

Worship (CL4)

Inviting God to Church

**Ross Arnold, Fall 2015
Lakeside institute of Theology**



Worship (CM5)

Oct. 1 – Intro to Christian Worship

Oct. 8 – Biblical & Theological Understanding

Oct. 15 – Inviting God to Church

Oct. 22 – Worship, Renewal and Community

Oct. 29 – ***Mid-Term Break***

Nov. 5 – Liturgy & Elements of Worship

Nov. 12 – Worship in a Postmodern World

Nov. 19 – Conclusion; Final Exam

The Nature of Worship

- ▶ “Christian worship is response to the Divine call, to the ‘mighty deeds’ of God, culminating in the redemptive act of Christ.”
- ▶ The need for worship is deeply rooted in the human personality; human beings are natural worshipers.
- ▶ Even those who claim no religion find themselves honoring persons or experiences they find transformative. They develop patterns of thought and action (equivalent, perhaps, of creeds and rituals) that help them order their lives. A fulfilled human life inevitably stakes out spaces for devotion.
- ▶ But while Christian worship reflects this human need, it is more than simply a human attempt to honor God. Worship that is rooted in Scripture does not start with human need, but with God and what God has already done – it starts with God's invitation, given first in Israel and then in Christ, to return to God, to be reconciled and healed. Thus true worship is a response to God's initiative.


The Nature of Worship

- ▶ Prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and confession are human acts of worship, but also theological events - that is, places where God is also at work. All true worship has this dual-directional character: God approaches in invitation and blessing; we respond in faith.
- ▶ We must recognize this two-sided character of worship: It is both a *call* and a *response*. The origin and the goal of worship lies with God.

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever." Romans 11:36

- ▶ Even so, worship has to do with things human beings do. While it is more than this, worship as we ordinarily use the word focuses on what groups of people do together in specific locations at particular times – gather, sit, stand, kneel; sing, pray, recite Scripture or the creed.


The Nature of Worship

- ▶ We tend to take for granted the way we are used to thinking about worship and practicing it. We imagine that practices familiar to us are somehow normative.
 - ▶ We have come to believe that worship should satisfy our own personal (or family) needs. In other words, worship is invariably personal.
 - ▶ Religion in general, and worship in particular, necessarily conforms to basic cultural realities and occupies particular cultural spaces.
 - ▶ Christians almost universally believe their created and cultural situation is also important to God.
 - ▶ What we call worship is charged with the presence of God. Therefore, people who come into this experience cannot remain passive or indifferent.
- 

The Importance of Worship Practices

- ▶ Worship necessarily involves both theological content and practical form.
- ▶ The elements of worship reflect the relation between theological content and practical form – between theology and practices.
- ▶ There is an ancient conviction of the church that worship is "primary theology" – it is where our theology begins. Formal theological language is properly a secondary reflection, and always builds on the language of worship and prayer.
- ▶ Therefore a person's prayer may be a better indicator of her beliefs than her explicit statements of faith. A person's practice of prayer reflects his or her theological convictions, as prayer indicates not what people say they believe but what they actually do believe - and believe in such a way as to act on it toward God. (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*)


Relationship of Scripture to Worship

- ▶ The priority of worship practices is evident not only in the history of the church, but also in Scripture.
 - ▶ Remembrance and Anticipation
 - ▶ Call and Response
 - ▶ In the Old Testament, God invited acts of worship, singing and praising, which reflected and represented God's presence among the people.
 - ▶ The New Testament continues this emphasis on God's initiative as it is seen in the life and work of Christ.
 - ▶ The early church began its life by singing its faith, as a spontaneous response to God's redemptive act in Christ, and it was within this practice of worship that theological reflection was born.
- 

Worship Today

- While worship is said to be experiencing a renewal in many parts of the church, there are cultural currents that seem to be working against any sustained renewal of worship, even among serious Christians.
 - The ever-increasing power of the media and entertainment industries.
 - A modern love for spirituality, but mistrust of religion – and worship, while it expresses spirituality, is necessarily embodied in religious forms.
- While worship calls forth deep feelings, it is finally not an individual quest for an encounter with God or the spiritual.
- Worship orients itself around particular things that God has done in history, and it is primarily about things that Christians do together in the presence of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What do we mean when we say that worship practices are "theological? "
 2. Since worship is dual-sided – something that happens between God and believers – do you think a good way of thinking about the worship experience might be as a "conversation between us and God?" What might be the strengths and/or weaknesses of such a model?
 3. What are some specific ways in which your culture affects (or infects?) the way you worship? Discuss this as a problem and as an opportunity.
 4. Discuss other "worship practices" in the New Testament that might be considered places of theological innovation (see, e.g., Matt. 3:13-17; Acts 4:32-33).
 5. Discuss the problems and opportunities provided for worship leaders by the media, especially the movies, and popular culture.
- 

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

¹⁵ Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” Matthew 3:13-17

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. Acts 4:32-34

