trustworthiness and all-sufficiency of God. Repeatedly Paul lines up preaching with faith as its goal: “How shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:14, 17). “Since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through its wisdom, God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21). “My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5; cf. also Rom 16:25f; 1 Cor 15:11, 14.) The aim of preaching is to beget and sustain faith. Why? Because faith magnifies the power and trustworthiness of God. This is why Paul loves the model of Abraham: Abraham “grew strong in his faith, giving glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to what he had promised” (Rom 4:20). The heart of saving faith is a spiritual apprehension of the glorious trustworthiness of God in Christ and an earnest embracing of all that God is for us in Christ to satisfy the hunger of the soul.

That is the way Jesus described faith in John 6:35: “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst.” Believing in Jesus means coming to him for the quenching of our souls’ thirst. Faith in Christ is being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus. When we experience that, we magnify the preciousness and worth of God, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him—which means we worship.

The aim of preaching, whatever the topic, whatever the text, is this kind of faith—to quicken in the soul a satisfaction with all that God is for us in Jesus, because this satisfaction magnifies God’s all-sufficient glory; and that is worship. Therefore the mission of all preaching is soul-satisfying, God-exalting worship.

(excerpted from [“Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation”](#))

BOOK NOOK



Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life

Geoffrey Wainwright
(Oxford University Press, 1984)

Wainwright, a professor of theology at Duke University for the past 24 years, describes this work as both “a systematic theology written from a liturgical perspective” and as “a theology of worship” (Preface). He rightly discerns the profound and necessary connection between worship and doctrine, and seeks to show that interdependence throughout the book.

Not for the faint of heart, this is pretty heavy and difficult reading—the author often goes off into dense, philosophical reasoning. The book shows an incredible depth of erudition and scholarship (there are 1,141 endnotes covering 121 pages!), and the author demonstrates a remarkable grasp of historical documents, theological works, and hymnology, and often brings them to bear on one another.

For all of Wainwright’s sophistication, his treatment often takes on a warmly orthodox, even evangelical, tone. For instance, he speaks of “the living God who is the gracious initiator of our personal relationship with himself” (p. 16). And he states that “by feeding on the Word of God, the believer is changed according to God’s character” (p. 18).

Generally Wainwright shows a lot of respect for the authority of the Scriptures and evaluates views and liturgical practices in light of the Word. However, at times he also shows an unnerving spiritual eclecticism—as when he advocates readings “from another religious tradition” in Christian worship (p. 174).

Aside from such problematic broadening in certain areas, the primary drawback to the book is the thickness of its prose and argumentation. Yet it is a valuable resource for the depth of its research and, being very well-indexed, can also serve as a useful reference. Probably its major contribution is its consistent stress upon intertwining the worship of the church with its beliefs—a crucial reminder in our day, when too often worship has little substantial doctrinal underpinning and the crucial God-centeredness and -directedness of both worship and doctrine are easily forgotten. In that sense, *Doxology* helpfully points us back to the end-all, be-all for the church (as the subtitle suggests): *The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*.

“The Protestant practice of doctrine needs to recover
a more explicit *doxological* dimension.” (p. 219)

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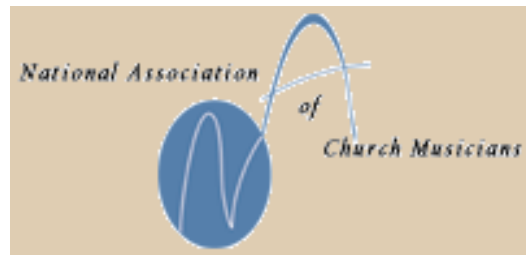
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