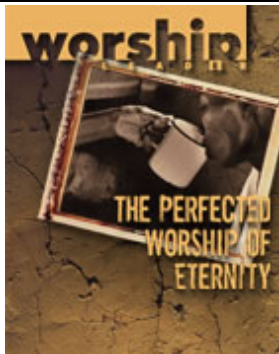


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Nov/Dec 2005

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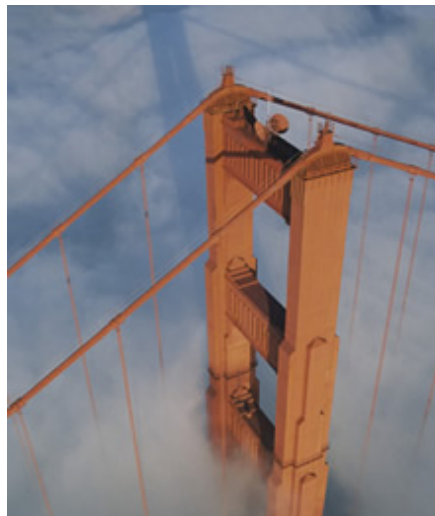


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feature

Worship Bridges

by Ron Man



Every grounded and mature believer would maintain that the Scriptures must guide us as our final and supreme authority in understanding and shaping our worship. With all the debates about worship forms, styles and practices which continue to rage today, the Church desperately needs a unifying understanding of the unchanging, non-negotiable foundations of worship—and we must turn to the Scriptures for this purpose.

Yet even with this commitment to the Scriptures as our guide, we immediately run into a problem if we go to the New Testament for models and guidelines for congregational worship. That problem has been summarized by John Piper as the “stunning indifference” of the New Testament writers to issues of form and practice in corporate worship. We search the pages of the New Testament in vain for much in the way of specifics. Even in the epistles, where we might expect Paul and the other writers to address

these issues as they write to guide and encourage brand new churches, we find frustratingly little.

It is a reasonable assumption that the virtual silence of the New Testament writers on the matters of form and style for worship means that the Lord intends for us to have considerable latitude and flexibility in these areas. Yet our worship services still need to look like something—so how are we to make informed, biblical choices?

An Illustration

In a suspension bridge, the weight is supported by both the towers and the suspension cable. The towers are sunk deep into the earth and are meant to be as stable and immovable as possible. The suspension cable or span, on the other hand, while sharing a significant portion of the load-bearing, has by design a great deal of flexibility to expand and contract, thus allowing the bridge to withstand variances in temperature, wind, weight load and so on.

What can we learn about our worship from this illustration? Our worship needs to be supported by firmly rooted biblical foundations, which are illustrated by the two towers. The flexible cable span suggests the liberty that the New Testament seems to allow for individual congregations to constitute their corporate worship. Like any art form, Christian worship allows for much creative expression, albeit within defined parameters. The Bible both gives those parameters and grants that freedom.

The First Tower: Biblical Constants

The first tower suggests an immovable aspect of Christian worship, which we could term “Biblical Constants.” These are nonnegotiable elements that simply must be present for our worship to be considered Christian.

What are these elements? One clue may be found in Acts 2. Luke has just recounted the events of the day of Pentecost: the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus, Peter's sermon, and the conversion and baptism of "three thousand souls" (2:41). And in the very next verse, Luke tells us what these believers did when they gathered together: "And they devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and **fellowship**, to the **breaking of bread** and the **prayers**.... **praising God** and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:42,47 ESV).

The words in bold suggest a list of crucial activities for the people of God when they congregate together: 1) *the word of God* 2) *fellowship* 3) *the Lord's Supper* 4) *prayer* 5) *praise*.

This is an excerpt from Worship Leader magazine's September issue. To read the full-length article - [click here](#) to subscribe.



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