

Creative Arts, Missions, and Worship

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Good morning. It is a privilege for me to be here in Singapore for the first time, and at GCOMM for the third time.

The plenary addresses this week are intended to give us the big picture, the framework within which we can better understand the role God has called us to play in His work in the various places where He has put us. We want to study the *theology* of the creative arts, the theology of worship, of missions, of evangelism and discipleship—because ultimately all of these activities are for God and His glory; they are all *God's* work, in and through us. So we want to gain His perspective on these things. *Theology* is simply the study of God, of His Person and His ways—and we will best honor Him by going to His Word, the Scriptures, as the foundation for all of our service to Him.

But much if not most of the learning this week will happen outside of the plenary sessions. The breakout sessions and tracks will then give us the opportunity to see how these broader truths and principles can be put into action in specific cultures. We will get to hear from specialists—gifted and committed nationals and missionaries who are working to help the peoples among whom they work to use the creative arts in order to help reach their people and build the church of Jesus Christ. And of course we will all learn from each other as we talk over meals and in the halls.

My assigned topic is “Creative Arts, Missions, and Worship”—a huge topic, an impossibly huge topic! I’m reminded of John Stott’s account of an English schoolgirl who wrote the Church of England Inquiry Center and said: “We are doing God this term. Please send full details and pamphlets.”

This message should that in some ways gives an overall context to all of the plenary messages—including the one we heard last night, as well as the ones to come. I would like to begin by asking some “Why?” questions:

1. *Why* should we use the *creative arts*?

We would answer first, of course, that we should use the creative arts ultimately to honor God our Creator, the supreme creative artist. But also, in the context of this conference, we would add the answer: *in order to contextualize and focus the message of missions*. The creative arts can help the effective communication of the gospel by expressing it in ways that are culturally meaningful and compelling. And under the broad category of missions we understand both of the activities that the Great Commission touches on: *evangelism* and *discipleship*. (We’ll hear messages in the coming days on both of those, and learn how the creative arts can enrich both.) So we can use the creative arts to strengthen the work of missions. I believe that is why we’re all here this week!

2. But then we could ask: *Why* should we do *missions*?

And we would say: *so that God might receive the worship of all peoples.* Missions, as we will talk about, has as its ultimate aim the honoring of God by gathering more worshipers for the glory of His name. (We will talk about this more in a little while.) And the creative arts help people to express their worship to God in wondrously varied ways.

3. But then the question remains: *Why* should the peoples *worship* God?

And the answer is: *because He is supremely worthy of all praise.* He is the one in whom “we live and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He the Lord of the universe and the Author of our salvation. He loved the world so much that He sent His only Son, so that we might have life through faith in Him (John 3:16). He, and He alone is worthy of our praise and our worship and our adoration and our service.

So, *why the creative arts?* In the context of this conference, to enhance the work of missions. *Why missions?* To gather worshipers for God. *Why worship?* Because God is worthy of all honor, and glory, and praise. So we have worked our way from the creative arts, through missions and worship, to God Himself, for whose honor and glory all these things exist.

And so now we want to begin now by considering the person of God, the most important subject of all, and then work our way back down again through the themes of missions and worship, and then finally again to the creative arts. Everything in its proper place and proper order.

I. GOD

So we begin, as we should, with God.

A. Creator

And let us consider the fact that God is the Creator of all things.

That God is Creator is the most basic fact we can learn about God; in fact, it is of course the very first thing we learn about God in the Bible: Genesis 1:1 tells us that “in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Understanding that God is the Creator is really foundational to understanding everything else. It means that God is unique and absolute in His glory. The Old Testament writers gave repeated testimony to the uniqueness of this Creator God:

O God, who is like You? (Psalm 71:19)

O LORD, there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You. (1 Chronicles 17:20)

There is no one like the Lord our God. (Exodus 8:10)

The LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. (Deut. 4:35)

There is none to compare with You. (Ps. 40:5)

To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him? . . . “To whom then will you liken Me That I would be his equal?” says the Holy One.”(Isaiah 40:18,25)

For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens . . . “I am the LORD, and there is none else.” (Isaiah 45:18)

“I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me.” (Isaiah 46:9)

“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another.” (Isaiah 42:8)

So, again, God is absolutely unique, because he is the Creator. And of course it is His creative handiwork that is the great Model for our creative arts; and that capability that we have as human beings is of course one profound aspect of the image of God in us.

B. Creation

Creation is what God brought into being by His great power. Everything else that exists does so because God called it into being. Whatever is not God was made by God. There are only two categories of existence: God, and everything else.

And, since we started this hour by asking “why?” questions, let us ask one more: *Why creation? Why* did God make all things, including us? The way we answer that question is incredibly important. You see, sometimes well-meaning Christians like to imagine that God created us because He didn’t feel complete, because He felt lonely and need someone to love. That could not be more wrong! God is perfect and complete in and of Himself. He lacks nothing, he needs nothing. And the biblical doctrine of the Trinity shows us that before the creation of the universe God already existed *in community*, and enjoyed a perfect relationship of love and fellowship among Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so He didn’t *need* to create the world, or us. *Why* then creation? The Scriptures tell us:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God. (Psalm 19:1)

Bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

The Bible says He created the world, and created us, in order to *display His glory*. By God’s glory we are talking of all of His attributes taken together; all of His perfections; all the things that make Him God. John Piper has written that God’s glory is “the beauty of God’s manifold [many] perfections.” (Dr. Piper has written much more about this crucial subject of the glory of God in his book *Let the Nations Be Glad*.)

So we have a glorious Creator; and we have the creation He has brought into existence. The appropriate response of all creation, and especially of the human creatures God has made, is one of *worship*. And so we turn now to the theme of worship.

II. WORSHIP

A. Let's consider how worship relates to God

There are two crucial things about *worship* that I want to emphasize here:

1. Worship is *our response to the glory of God*. God has revealed Himself: in nature, in Scripture, and above all in His Son. And worship is the totality of our response to God's revelation of His glorious Person. Worship is *all that we are* responding with praise and thanksgiving to *all that God is* (that's what His *glory* is, as we just saw). In worship we acknowledge and celebrate God's unique glory and majesty with all of our being: we the truth of God's glory with our minds, but it goes much further than that: our hearts and embrace and cherish that truth, which brings forth the praise of our lips and indeed a whole life that is offered to God as an appropriate response for all that He has done for us in Christ (as Romans 12:1 tells us).
2. True worship presupposes this *fundamental distinction* between Creator and the created order that we already talked about. *God is His own category*—there's nothing, and no one, like Him. That's why He is the only one worthy of our worship. He's the Creator, and alone deserves our praise:

For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens . . . "I am the LORD, and there is none else." (Isaiah 45:18)

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created." (Revelation 4:12)

"Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker." (Psalm 95:6)

In worship we are called upon to acknowledge before the Creator that "He is God; and we are not," and that only He is worthy of our worship. The angel made that clear to the Apostle John:

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that! I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God." (Revelation 22:8-9; cf. 19:10)

There is a fundamental distinction between God and everything else which exists—because He *made* everything else which exists. He is therefore the only

One worthy of worship. The proper relationship of those God created to their Creator is one of *worship*.

B. The Fall

This distinction is crucial to understanding what happened in the fall. The fall was a direct challenge to the fundamental distinction between Creator and created, a rejection of the uniqueness of God's glory. And this challenge actually goes back to the fall of Lucifer. The prideful attitude which led to this angelic being's rebellion against his Maker is reflected in the reference to the "star of the morning" in Isaiah 14, according to many commentators. There we read:

"You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
I will raise my throne above the stars of God.'" (Isaiah 14:13)

And, most tellingly,

"I will make myself like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:14)

In wanting equal status with God, Lucifer was thereby denying his appropriate station as a created being and seeking to usurp the unique authority and glory of God Himself.

When we come to the account of the fall in Genesis 3, we see Satan (in the guise of the serpent) dangling before Eve the very same supposed possibility:

The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die? For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

That was the essence of Satan's lie: presuming that one could be like God. *No one* can be "like God;" as the Creator He is absolutely unique and in a class by Himself. The attempt to usurp His unique status lies at the root of the fall. We see this as well in Romans 1, where Paul is commenting on the fall:

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not *honor [glorify] Him as God* or give thanks." (Romans 1:20-21)

Adam and Eve knew God, knew His power and glory, yet did not "glorify Him as God," i.e., did not grant to Him or submit themselves to His unique station and status. In wanting to be like God, they denied Him the respect and homage He alone deserved. As John Piper has said, "the essence of sin is the belittling of God's glory." And they belittled His glory by robbing it of its claim to uniqueness. If God the Creator is not unique, He's not God at all! So they were in fact rejecting Him as (their) God.

So Adam and Eve denied the fundamental distinction between Creator and created which, as we have seen, is the foundation of true worship. Without the foundation of true worship, there is nothing less than to turn to false worship, or idolatry. And that is in fact what happened, as Paul goes on to say in Romans 1:

“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. . . . For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” (Romans 1:22-23,25)

Pastor Tim Keller makes these same points when writing about idolatry:

The opposite of worship is idolatry. . . . Underlying idolatry is the lie. In John 8:44 Jesus describes Satan as “the father of lies.” The lie in its various forms says that you are god, you can become a god, you are a part of god, you are worthy of worship as a god, you can be the source of your life’s identity and meaning. . . . The answer, the lie says, is to be found in self rather than in a creator God who is separate from me and rules over me.

So we see that the central issue in the fall was one of *worship*: Whom are you going to worship? Who is worthy of your worship? In the fall, man rejected the unique glory of God and worshiped created things (including himself) instead. So we see that worship is at the center of the whole conflict of the ages; man refused to give the Creator the worship He alone deserved; and the story of the Bible and of human history is God acting to restore worship to Himself.

The problem in our world is *not* that people do not worship; but rather, that they worship the wrong thing. When confronted with the question, “Whom will you worship?” Adam and Eve made the wrong decision: they did not glorify God or give thanks, with huge consequences for the entire human race.

C. The Great Reversal

The Second Adam, Jesus Christ, on the other hand, when presented with essentially this same question, answered differently. The third of Satan’s temptations of Christ in Matthew’s account shows us this:

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and *worship* me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall *worship the Lord your God*, and serve Him *only*.’ ” (Matthew 4:8-10)

Jesus answered correctly the questions, “Whom will you worship?” “Who is worthy of your worship?” His reply: God, and God alone. He glorified God *as God*, acknowledging His uniqueness and glory. It is undoubtedly significant that this is the first occurrence of the word for “worship” in the New Testament.

As our heritage from the first Adam is that of God-belittling self-worship, so our legacy from the *second* Adam is God-glorifying worship. He came to set things right. He is our model: we are to worship the Lord our God, and serve Him *only*.

With Christ the fundamental distinction between Creator and created is reaffirmed, and with it the basis for true worship is restored.

Christ also restored true worship by reversing all of the effects of the fall that we have already seen in Romans 1. We see that Christ enables us to:

to glorify God as God and give thanks (v. 21)

to exchange images for the glory of God (v. 23)

to exchange the lie for the truth of God (v. 25)

to worship and serve the Creator rather than the creature (v. 25)

In other words, Christ restored everything which the fall had corrupted. A. W. Tozer agreed when he wrote:

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."¹

D. The Gospel: A Call to Worship

So we see that Christ came to restore true worship; He also came to call forth true worshipers, as we see in His conversation with the Samaritan woman:

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers." (John 4:23)

That is what God is seeking first and foremost from each of us: our *worship*. The Bible never says that God is seeking missionaries, or pastors, or worship leaders, or Christian businessman and -women; Jesus said that God is seeking *worshipers*. That must come first before we are ready to serve God.

If the issue in the fall was worship, and the issue in Christ's redemptive work was the restoration of true worship, then the Gospel is an invitation to trade in our false worship for true worship. And not only an invitation: in Christ the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), the power to reverse our descent into false worship and idolatry and turn instead to worship the one true God.

Too often we describe the Gospel only in negative terms (being saved from God's wrath, turning from sin, escaping hell); it is certainly all these things, but also

¹ A.W. Tozer, *Worship: The Missing Jewel*, reprint ed., (Camp Hill PA: Christian Publications, 1992), 19.

involves turning *to* something as well as *away* from something. When we receive the Gospel, we turn to God, but that necessarily involves *turning from false worship to true worship*.

In commending the faith and the faithfulness of the Thessalonian believers, Paul writes:

For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*. (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9)

They turned away from false gods, and turned instead to true worship of the Creator.

When the inhabitants of Lystra want to worship Paul and Barnabas because of the miracles they are performing, they reply:

“Men, why are you doing these things?
We are also men of the same nature as you,
and preach the GOSPEL to you
that you should
turn from these vain things to a living God,
Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.”
(Acts 14:15)

The Gospel they preached was a call to turn from false worship to the true worship of the Creator (“Who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them”). (See also Acts 14:15; 26:18.)

God the Creator is unique in His glory and therefore alone worthy of worship. In the fall God’s claim to exclusive worship was usurped and rejected, and mankind embraced false worship. Christ came to undo the effects of the fall and to enable true worship once again. The Gospel then is a call to all mankind to come to the Father through Jesus Christ: a call to *worship*, to the glory of God.

As the Psalmist put it:

“O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth!
Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” (Psalm 96:1-5)

As John Piper has pointed out in this Psalm: first we sing—we *worship*—and *then* we go to tell others about this great God, the Creator, who is worthy to be praised.

E. Diverse Worship

This worldwide call to worship inevitably means a call to *diverse worship*. The New Testament does not prescribe in detail what our worship should look like, and thus allows for an infinite variety of different cultural inflections of praise in the language and heart language of the various people groups where the Gospel takes root.

Aidan Kavanaugh has written that Christian worship “swims in creation as a fish swims in water.” Worship breathes the cultural air in which it is practiced. And that brings to our churches the wonderful variety that we are celebrating here at GCoMM.

The Psalmist reminds us that:

“Great is the Lord, and [therefore] *greatly* to be praised.” (Psalm 96:4)

What does it mean to praise Him *greatly*? I think it must include:

- praising Him with great CONSISTENCY
- praising Him with great JOY
- praising Him with great THANKFULNESS
- praising Him with great *DIVERSITY*

And so we have the work of *ethnodoxology*, which you’ll be hearing about a lot about this week. The work of ethnodoxology is to study, facilitate and celebrate the ways that people of diverse cultures glorify the true and living God.

And yet, while we want to study and celebrate this diversity in worship, we need to recognize that there is a crucial underlying *unity* to all true worship as well. Hebrews 2:12 reminds us that Jesus Christ Himself is our Worship Leader. He says to the Father:

“I will proclaim Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.”

It is the powerful mediating presence of our living Lord (rather than any certain song or particular expression of worship) that gains us access into the Father’s presence. He Himself sings in our midst, and gathers up our imperfect and varied expressions of worship and present them as part of His own perfect offering of praise to the Father.

I first learned of this wonderful truth in the writings of James B. Torrance (*Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*), and wrote of it myself in my little book *Proclamation and Praise: Hebrews 2:12 and the Christology of Worship*. It is a liberating thing to realize that God accepts and delights in our worship, not

because it was so well prepared or performed; rather the power of all true worship is found in the promised presence of our living High Priest, Who takes our imperfect offerings of worship, perfects them and offers them up to the Father as part of His own perfect offering of praise. That means that, as worship leaders, we don't have to worry, "Was it good enough?" If we come through Christ, we can know that our worship is always pleasing to the Father—not because of our excellence, but because of the excellence of His Son, in Whom we come. That's God's *grace* for our worship! No matter what the outward trappings of our worship may look like, there is in reality only *one way* to come to the Father: through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Reggie Kidd has also written on this subject, and makes a statement that I think we should keep all in mind this week. He speaks to the profound *unity* underlying our worship, even with all the wonderful diversity of forms and practices we will be celebrating:

Let me suggest that every group brings its own voice, but no group brings the official voice. One Voice sings above them all, and this Voice sings in all their voices, excluding none. His singular voice is distributed among a plurality of people. Just because there are so many dimensions to His own being, the multiplicity of their voices amplifies His song. (*With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship*)

There is One Voice, that of our great High Priest Jesus Christ, leading and empowering the praises of thousand of local expressions of worship among the worldwide people of God.

III. MISSIONS

And that brings us to missions, which is simply the task of carrying to all peoples the gospel's call to true worship, for the glory of God.

A. Missions and Worship

Many places in the psalms speak call forth the worship of all peoples:

"Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!" (Psalm 46:10)

Clap your hands, all peoples!
Shout to God with loud songs of joy! (Psalm 47:1)

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy. (Psalm 67:3-4)

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name. (Psalm 86:9)

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord glory and strength! (Psalm 96:7)

Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples! (Psalm 117:1)

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!

Let them praise the name of the Lord,
for his name alone is exalted;
his majesty is above earth and heaven. (Psalm 148:11-13)

“Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy.” (Psalm 67:3-4)

Edmund Clowney, speaking to the Student Missions Conference at Urbana in 1976, said similarly:

“Praise his name, we are called to doxological evangelism:
Salvation is of the Lord!
Let that song die and we have nothing to sing to the nations.
If we do not praise His name, we do not preach the gospel.”

Eric Alexander continued the theme at Urbana in 1981:

“Worship and mission are so bound together in the economy of God
that you really cannot have one without the other.

No one can truly worship God and at the same time have an apparently
total indifference to whether anyone else is worshiping him or not.

True worship and true mission always go together.”

These insights prepared for John Piper’s now famous opening lines in his book
on missions, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, in 1993:

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions
exists because worship doesn’t. . . . Missions is a temporary necessity. But
worship abides forever.”

With these startling words Piper touched off a revolution in thinking about
missions and about worship and about their relationship (in my own life and
many others’)—even though, as we have seen, the principles go back to Scripture
and were touched on by others before Piper. But it was Piper who laid out the
idea clearly and forcefully and extensively; the whole first chapter of his book is
on worship as it relates to missions, and includes statements like these:

“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.”

And so, as Piper has laid it out for us, we see that the work of missions is an extremely important *means* to an even greater *goal*: the worship of God by all peoples. Hence we have the term ETHNO-DOXOLOGY. The work of missions is to call all peoples (*ethnoi*) to raise their *doxology* (praise) to God their Creator.

As Piper points out, around the throne of God in heaven there will be no missions; but worship shall continue forever and ever. Missions is therefore, as Piper puts it, a vital but ultimately *temporary* necessity.

B. Great Commission and Great Commandment

Another way to see the dependent relationship between missions and worship is to compare the *Great Commission* and *Great Commandment*.

The Great Commission is the name we give to the resurrected Christ’s final charge to His disciples in Matthew 28:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (28:18-20)

The Great Commandment was Jesus’ response to the question asked Him about the greatest commandment in the Old Testament Law:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” (Matthew 22:37)

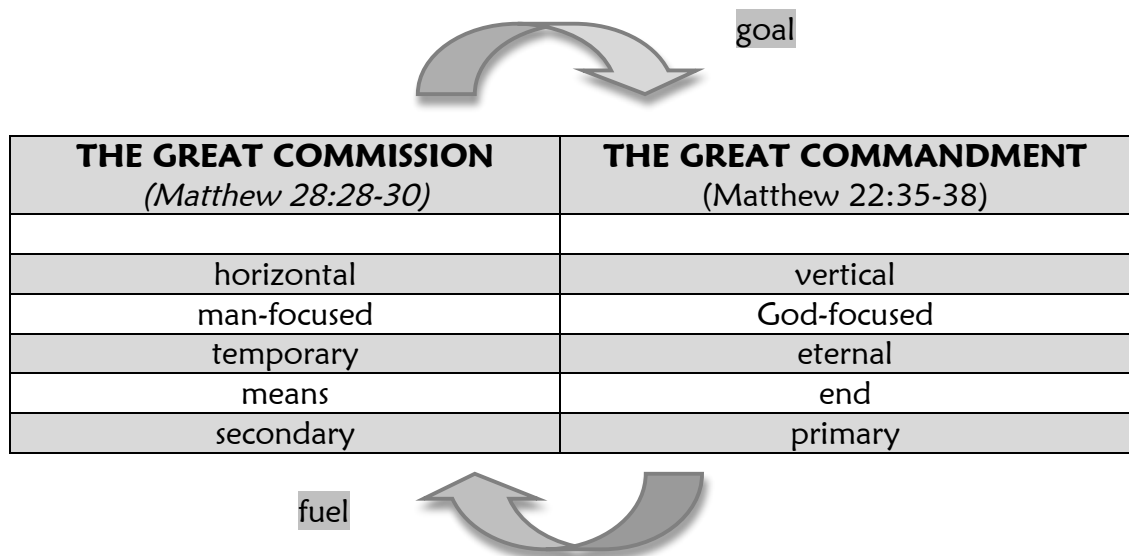
When we compare these two statements (see the chart below) we see some striking differences. The Great Commission by definition is horizontal and focused on man: we’re to go to the nations and make disciples; the Great Commandment, on the other hand, is purely vertical in its focus: we are to love God with all of our being (which is simply another way to speak of worship). The Great Commission, like missions, is limited to this present age; the love for God of which the Great Commandment speaks will continue forever. So we see that the Great Commission is a crucially important *means* to an even greater *end*: the fulfilling of the Great Commandment in the lives of people.

There’s one more way to demonstrate this relationship. Consider the process of disciple-making as laid out in the Great Commission itself: we’re go and make disciples of all nations by: 1) *baptizing* (probably representative of the whole process of evangelism, whereby we share the gospel and bringing converts into the fellowship of the body of Christ through baptism); and 2) *teaching* them to obey *all* that Jesus commanded (which is the process of discipleship). The climax of this teaching process is the disciple’s obedience to Christ’s commands, of

which Jesus Himself said the *most important* one was “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” So in fulfilling the Great Commission, disciple-makers are ultimately leading their disciples to live according to the Great Commandment.

Not only that, but disciples who are growing in their obedience to not only the first but also the *second* greatest commandment (to “love your neighbor as yourself,” Matthew 22:39) will learn to see those neighbors as God sees them, and will seek to make disciples from among them. So the Great Commission will lead to people who seek to obey the Great Commandment, and in so doing will become disciple-makers, Great Commission agents, themselves.

Piper claims that worship is not only the *goal* of missions, but also the *fuel* of missions. He writes, “Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can’t commend what you don’t cherish.” You must be a worshiper first, or you have nothing to recommend to others. You aren’t ready to proclaim to the nations: “Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised” until you have first greatly praised Him in your heart. Love for God expressed in worship (the Great Commandment) will *fuel* the Great Commission (missions). Worship fuels missions. The ultimate goal of the church is, through missions, to help more and more peoples become Great Commandment lovers of God, or worshipers.



This understanding will also help us to see in proper context the two aspects of the Great Commission that we will look at the next two mornings, evangelism and discipleship, in terms of their ultimate purpose: we might say that the end goal of evangelism is to *win MORE worshipers for God* (from among the nations); and that the final purpose of discipleship is to *build BETTER worshipers of God*—those who love God with ever more of their heart, soul, mind and strength. Missions, in both its evangelism and discipleship aspects, has as its ultimate aim that more worship be offered up to God, for His glory.

IV. CREATIVE ARTS

And that bring us finally to the creative arts.

Martin Luther was a great champion of music in the church, as you may be aware. But he insisted that it be seen in proper perspective—for he said insisted that “music is the handmaiden of theology;” the musical expression must always serve the higher purpose of glorifying the One who invented it by being vehicle for the communication and celebration of God’s truth. More recently, Donald Hustad similarly has written that music in church is a “functional art”—not an end in itself, but a means to the greater end of *worship*.

We could certainly apply both Luther’s and Hustad’s comments to all of the creative arts. We know from history that the arts can flourish tremendously when they are appropriately directed to the artist’s Maker, for His purposes and His honor; and that when that vision for the arts fades, the arts often follow a downward path as well. God delights in the use of our creative capacities; but we must always take care that our artistic pursuits do not become ends in themselves.

Human beings are created in the image of God, and have amazing capabilities; but as Romans 1 and our experience make clear, we are no good at being God. We must “glorify God as God” (Romans 1:21) and take our proper place in the created order; then and only then, by God’s grace and with His help, we can richly fulfill the purposes for which we were made.

Something similar is true about the arts. The arts are not ends in themselves; artistic products are not to be worshipped, nor are those who make them. But when used in the proper way, the arts have a tremendous potential for lifting the human spirit and exalting the God of beauty and truth.

Keeping the broader perspective of this talk in mind, let us consider some things that the creative arts cannot do, and some things that they can do extraordinarily well.

A. What the Creative Arts *Cannot* Do

1. *They cannot fully represent or communicate God.* Only Christ and His Word can.
2. *They cannot bring people into the presence of God.* No song or painting can. No worship leader can. Not even worship can do that. Only the living Christ can lead us into the Father’s presence.
3. *They cannot bring people to faith.* Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

B. What the Creative Arts *Can* Do

1. *They can honor the God of creation and of creativity.* The wonderful diversity of artistic expressions is just a faint shadow of the infinite creative capacity of our God.
2. *They can enhance worship by engaging the senses and the affections.* The arts can help us to express our love to God with more of our “heart, soul, mind and strength.”

3. *They can help to open hearts to the truth of the gospel.* The arts can soften a person's defenses by speaking to the whole person in culturally meaningful ways.

CONCLUSION

1. And so: *Why should we use the creative arts? In order to contextualize and focus the message of missions.*
2. *Why should we do missions? So that God might receive the worship of all peoples.*
3. *Why should the peoples worship God? Because He is supremely worthy of all praise.*

We have, of course, Scriptural mandates for all of these areas.

God is “immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Timothy 1:17).

Therefore He, and only He, is worthy of all our **worship**: we are to “worship God,” and Him alone (Revelation 19:10; 22:9).

In **missions** we call the nations to worship Him, and Him alone (Psalm 67:3). We seek to win more worshipers for Him through **evangelism**; and to build better worshipers of Him through **discipleship**.

And with the **creative arts**, we unleash our God-given faculties to bring Him praise. We “praise Him according to His excellent greatness” for all the world to see and hear—as we obey the Psalmist’s instructions to “Praise the Lord . . . with trumpet . . . lute . . . harp . . . tambourine . . . cymbals . . . dance” (Psalm 150) and with all the other creative arts.

He is supremely worthy of our praise—and we simply cannot find too many ways to express that praise!

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. *Hallelujah!*” (Psalm 150:6).