

Chapter 1

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

It is as natural for man to worship as it is to breathe. Worship is “the very law of his being, as a creature of God, to love, and honor, and serve his Creator.”¹ Everyone worships someone or some thing, whether it is the one true God or an idol made by hands.

Because worship is an inherent, inborn characteristic of man, God prescribes the way we should worship. Paying homage to God is the very end for which man was created and exists. As the answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism (as well as Charles Spurgeon’s version of the Baptist Catechism) puts it, man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. God therefore demands that we worship him, the one true God, rather than false idols. This is the first commandment of the law. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).

The second commandment of the law is Exodus 20:4, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness

1 James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (1869, repr., Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991), 1:324.

of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” God not only prescribes *whom* we should worship (himself) but also *how* we should worship. The great sin of Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel after the rending of Solomon’s kingdom into two nations, was not the worship of false gods but the false worship of Yahweh, the one true God, in the form of two golden calves. What was God’s judgment on this worship practice? “And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.” (1 Kings 13:34). God’s pronouncement was that Jeroboam had “done evil above all who were before [him]” (14:9).

Worship should pervade our lives. The late John Murray pointed out that we worship in two ways, generally and specifically.² In the general sense, we owe God the whole of life. God is sovereign over his creation. As the Creator, he has the right to do with us as he pleases. Conversely, as created creatures, we owe him our allegiance and devotion in all that we do. Thus, E. C. Dargan observed that the English word *worship* is simply a contraction for “worth-ship” and denotes the giving of suitable honor to whom it is due.³ We are called on to ascribe worth-ship to our Creator. The psalmist said,

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
bring an offering, and come into his courts!
Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;
tremble before him, all the earth! (Ps. 96:8–9)

2 For an elaboration of this distinction, see John Murray, “Worship,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray 1: The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1976), 165.

3 E.C. Dargan, *The Doctrines of Our Faith* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Convention Sunday School Board, 1905), 171.

The apostle Paul said, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). By giving God our lives and living our lives before his face, we engage in worship.

At the same time, we worship in specific or specialized ways. We pray, we give thanks, we read and hear the Word of God, we sing, we take the Lord’s Supper. And we do so in different settings. We engage in family worship, private worship (devotional time), and public worship. Each has its different rules and expectations. J. I. Packer seems to have had in mind both our general worship and specific acts of worship when he wrote,

Worship in the Bible is the due response of rational creatures to the self-revelation of their Creator. It is an honoring and glorifying of God by gratefully offering back to Him all the good gifts, and all the knowledge of His greatness and graciousness, that He has given. It involves praising Him for what He is, thanking Him for what He has done, desiring Him to get Himself more glory by further acts of mercy, judgment, and power, and trusting Him with our concern for our own and others’ well-being.⁴

This book focuses on public worship. There is something undeniably different, something undeniably special, something undeniably unique about public worship. In public worship, we gather in an assembly as the body of Christ to worship our Lord, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:25). Gathering

4 J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), 98.

as the body of Christ is important because, as John Murray once said, “it is one of the principal ways of giving expression to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to the communion of the saints with one another in the oneness of Christ’s body.”⁵

Yet, several key questions need to be considered when it comes to public worship.

WHAT IS PUBLIC WORSHIP?

The first question before us is, What exactly is worship—more specifically, public worship? To worship is to pay honor, homage, or reverence to another. Nowhere in Scripture is worship actually defined. But when the key biblical words for *worship* are examined, it becomes clear that the central concepts are homage, service, and reverence.⁶ It is no surprise, then, that theologian John Frame defines worship as “the work of acknowledging the greatness of our covenant Lord.”⁷ The principal Old Testament word for *worship*, used ninety-five places, is *shachah*, meaning to “depress,” “bow down,” or “prostrate.” The Old Testament idea is therefore “the reverential attitude of mind or body or both, combined with the more generic notions of religious adoration, obedience, service.” The principal New Testament word, used fifty-nine times, is *proskuneo*, meaning to “kiss (the hand or the ground) toward.” It is to render homage to someone, whether man, angel, demon, or God.⁸

5 Murray, “Worship,” 166.

6 D.G. Peterson, “Worship” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2000) (reproduced in electronic format in The Essential IVP Reference Collection).

7 John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 1.

8 Phillip Wendell Crannell, “Worship” *International Standard Bible*

Public worship, then, is the collective exultation of the gathered church. In fact, worship is the primary purpose of the church. A worship service is not merely a gathering of individuals who sing some hymns and hear a sermon together. Rather, it is the corporate expression of the body of Christ. It is a unique and unified offering of adoration and honor to God our Savior.

WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE IN PUBLIC WORSHIP?

So then, why do we participate in public worship? The great nineteenth-century Southern Baptist John Broadus succinctly stated in an 1879 sermon, “Why ought we to worship God? Because it is due to him; and because it is good for us.”⁹ It is as simple as that. We owe God our worship as a matter of duty. As we have already mentioned, God alone is worthy of our worship. He requires our devotion. He is a jealous God who demands exclusivity in worship. And yet, doing our duty, worship, is good for us. This is because it is only in the worship of God that we can truly find satisfaction. This was the very purpose for which we were made. We are most satisfied when we find our delight in our God.

This means that public worship is God-directed, not self-directed. When we engage in true worship, we should not focus so much on how we feel as we sing and pray and take Communion and listen to the preaching of God’s Word. We should not even come to church with the purpose in mind of feeling God’s presence. No, our primary purpose in coming is, or at least should be, to corporately express our

Encyclopaedia, (Biblesoft: PC Study Bible Electronic Database, 1996).

9 John A. Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses* (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1886), 4.

adoration to God our Creator and Christ our Savior. John Frame quotes a former pastor as insightfully saying, “When we leave worship, we should first ask, not What did I get out of it? But How did I do in my work of honoring the Lord?”¹⁰

WHAT SHOULD OUR ATTITUDE BE IN PUBLIC WORSHIP?

Our third question addresses our approach to worship—that is, what kind of attitude should we have in public worship? John Murray suggests that reverence should typify the proper attitude in worship.¹¹ We think he is right. Too much of what passes for worship on the contemporary scene has lost sight of the requirement that worship should be reverent. There is too much frivolity and familiarity in worship today. To be sure, there is a place in life for laughter. There is a place for humor. But when we worship, *reverence* should be our watchword.

At the same time, worship is active. It is something we do. Therefore, our worship is not to be passive. It is not a spectator event. When we sing, we should sing heartily. When we pray, we should pray actively. When we listen to the preaching of the Word, we should listen with hearts open and minds engaged.

HOW SHOULD WE ENGAGE IN PUBLIC WORSHIP?

Finally, how should we engage in public worship? Both substance and form are critical to true worship. Worship is not true worship unless it flows from both a heart of faith

¹⁰ Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, 5.

¹¹ Murray, “Worship,” 167.

and a heart engaged. Throughout Scripture, God condemns “going through the motions” in worship. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly decried external religion devoid of devotion. Samuel told Saul,

Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.
(1 Sam. 15:22–23)

In Psalm 51, after being confronted with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, a contrite and repentant David cries out to God:

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build the walls of Jerusalem;
then you will delight in right sacrifices,