

Defining Authentic Biblical Worship
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Definitions of Worship

- Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because he is worthy, delightfully so. This side of the Fall, human worship of God properly responds to the redemptive provisions that God has graciously made. While all true worship is God-centered, Christian worship is no less Christ-centered. Empowered by the Spirit and in line with the stipulations of the new covenant, it manifests itself in all our living, finding its impulses in the gospel, which restores our relationship with our Redeemer-God and therefore also with our fellow image-bearers, our co-worshippers. (D.A Carson, *Worship by the Book*)
- True worship is that exercise of human spirit that confronts us with the mystery and marvel of God in whose presence the most appropriate and salutary response is adoring love. (Ralph Martin)
- Jesus tells us that “the Father is seeking [present tense] such [as we are] to worship Him.” (John 4:22, 24) What a mind-boggling concept—the Father is *seeking* us! He seeks us in our totality. He wants our spirits in adoration; He wants our souls in contemplation; He wants our bodies in dedication; He wants our service in consecration. This is [Christian] worship. (Stephen F. Olford, Foreword to *Return to Worship*)
- The worship of the New Testament believers was always through Christ, in Christ, and for Christ. The same must be true for us today. The work of the Holy Spirit is to keep our eyes on the Lord because our very living, and therefore our worship, is to be “of Him and through Him and for Him.” (Ron Owens, *Return to Worship*)
- Worship is a dialogue - one that begins long before a community of believers gathers on a particular day to “worship God,” and one that does not end when the sound of the concluding benediction is no longer audible. (Milburn Price)
- Worship is . . . to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God. (Anglican Archbishop William Temple)
- Worship is a personal meeting with God in which we hymn, magnify, and glorify Him for His person and actions . . . We worship God simply because He is God. (Robert Webber)
- Worship is the believer’s response of all that he is – mind, emotions, will, and body – to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God’s revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better. (Warren W. Wiersbe)
- Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever. (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

I. Principal Expressions of Worship

1. Presenting Offerings – Cain Gen 4:3-4
 (Offering “First-fruits” – Abel)

⁴ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks. (Heb 11:4)

2. “Calling upon His name” –
 Descendants of Seth Gen 4:26
 Coveting conversation with God versus those,
 like Cain, who spurn his gracious counsel

[The deprivation of humanity as evidenced in the progression of sin from Cain to Lamech stands in striking contrast to the fact that “men began to call on the name of the Lord” at the very same time (Gen 4:26). It is not surprising however, that this activity of “calling on the name of God” is attributed to the descendants of Seth. He was Eve’s replacement for Abel and the forefather of Noah – the only member of humanity to find “found favor in the eyes of the Lord” during the days prior to the flood. One might surmise then, that gaining the favor of the Lord is intrinsically associated with calling upon His name in worship.]

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
 Heb 11:6 (NASB)

3. Walking with God – Enoch Gen 5:24

Enoch, the quintessential Son of Seth walked with God for 365 years
 He pursued relationship with God and *demonstrated* his faithfulness.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death;
 AND HE WAS NOT FOUND BECAUSE GOD TOOK HIM UP;
 for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up
 he was pleasing to God. Heb 11:6 (NASB)

4. Responding to God’s Favor – Noah Gen 6:9

a. Living Righteously: “blameless in his age”
 (Exemplary among his contemporaries)

b. Fulfilling His Destiny (the prophecy of his father) Gen 5:29

It is ironic that Noah, a descendant of Seth should be born of a man also named Lamech. Cain's descendant by that name had been known for his *increasing* sinfulness whereas Seth's descendant, Lamech, prophesied concerning Noah, his son, saying, "This one shall give us rest from (comfort us in) our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the Lord has cursed." Gen 5:29]

5. Acknowledging Sin/Seeking Atonement – Noah	Gen 8:20
6. Responding in Obedience – Abram leaving Haran	Gen 12:4
7. Consecrating Places – Abram at Bethel	Gen 12:8
8. Restoring Relationship – Returning to Bethel	Gen 13:3-4
9. Acknowledging God' Omnipotence - Melchizedek	Gen 14:18
10. Celebrating God's Providence – Melchizedek	Gen 14:20
11. Responding in Faith - Abram	Gen 15:6
12. Falling Prostrate in Reverence - Abraham	Gen 17:3

II. Principal Mandates of Worship

Ex. 20:1-8

- You shall have no other gods before Me.
- You shall not make for yourself an idol, you shall not worship them or serve them.
- You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
- Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

III. Principal Vocabulary for Worship

A. Primary Old Testament Word for Worship

Shachah (translated as "worship" 81 times in NASB)

" . . . the most widely used Old Testament word for worship. The literal meaning of the verbal root is the act of falling down and groveling or even wallowing on the ground before royalty." Andrew E. Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, Baker, 1993, p. 6

1. Genesis 18:2

Abraham "bowed himself to the earth" before men who visited him in the desert. He later learned that one of the individuals was God. Ironically, the first word translated as "**worship**" is *the same word*.

2. Genesis 22:5

Abraham says to his servants, "I and the lad (Isaac) will go yonder (to Mt. Moriah) and we will *worship* (*shachah*) and return to you."

- 3. Significance** – What was Abraham going to do on Mount Moriah? Abraham was going to sacrifice his only son, who represented the physical fulfillment of God's covenant and the very essence of his life. The significance of his entire journey to the land of Canaan, the reality of God's promise to make him the father of many nations, and every hope he had for a meaningful future were embodied in the person of Isaac. In a metaphorical way, Abraham was sacrificing himself.

B. Primary New Testament Words for Worship

1. *Proskuneo* (translated 51 times as "worship" in NASB)

One of two words used most frequently for worship in the New Testament. The word literally means to bow and "to kiss toward" – touching the hand to the lips and extending it in obeisance toward the honored individual.

a. **Matthew 4:9**

Satan tempted Jesus with the wealth of the world saying,

"I will give You all this domain and its glory for it has been handed over to me, and I will give it ... if You *worship* (*proskuneo*) before me ..."

b. **Luke 4:6-8**

The passage in Matthew only alludes to the submission and devotion implied by *proskuneo*. Satan did not simply ask for a *display* of obeisance from Christ. Rather, he requested a specific expression of submission and devotion – a visual commitment to serve. This fact is evident in account of the temptation recorded by Luke. There, Jesus responded to Satan's request with a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13 saying, "It is written, 'you shall *worship* the Lord your God and **serve** Him only.'"

2. *Latreuo*

In Jesus' quotation of Deuteronomy 6:13, the word *latreuo* was employed. This word is the second word most frequently used for worship in the NT.

a. **Definition**

"*Latreuo* originally referred to ordinary work rendered perhaps to the state, and later came to mean *service to God*. So then, we use the word "Liturgy" (from *latreuo*) to denote that worship is *for God* – it is the "work," the "service" of *all the people, for God*." Donald Hustad, *Jubilate II*, p. 98

b. **Revelation 7:15**

Possibly the most poignant example this word is found in Rev. 7:15. There the 144,000 who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, stand before the throne of God waving palm branches and crying aloud, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Moreover, the angels, elders and beasts surrounding the throne fall on their faces in response to this song and sing a doxology of their own. When asked to explain the purpose of the 144,000, the angel says to John, "For this reason (that they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb), they are before the throne of God; and *serve (latreuo)* Him day and night in His temple ..."

IV. Significance of Scriptural Vocabulary

A. Old Testament Perspective

The essence of worship in the Old Testament is submission to God out of reverent fear. This submission involves the whole person – actions, intent and spirit; a totality that is clearly summarized in **Deuteronomy 6:5**

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Consider Abraham.

1. Worship was a physical expression of reverence before the Lord. Gen 17:3
2. Worship was the intent to serve or minister unto the Lord. Gen 18:2-5
3. Worship was the spiritual surrender of life to the Lord. Gen 22:5

B. New Testament Perspective

The essence of worship in the New Testament entails active adoration – a physical, as well as, verbal commitment to serve. Both are expected in the authentic expression of worship. (Romans 12:1-2, Philippians 2:10-11)

Consider James 2:23

Concerning Abraham James said: "... 'and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God." Abraham's acts demonstrated his commitment of love and confidence in God and Abraham was rightly known as the friend or loving companion of God.

V. Historic Vocabulary of Worship

A. *Gottesdienst* - the word historically employed by German Christians which literally means "God's service."

"Worship is far different from entertainment. It is not passive but participatory. It is both adoration and action." (John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*)

B. *Woerthscipe* - later "worthship," from the Anglo-saxon meaning "to ascribe supreme worth to God."

"To know God is to worship God; therefore our view of God will directly affect how we approach Him." (Henry Blackaby, Foreword to *Return to Worship*)

Implication: to worship is to actively engage in service to God based, in direct proportion, upon our esteem of His character and accomplishments.

VI. Conclusive Implications for Worship in Contemporary Culture

1. Consideration should be given to the fact that worship in its essence is active. In both the Old and New Testament as well as the descriptions of worship in heaven, sincere spiritual expression is fundamentally physical in nature.
3. Though the essence of biblical worship is active, the reality is that most Evangelicals are either ignorant of or opposed to physical expression such as bowing, dancing, kneeling, laying prostrate in worship. One of the reasons for such opposition is simply prejudice toward worship practices that are deemed to be too liturgical and/or charismatic in their expression.
4. Worship in the New Testament was focused on God's redemption of all who would believe on the name of Jesus Christ – His life of perfection, His atonement for sins, His resurrection, His ascension to the Father's right hand, His continual intercession for all the saints and His promise of eternal life to all believers.
5. Christian worship has historically been Trinitarian in its focus – ordained by the Father, for the glory of the Son, and accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.
6. Worship is a lifetime of giving to God the sacrifices He deserves. It is loving and worshiping Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. If worship is merely relegated to the confines of a particular place at a particular time performing particular religious acts it is not worship in a biblical sense. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Matthew 22:37)