

Worship as a Spiritual Discipline – Theology and Practice of Worship

A. INTRODUCTION:

1. Why do we Worship Something?
 - a. We worship something that focuses our mind and heart on an object of our most intimate and intense desire.
 - b. In this context the object of worship may be almost anything that captivates and holds our focused desire.
 - c. Worship is an intense longing that holds our interest for a prolonged period of time... such as a person who is an object of our love and devotion.
2. Christian Worship is defined primarily by its object and secondarily by its process:
 - a. Worship is substantive – it is an act [or acts] of our devotion usually directed towards God as Trinity. The word is derived from the an “Old English” term of “*worthscipe*” meaning *worthiness* and conveys the desire of an individual to give worth to God. Christian worship includes:
 - i. The absolute acknowledgment of all that lies beyond the human individual where we respond in wonder at the glory of God that fills and sustains creation.
 - ii. It is the reasonable response that conscious beings make to their Creator in connecting with the Eternal Reality from which we have come from and will ultimately return.
 - iii. God is recognized as The Supreme Being and is realized through His Self-Disclosure in Scripture as “Authoritative Revelation,” through nature as “General Revelation,” through history as “Redemptive Revelation,” and through science, art, human life and character as humanity was created in the Image of God “Imago Dei” and thus reflect aspects of His Character and Nature though imperfectly because of the Fall.
 - iv. Worship asserts the reality of its object and defines its meaning by reference to it.
 - b. Worship is responsive – Theopedia the online encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity says that worship is the natural human response “to the character, words and actions of God which is initiated by His revelation and enabled by His redemption, whereby the mind is transformed (e.g. belief, repentance), the heart is renewed (e.g. love, trust), and actions are surrendered (e.g. obedience, service), all in accordance with His will and in order to declare His infinite worthiness.”
 - i. In both Hebrew and Greek, there are two categories of words for worship.
 1. The first is about body language that demonstrates respect and submission – to bow down, to kneel, and to prostrate oneself.
 2. The second is about doing something for God that demonstrates sacrifice and obedience – to present our offering or service.
 - ii. In modern usage – we tend think of worship in terms of musical praise. This is an aspect of worship and should include the foregoing.
 - c. The “Regulative Principle of Worship” is a teaching primarily emphasized in Reformed churches that the public worship of God should include only those elements that are

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instituted in the Bible. The Westminster Confession of Faith provides a very common statement of the Regulative Principle:

- i. "The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." (WCF 21.1)
 - ii. By contrast, what has been termed the "normative principle" teaches that worship must consist of that which is commanded by God *but also may include* that which is not specifically prohibited by Scripture so long as it is agreeable to the peace and unity of the Church. This is the view found in Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, most independent Baptist and non-denominational Bible churches, as well as in the Roman Catholic Church.
- d. Worship is an invitation to engage in communion with our Creator. It is an act where we consciously engage God with our heart and our mind. It is a Spiritual because God is Spirit (John 4:23-24).
 - e. An act of worship may be performed individually, in an informal or formal group, or by a designated leader.

3. Why Worship God?

- a. Because God is God – Ps 90:2; Rev 4:8&11
- b. Because we were created to be in relationship with God – Gal 1:6; Mica 6:8; Deut 6:5
- c. Relationship with God is formed and fueled by worship – Ex 34:13; Ps 29:2
- d. Worship is both individual and corporate – what does God want to happen in corporate worship?
 - i. Intimacy
 - ii. Dependency
 - iii. Revelation
 - iv. Illumination

B. CORE CONCEPTS FOR A THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP:

1. Worship is necessarily a Spiritual act – rather than physical or material.
 - a. Worship must be defined in Spiritual terms – both as an event and as an experience. The intent is always to connect with the Heart of God through the internal open door of the Indwelling Spirit.
 - b. Worship is subjective and mystical... it can be discussed and people can share their relative experience, but it cannot be fixed in an authoritarian manner.
 - c. I can create an environment that is favorable for worship, but I can't make it happen. The connection with God is dependent upon an individual's openness and sensitivity.
 - d. Biblical sources indicate several approaches of worship:
 - i. Ignorant worship – John 4:20 – "Where" is irrelevant.
 - ii. Intelligent worship – John 4:22 – "Who" is what's relevant.
 - iii. Intimate worship – John 4:23 – "How" is by Spirit & Truth.
 - e. Most Pastors want to focus upon the form - mainly because form is usually most relevant to the particular group or crowd involved. On one hand this makes sense,

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- but we should not start or end there. Instead, we should also focus worship on intimacy. Intimacy is where transformation occurs... meetings with God are always transformational.
2. **Worship is fundamentally relational – it should always be approached in relational terms rather than merely mechanical or performance ones. Mechanical and performance nuances may contribute to effective worship or they may detract from effective worship.**
 - a. **Must be defined in relational terms – it is always experiential.**
 - b. **Worship design must include a sense of entering into God’s presence.**
 - c. **Worship includes both an action and a response from its participants:**
 - i. **Emotive aspects usually occur up front – emotion is important and it can be an indication that a relational connection has been achieved, but the emotion is always to be grounded by reason and Scripture. SEE SPIRITUAL MATURITY “SF-2.4-UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS AND THEIR CONTEXTS.”**
 - ii. **Transformational Response usually occurs at the end – the true value of the experience is not “how it makes you feel” but instead “how it changes your nature and character to become more like Jesus.”**
 - iii. **Effective worship should seek to create something that DEMANDS a response – providing a setting that allows proclaiming God so people can see Him more clearly and then evaluate themselves more properly as they go.**
 - d. **In planning a worship encounter it is wise to ask yourself if all elements of the gathering combine to further worship. Is the event actually bringing people into an encounter with God? All elements of the event should be considered and integrated so the opportunity of a personal encounter with God is encouraged.**
 3. **Philosophy of worship – it is important for Christian leaders to get away from performance driven gatherings and instead focus instead on creating a more participatory event.**
 - a. **Imagine this:**
 - i. **Instead of the congregation being fans – God is the fan. Evaluate the occasion prayerfully about how you think God received it. All too often we gage the success of the event from a performance context, rather than a relational and transformational context.**
 - ii. **Instead of the worship team being pastors – consider the worship team as the participants who are inviting the congregation to participate with them.**
 - iii. **Instead of envisioning the coach as being “God” – consider that the coach is the “Spirit.” This may sound contradictory, but often “God” is more distant and less intimate, where the Spirit is both Eminent and Intimate.**
 - b. **God desires us to encounter Him with worship in such a way that it demands a response.**
 - c. **When people come face to face with God – they perceive His Character of goodness & mercy... of love and hope – and they are spiritually challenged and changed by these experiences.**
 - d. **The key evaluating criteria is if you have experienced God in the event.**
 4. **Worship is “Theo-Centric” – rather than “anthro-centric” or “ego-centric”**
 - a. **It is not about us – it is all about God.**
 - b. **Worship should display God’s character, bring reverence and praise as a result.**

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- c. **Worship is not practical – it is bringing people into a personal and collective encounter with God. When people leave a worship service they should go away excited or moved by their encounter with God... not critiquing or complementing the event.**
- 5. **“Worship” can occur in three directions:**
 - a. **As “performance” within the community...**
 - i. **God is a topic in the service, not a participant.**
 - ii. **God is talked about in the third person – He is seen as real but not present.**
 - iii. **Emphasis is on whether I was engaged and entertained. This is a great evil.**
 - iv. **Focus is on the professionalism of the performance.**
 - v. **Result is people leave pretty much as they were before they arrived, there is no life encounter, no transformational content, only whether they enjoyed the experience or not.**
 - b. **Horizontal among the community...**
 - i. **People are brought together before God.**
 - ii. **God is a participant in the event.**
 - iii. **Emphasis is on what I experienced and how I related to God.**
 - iv. **Focus is about my love for God**
 - v. **Result is the community has a greater sense as a collective congregation, we feel closer to one another but not necessarily closer to God. The service is crafted to encourage that we are here together before You.**
 - c. **Vertical worship personally with God...**
 - i. **God is the focus of attention... the congregation is on the stage before the Throne of God.**
 - ii. **God is talked about in the first person – He is before and among the worshipers... in our midst.**
 - iii. **Emphasis is on God as ‘You’ not ‘Him’ – and how God relates to me and cares for me.**
 - iv. **Result is an intimate encounter with God... one on One. The service is crafted to acknowledge that ‘You’ are here and we can encounter ‘You’.**
- 6. **Thoughts to evaluate the proposed Worship experience to help accomplish your intended purpose:**
 - a. **Understand that Scripture is to be understood as God’s Personal Self disclosure – it is not just practical wisdom or knowledge, or even merely true information you want to know. Instead it is the means we can engage God and be transformed by Him. Scripture renews and transforms first our mind because that is how we receive it, then our heart because that is where we experience God... it is both IQ and EQ. (Romans 12:2).**
 - b. **As people leave the assembly, how will the gathering take them deeper in their own individual relationship with God? Go into your planning of the event with an end in mind.**
 - c. **We are here to echo God’s voice – not just teach or preach. You can preach a “great” sermon that has no life impact what-so-ever. What is the Spirit telling you that your congregation needs to hear?**
 - d. **We are here to give God’s good news – not just advice or practical applications.**

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- e. What does God want to happen in the event?
 - f. God wants us to enjoy Him
 - g. To have a further revelation of Him
 - h. God wants “eye contact” with us – our full attention focused face to face with Him... this is where mind and heart contact occur.
 - i. Knowledge that we are sitting at the feet of Jesus – that we are here together breaking oil over His feet.
 - j. God wants to dance with us – every reference to God’s people is relational – it is a Holy Romance.
7. Definition of effective Worship – it is placing our full attention upon God and responding to what is found. You cannot encounter the Holiness of God and not be moved.
- a. How now do you define worship? It is responding to God’s greatness, grace and mercy with gratitude and love. It is Grace reverently received.
 - b. Worship involves prayer, praise and preaching – it is a holistic construct of many elements toward one focused end.
 - c. Worship is both an individual and a group activity... both elements should be expressed and received.
 - d. The result of worship is greater intimacy with God, and greater love for God and others.

C. WHY WORSHIP GOD – A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE:

1. We should worship God because He is our Creator – unique to the Judea-Christian perspective is a God who calls order out of chaos, who delights in creative works, who created Humanity for relational intimacy... we worship God because He is God – Ps 90:2; Rev 4:8&11
 - a. We were created to be in relationship with God – Gal 1:6; Mica 6:8; Deut 6:5
 - b. Relationship with God is formed and fueled by worship – Ex 34:13; Ps 29:2
 - c. Worship is both individual and corporate – what does God want to happen in corporate worship? To encounter God and respond to Him in love, gratitude, reverence, and adulation.
 - i. Intimacy
 - ii. Dependency
 - iii. Revelation
 - iv. Illumination
2. Worship Logic – We seek to understand the dynamic of worship so we can develop a logical means to fulfill God’s invitation to worship Him. God’s invitation into relationship with Him is an act of discovery both about God and humanity.
 - a. Such discovery underlies foundational thinking about public worship – without God’s Self-disclosure we not only could not know who God is, and it would be impossible to know how to approach Him and please Him.
 - b. Making sense of what we do in personal and public worship requires a fundamental reordering of our priorities.

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- c. All of this results in our reasoning toward a specific outcome in a worship experience.
- d. All of this presumes there is a cause and effect of elements in a worship service.
- 3. **Worship Logic Informs my Preparation:**
 - a. **A Typical Historical Worship Template includes the following elements:**
 - i. Prelude – music as people arrive and are seated for the service
 - ii. Music:
 - 1. Receptive – such as processional and elemental worship presentations in which we quiet our minds, open our hearts, and reflect upon God.
 - 2. Interactive – such a corporate experiences where we all engage God.
 - iii. Announcements – church community activities & interests, opportunities to engage in serving and learning.
 - iv. Music & prayer – preparation for sermon delivery and receptiveness.
 - v. Sermon – preaching & teaching
 - vi. Response – prayer, communion, & love offering
 - vii. Benediction – farewell music
 - b. **A Worship Template demands we ask:**
 - i. What is the order we should do things?
 - ii. Why are we doing these things we do?
 - iii. Is this the proper order to accomplish our logic?
 - iv. Is the result an encounter with God?
 - c. **Bedrock ideals for informing and implementing a particular Worship Logic:**
 - i. I can legitimately create only what I can accurately define, therefore:
 - 1. Worship must be defined in terms I can understand and communicate effectively.
 - 2. I must revisit my practice with prayer and an open heart/mind each time... both to be conformed and informed by God and responsive to His leading.
 - 3. I must evaluate each worship service based upon my definition and my expectations.
 - ii. I can only take others where I have been myself, therefore:
 - 1. I must spend time in scripture – hearing God’s voice to shape my heart and transform my mind.
 - 2. I must spend time in prayer to transform my Spiritual life.
 - 3. In my personal time I must be going where I can take others.
 - 4. I need to spend time with the people I am leading & engaging to know how to take them or direct them anywhere.
 - iii. How I design a worship experience determines the outcome, therefore:
 - 1. I must identify the intended/expected outcomes.
 - 2. Do all elements of the experience promote/engage worship of God?

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3. I must have the focus to be on God and bring attention to Him... if I am calling attention to myself and my talent/ability that is not worshipful.
 4. I must plan for an appropriate response and create an opportunity for it to occur.
 5. Forms of worship should provide two things:
 6. Channels for the mind to apprehend the truth of God's reality.
 7. Channels for the heart to respond to the beauty of that truth.
4. Worship Logic Informs my Observation of the effort [aka – post-mortem analysis]
- a. Has worship taken place? – Look around and understand:
 - i. Observable indicators that people are connecting... observe their facial expressions, are there joyful responses? Tears, etc.
 - ii. Physical – body language indicators – are they nervous? Are they being convicted? Are they uplifted?
 - iii. Emotional responses – hugging, praying, engaging others.
 - iv. Conviction – commitments being made.
 - v. All worship involves God dealing with His people – do they want to remain and continue in the experience? Are they not ready to leave and have the experience broken?

D) WORSHIP RESPONSES:

1. Worship in Action:
 - a. David dances before the Ark of the Covenant – 11 Sam 6:12-15
 - b. Joy praise & thanksgiving – 1 Chron 16:1-7 & 36
 - c. Hearing the Word – bowing & worshipping, weeping & celebrating – Neh 8:1-12
 - d. Wall dedication, worship and singing – Neh 12:27 & 45-46
 - e. Isaiah humbled, aware of personal sin – Isa 6:1-5
 - f. Witness the Glory of God, sense of awe & fear – Matt 17:1-8
 - g. Aware of forgiveness, tears, offerings like perfume – Lk 7:36-50
 - h. Judgment & conviction – Deut 32:5; John 8:7-9
2. Worship Expectations - what are the appropriate responses of being brought close to God?
 - a. Holiness – bowing down, fear, timidity
 - b. Grace & mercy – tearful acceptance, appreciation
 - c. Love – to love in return
 - d. Power – sense of awe, charged up for action
 - e. Faithfulness – gratitude, commitment
3. If there has not been a natural response to the experience, then people probably have not been brought close to God. Something should happen when they are in His presence.

E. WORSHIP LOGIC APPLIED:

1. First Order Elements of Worship – absolutely these elements should be included as they are essential elements of worshipping:
 - a. Scripture – God's Word

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- b. Praise – singing
- c. Prayer – intercession and petition
- 2. Second Order Elements to include:
 - a. Table fellowship – communion
 - b. Gifts and offerings – bringing something to God
 - c. Baptism – in the service as opposed to a separate service
 - d. Confession & repentance – opportunity for individual prayer
- 3. Third Order or Non-essential Elements:
 - a. Announcements – positively engages the community, negatively a distraction for which there are many ways of handling this outside of the service.
 - b. Greetings of neighbors – positively creates community engagement, negatively if people are shy or uncomfortable may further disengage them.
- 4. Transforming Horizontal into Vertical Worship
 - a. Time allowances – again depending upon the community:
 - i. Sermon – 20-40 minutes
 - ii. Singing – 20-25 minutes
 - iii. Prayer – 5+/- minutes
 - iv. Response – 5+/- minutes
 - b. How to convert a negative to a positive:
 - i. Convert greeting into 3-5 person prayer sessions where they share needs and pray for each other.
 - ii. Convert corporate prayer into leading by example people who may not otherwise pray in public. Demonstrate strategic prayers – praying about our dreams of God and our personal longing for Him.
 - iii. Convert scripture reading or placed on overhead – into responsive reading, prayer, have a deacon provide a personal testimony to exemplify finding God or struggling along in everyday situations, showing the relevancy of prayer and reading.
 - iv. Convert focus on singers or leaders into focus on God – less on people... remember it's all about God, not us.
 - c. Pastor and worship staff should meet early in the week prior to the service to integrate elements toward a common goal of encountering God.

F. WORSHIP CULTURE – includes customs and traditions that are associated with a specific generation, ethnic group, or geographic location and the shared worship experiences of that specific congregation. Remember all groups are different... one-size-fits all doesn't work. Find out what their normative responses are, and catch up with what God is already doing in their life.

- 1. Every local church develops its own worship culture:
 - a. Every time you worship you are shaping and molding that culture.
 - b. California culture is a casual lifestyle – hence services tend to be more relaxed and dress is not fancy or pretentious. This won't play well in the Mid-West.

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- c. Local and personal culture will also have an impact – such as the surf theme and the body art theme prevalent in Santa Cruz... this won't transfer into more conservative locales.
 - d. While it is helpful for such a culture to distinguish you, don't necessarily allow it to define you... because at some point you will be outmoded yourself. Culture and sub-culture are always in a state of evolution.
2. **Worship Culture is Expressed by:**
 - a. How God's Word is communicated and understood.
 - b. How people dress for worship and their inherent expectations.
 - c. The emotional atmosphere – laid back or energetic, etc.
 - d. What music is used, and what accompaniment and how it is sung. Piano/organ works in some groups, acoustic guitar in another, rock bands in still another.
 - e. Physical environment
 - f. How long a service lasts.
 - g. How believers relate to each other – touchy feely, formal, distant, etc.
 3. In every circumstance when a believer allows himself to be confronted with His God, he will worship.
 4. **Shaping the Worship Culture of a Church:**
 - a. Continuously teach the believers about worship – about what it is, what it means, how it is expressed.
 - b. Design worship from your own mission statement & worship statement.
 - c. Work with a broad based worship team – consciously include a diverse base of ages, talents, etc. You should avoid a monolithic approach to worship... engage people to catch a bigger concept of God.
 - d. Prepare people for change rather than surprising them with it:
 - i. Seed ideas in people's minds by telling them what others are doing before you intend to start do it.
 - ii. Seed ideas about constitutes worship.
 - iii. Build a culture of change and incorporating new ideas – keep people guessing as to what you'll do next. This seems counter-intuitive but it can really help transform a community.
 - iv. Publically and personally engage with God in a sense of urgency and expectancy.
 - e. Personalize consensus building – get with individuals as to where you are going.
 - f. Use special events to experiment with change.
 - g. Employing influence as opposed to authority is a much more subtle and acceptable means to foment change. People will more easily adapt to a series of nudges that a hash slap in a new direction.

G. CREATIVITY IN WORSHIP:

1. **Why be creative in worship?**
 - a. First and foremost because it brings life and vitality... both for the ministry teams and the congregation.

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- b. It helps worshipers find something new about God. A steady diet of anything in time becomes less desirable.
 - c. It creates new entry points to discover and relate with God.
 - d. It reflects God's own character.
 - e. It helps keep worship honest and fresh.
2. How to become creative in Worship?
- a. Begin with your own attitude – allow for it to encourage others to think creatively and outside the box.
 - b. Read – books, journals – to challenge your thinking.
 - c. Surround yourself with creative people.
 - d. Visit other churches – 1st hand experience of the diversity of approaches is a key to remaining fresh and relevant.
 - e. Take note of what engages your own worship... and have some friends from outside your ministry team give you a fresh view of what is being seen in the pews.
 - f. Practice – implement – experiment... don't be afraid to be a change agent for Jesus! But don't force change for change sake.

H. OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP:

1. 1st known example starts very early and goes wrong really fast – Cain and Able and their 1st fruit offering.
2. Prior to the “Tabernacle and Temple Organized Worship” – worship was mostly personal and informal. It was related to small private alter offerings and commemorative markers that symbolized an encounter with God [AKA Ebenezer].
3. When Tabernacle and Temple worship was introduced and through the Monarchy, worship became formal and prescriptive – God informed in great detail how to perform these services and that only His priests could mediate the sacrificial offerings. Everybody was expected to participate in the service and to bring something to offer to God.
4. Songs of Assent – were sung by pilgrims as they traveled to the Temple for worship – it was intended to prepare their hearts on the way.
5. When the Monarchy was ended and the Israelites were scattered into captivity, Synagogue worship developed which was less national and more about the local community.
6. The 4 parts of Synagogue worship were:
 - a. Shema – recitation of Jewish creed
 - b. Reading of the Torah
 - c. Singing of Psalms
 - d. Prayer

I. NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP:

1. 1st & 2nd Century Church:
 - a. The Temple and the local Synagogue forms of worship were played forward into the early Christian community – and they morphed into the corporate gatherings of local “Home Churches.” This was closer to the Synagogue form of worship, because the arrival of the Messiah formally ended the necessity of Temple

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worship, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD made it not only irrelevant but also impossible.

- b. Early church group emphasis was on singing and prayers; and also the reading of the OT Scripture along with the gospels and pastoral letters [epistles] for the encouragement of the body.
2. Ancient Church Worship – 313-604 AD
 - a. 331 was important due to the “Edict of Milan” with the Roman Empire confirming they would now treat Christians with tolerance and respect.
 - b. 380 was when the church became the official faith of the Roman Empire
 - c. Roman Empire had a huge effect on the church:
 - i. The financial resources of the empire allowed for the creation of church buildings and National/regional Cathedral structures.
 - ii. Architecture, art and music were now officially sponsored by the state.
 - iii. Liturgy developed with the attended services in these new buildings.
 - iv. The ‘Mass’ along with the sacraments became dominant form of worship.
 - d. Gregory 1 – development of ‘Gregorian Chants’ – no harmony parts, no accompaniment. Very plain and simple music all in Latin – this was dominant for 300 years.
 - e. The Monastic movement pushed worship in a new direction becoming more personal and reflective.
 - f. Augustine redefined worship in 500 AD.
 - g. The church ever since these early beginnings has been engaged in altering worship response to make it more culturally relevant.
3. Medieval Worship – 604-1517 AD
 - a. In too many ways the church had become irrelevant and needed serious overhaul... which gave birth to the Reformation in the development of the Protestant faiths, and the Counter-Reformation in the Catholic faith.
 - b. Cultural relevancy had the reformers rethinking every aspect of worship, and not coincidentally much the same thing is happening now.
 - c. Worship direction – of music and services

<u>LEFT</u>	<u>CENTRIST</u>	<u>RIGHT</u>
Puritans	Reformed	Anglican
Anabaptists	Presbyterians	Lutheran
Quakers		
 - d. Form changes in church:
 - i. Seats were added to the buildings so people could sit. In the past they stood.
 - ii. Pulpits were built so people could see and hear the speaker.
 - iii. Preaching became the main thing – done in the common language.
 - iv. Music had the purpose of teaching theology as well as praising God – done in the common language as so few were literate.
 - v. 730 – 1st church organ was used.

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4. Modern Worship – 1517 – 1960

- a. Worship included choirs and accompaniment of organ, piano and other instruments.
 - b. Emphasis on congregation participation.
 - c. Traditional music forms were used with little change.
5. 1968 – Calvary Chapel introduced a big change in music – based on an experiential relationship with a personal God. Maranatha Music was the new worship form.
- a. Introduction of folk-style music – acoustic guitar based was 1st introduced.
 - b. Introduction of rock style music – electric guitar based followed.

J. SERVICE OF WORSHIP: λατρεύω and λατρεία in the New Testament. Chuck Gerhig is Lead Pastor of Elevation Church, and teaches about the distinctions of “offering” and “service” as Worship. He speaks of the element of "service" as worship that is connected to the Greek word - λατρεύω. He says, “I'm actually teaching on this this Sunday at E so it's fresh on my mind :) a text is Romans 12 – the idea: we are now priests offering the service of a living sacrifice of our whole selves (life as worship). This equates with serving God in a way previously done by the OT Levitical Priesthood in the Temple. Our service is connected to our individual spiritual gifts is the worship referenced in verse 2.” The following is a short study exploring the use of Greek terms and their most likely interpretation:

1. λατρεύω.

a. Occurrence. λατρεύειν occurs in the NT 21 times, of which 8 are in Luke (Lk. 1:74; 2:37; 4:8; Ac. 7:7, 42; 24:14; 26:7; 27:23), 6 in Hb. (8:5; 9:9, 14; 10:2; 12:28; 13:10), 4 in Paul (R. 1:9, 25; Phil. 3:3; 2 Tm. 1:3), 2 in Rev. (7:15; 22:3) and 1 in Mt. (4:10). Three of these verses derive from the OT (Mt. 4:10; Lk. 4:8; Ac. 7:7). The particularly strong usage in Hebrew corresponds to the significance of cultic ideas in this epistle.

b. The Purely Religious Character of the Word as Determined by the LXX. The influence of the LXX may be seen in the fact that the word never refers to human relations, let alone to secular services. The distinction is made between λειτουργεῖν meaning priestly sacrificial ministry, and λατρεύειν meaning Temple cultic worship.

c. There is no doubt that the phrase has the Jewish Temple priests in view and not the Jewish community in general, no matter what deductions are made from what is said about the priests. Again, the λατρεύειν of Hb. 9:9 refers not just to participants bringing the sacrifice in the cultus, but instead to the priests who perform the actual offering of the sacrifice. This is clear from the fact that in the λατρεύων of this verse there is further reference only to the ἱερεῖς τὰς λατρείας ἐπιτελοῦντες of 9:6. The λατρεύοντες in Hb. 10:2 are also the priests. The LXX translators would certainly have chosen λειτουργεῖν in all these cases, cf. the way in which the λατρεύειν of 8:5 is taken up in the λειτουργία of 8:8, cf. also 10:11.

d. λατρεύω also speaks of the Ministry of Prayer. In the other NT verses the reference of λατρεύειν is to the cultic worship of praise and prayer which all may offer, and the word is used in an extended, loose and almost figurative or spiritualized sense to include every form of divine worship.

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In the sense of adoration, λατρεύειν occurs in the temptation story (Mt. 4:10; Lk. 4:8; cf. Dt. 6:13), where it stands in antithesis to the προσκυνεῖν demanded by the tempter; cf. also Rev. 7:15 which refers to the blessed martyrs who serve God day and night in His temple, and Rev. 22:3. But the unwearied prayer of Anna in the temple (Lk. 2:37) and the incessant supplication of Israel for the fulfillment of the promise (Ac. 26:7) are also called λατρεύειν, and indeed in the second of these two verses the word simply means “to pray.” The verses are worth noting because the dative to denote the recipient is absent. The word is thus used here for the ministry of prayer.

e. λατρεύω in a Generalized Figurative Sense. The comprehensive use of λατρεύειν for the whole conduct of the righteous towards God is found first in Lk. 1:74. Zacharias confidently awaits the time when God will grant that, undisturbed by the oppression of enemies, we may λατρεύειν αὐτῷ ἐν ὁσιότητι καὶ δικαιοσύνη ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ. The worship of God to which he here looks forward with yearning is impossible without a true holiness and a keeping of the commandments which is valid in God’s eyes too. λατρεύειν then has the same comprehensive sense in Ac. 24:14, where Paul gives the assurance that he serves the God of the fathers. Though this λατρεύειν now takes place κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἣν λέγουσιν αἴρεσιν, i.e., according to the standard of the Gospel, this does not imply any loss of fidelity to the Law and the prophets. Part of the service is that he strenuously exerts himself (ἀσκῶ), ἀπρόσκοπον συνείδησιν ἔχειν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διὰ παντός. Cf. also Ac. 27:23 (τοῦ θεοῦ οὐ εἰμι, ὧ καὶ λατρεύω, ἄγγελος) and 2 Tm. 1:3 (χάριν ἔχω τῷ θεῷ, ὧ λατρεύω ἀπὸ προγόνων ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει). Hb. 12:28 may be cited in this connection. We receive, says the author, an incorruptible kingdom. This pledges us to gratitude (ἔχωμεν χάριν), δι’ ἧς λατρεύομεν (v. λατρεύομεν) εὐαρέστως τῷ θεῷ, μετὰ εὐλαβείας καὶ δέους. A manner of life which is pleasing to God, and which is sustained both by gratitude and by a serious sense of responsibility—this is Christian τῷ θεῷ λατρεύειν. The word thus serves as a transition to the admonitory section which follows (c. 13). Perhaps the λατρεύειν of Hb. 9:14 also belongs here. The blood of Christ will purge our conscience from dead works εἰς τὸ λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι. Purging of the conscience implies remission of sins (cf. v. 22). One possible rendering is that the Christian now has the ability to come to God, to approach Him, like the priest in sacrificial ministry. In this case there is a figurative reference to priestly λατρεύειν. But another possible meaning is that the goal and result of this purging of conscience is a new manner of life which is true λατρεύειν θεῷ ζῶντι (cf. 12:28). In this case the term is used as in Lk. 1:74.

R. 1:9 has in view the same active religious service except that here the reference is specifically to Paul’s missionary work. In R. 1:9 Paul, asserting his unceasing remembrance of the Roman Christians in prayer, calls God to witness, ὧ λατρεύω ἐν τῷ πνεύματί μου ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. The conclusion of this observation can only mean that the apostle’s service is rendered in the sphere of preaching the Gospel of the Son of God (ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ as in 2 C. 8:18; 10:14). Hence Paul refers to his missionary work. He calls this a λατρεύειν, an act of religious service, of the worship which he offers to God. Worth noting is the addition ἐν τῷ πνεύματί μου. Paul obviously does not mean that his missionary service is rendered inwardly. Does he mean, then, that his service is rendered “through his spirit,” and by “his spirit” does he mean the Holy Spirit imparted to him, i.e., the Spirit of God? But why does he not say this? And what is the point of describing his apostolic office as a charisma in this context? Another suggestion is that he is emphasizing that he does this work with his whole heart. But would he express this in the phrase in question? Perhaps two thoughts are present,

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first, that Paul's λατρεύειν, or service, is rendered outwardly in his missionary work, and second, that it is also rendered in his prayer life, the chief concern of which is, of course, the progress of his missionary work. In this case there is a measure of oscillation in the term λατρεύειν. Paul serves and worships God, he renders divine service, actively in the proclamation of the message and inwardly in intercession for the churches and for the progress of the Gospel. This thought would supply the reason for Paul's appealing to God as witness of his intercession. As an inner process, this is concealed from the congregation but well known to God.

Finally, in Phil. 3:3 we again find λατρεύειν in a broad metaphorical sense in which it comprises the whole of Christian existence. Paul contrasts himself and Christians with the Judaizers, for whom he has very sharp words. We are the true circumcision of οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ (v.l. θεῶ) λατρεύοντες. They put confidence in the flesh. Their whole worship of God is in the flesh. Christians worship God through the Spirit of God. This is not to be restricted to prayer. It includes all that to which we are impelled by the Spirit. The Christian life fashioned by the Spirit is true λατρεία.

λατρεύειν means to worship cultically. In the OT its primary reference is to the sacrificial cultus. In the NT, however, this is almost completely secondary, except in Hb. It gives place to the ministry of prayer, and then more broadly to the total view according to which the whole life of the Christian is fundamentally brought under the concept λατρεύειν, so that he alone seems to be capable of a λατρεύειν, a worship of God, which is worthy of the name. The cultic concept is now spiritualized.

2. λατρεία.

Of the five occurrences of this word in the NT, three refer to the sacrificial ministry. In R. 9:4, with the giving of the Law and the promise, λατρεία, the sacrificial cultus, is one of the religious advantages which accrue to Israel. The δικαιώματα λατρείας of Hb. 9:1 are cultic ordinances. In Hb. 9:6: οἱ ἱερεῖς τὰς λατρείας ἐπιτελοῦντες, the ordinances are again those of the sacrificial ministry. In Jn. 16:2: ἔρχεται ὥρα ἵνα πᾶς ἃ ἀποκτείνας ὑμᾶς δόξῃ λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ θεῷ, the word λατρεία virtually means sacrifice, as shown by the verb προσφέρειν. The concrete idea of sacrifice seems always to cling to the noun no less than to the verb. This is also true in the last verse (R. 12:1), though the use here is metaphorical. The service which Christians are to offer consists in the fashioning of their inner lives and their outward physical conduct in a way which plainly distinguishes them from the world and which corresponds to the will of God. This is the living sacrifice which they have to offer. Using a term which was current in the philosophy of his day, Paul describes this sacrifice as a λογικὴ λατρεία, a service of God which corresponds to human reason, in which, however, divine reason is also at work. If man listens to the voice of reason, he must acknowledge that this is the true service of God. The biblical history of the cultic term λατρεία reaches its climax in this interiorisation, which is also the most comprehensive exteriorisation, and which takes up again the initial prophetic statement in Dt. 10:12 ff. The saying of Paul in R. 12:1 ff. is the crown of this whole development.

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K. CONCLUSION – SO WHAT? What does this all mean?

1. Different generations have worshiped God differently – meaning there is no “One Way” that seems to have been “Ordained” as authoritative by God, and also recognizes that the nature of New Testament Grace is far more inclusive than the more exclusive Old Testament Law.
2. No one worship style or format is “the right one”... instead of a rigid prescriptive worship approach that was explicitly and systematically defined, and we are now encouraged to make room for individual preferences and being sensitive to other ways of expression.
3. Worship style and format is not the basis of our unity in Christ, and it should not be the deterrent either. We need to be wise in granting Grace to allow a wider range of worship preferences.
4. We really need to understand that each generation seems to find a way to express their faith in vital and relevant means. As each generation ages it becomes more difficult for them to change, people get set in their ways and comfortable with their pattern of things. Many thus conclude that if it “feels” right, therefore it must be RIGHT... or worse it HAS to be RIGHT.
5. Authentic worship should help to unify generations rather than dividing them... and this is the challenge for the Church as we await Jesus return.

For more information on Theology and the unity of the Church look to authenticdiscipleship.org and go to the drop tabs at Biblical Literacy/Theology/Introduction.