

A Biblical Theology of Worship

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Introduction: A Definition of Worship

God desires to dwell with his people. Since the garden, however, we have rebelled and resisted his initiating love and presence, choosing to worship the creation rather than the Creator. The story of redemption is about God initiating a covenant relationship with his people and drawing them back to himself to be in his presence. When we worship, personally or corporately, we offer our adoration for who God is and gratitude for all he has done. *Worship is our whole life response to God's self-revelation; it remembers God's story through actions and expressions in sacred time, leads to our edification, and is formative, renewing our heart and mind.*

Worship is our whole life response to God's self-revelation. In seeking to define worship, we must begin with the reality that God is the one who initiates a relationship with us. He is the covenant-making God who made himself known to a person, a family, a nation, and ultimately, to the world. He is our triune God, who comes to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In response, we bring our whole life to him, lovingly and obediently. Block writes, "Unless the worshiper walks with God in daily life, no cultic acts will impress God positively."¹ Worship is not limited to an hour on Sunday; it is a lifestyle of love and service to God and others.

Worship remembers God's story through actions and expressions in sacred time. In the Old Testament, God's people remembered the exodus event, how the Lord brought them out of Egypt and rescued them from slavery. As Christians, we remember the Christ event - his birth, death, resurrection, and exaltation - through the weekly rhythm of the Lord's Day and the annual rhythm of the Christian Year. When we gather, we retell this story by proclaiming his Word; communing with him at the table; and by singing, praying, and affirming our faith through Scripture and creed.

¹ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 81.

Worship leads to our edification. We can speak of the “vertical” (praising and adoring God) and the “horizontal” (edifying and loving one another) dynamics of worship.² Though our primary aim is to praise God, we are edified and strengthened in the process. Thus, regarding Paul’s understanding of the gifts of the Spirit, Petersen writes, “He envisages that believers will come together for the benefit of one another, drawing on the resources of Christ for spiritual growth.”³ Borchert adds that these gifts are “not meant for our own personal satisfaction, but for the benefit of the entire Christian community.”⁴ Mutual edification needs to be a priority so that our worship is not self-centered, but expresses care and concern for others. Sharing our testimonies and ministering to one another builds up the body of Christ.

Worship is formative. Lyrics, prayers, sacraments, and gospel proclamations shape us. This dynamic is expressed in the latin phrase, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (“The law of prayer is the law of belief”). Worship informs our worldview, renews our mind, and transforms our heart through the power of the Spirit and the regular rhythms of the Lord’s Day and the Christian Year.

Methodology and Theme

I will seek to support this definition and develop a biblical theology of worship by exploring three topics. First, I will explore God’s *divine presence* as he has revealed himself

² John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1996), 8.

³ David Petersen, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 212.

⁴ Gerald L. Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), 112.

throughout redemptive history to Abraham; to Moses and the people at Sinai; in the tabernacle and in the temple; to the early followers in the person of Jesus; and to the church through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For this section, I will rely on Ross' *Recalling the Hope of Glory*,⁵ Hill's *Enter His Courts with Praise*,⁶ and Dyrness' *A Primer on Christian Worship*.⁷

Second, I will direct my focus on how we respond to God through *sacred time*. I will focus on the daily rhythm of prayer, the weekly rhythm of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, and the annual rhythm of Passover and other feasts of the Old Testament. I will also demonstrate the development of these rhythms in the church and their significance for today. For this section, my resources will include Petersens' *Engaging with God*, Webber's *Worship Old and New*⁸ and *The Complete Library of Christian Worship (Vol. 1)*.⁹

Finally, I will explore who we are becoming as followers of Christ by focusing on the nature of worship and *spiritual formation*. Dawn states, "the specific attitudes and habits of being that are created by all the elements of worship services affect how we think, speak, and act as we

⁵ Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2006).

⁶ Andrew Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise: Old Testament Worship for the New Testament Church* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993).

⁷ William A. Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Can Go* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).

⁸ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan House Publishing, 1994).

⁹ Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship, Vol. 1, The Biblical Foundations of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993).

worship in the rest of life.”¹⁰ It is vital that we evaluate our worship and ask how it is shaping our character and love for the world, heeding the writings of the prophets and how they rebuked God’s people for their hypocritical worship. My resources for this section will include the works already cited by Dawn, Ross, and Dyrness.

The theme that ties these topics together is *communion with God*. All throughout the story of redemption we find the means by which God dwells with his people. We find communion in the various encounters of his divine presence and within the various rhythms of sacred time. Ultimately, such time and presence with the Lord shapes and forms us. And there is an ultimate transformation awaiting us, as the apostle John writes, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).¹¹

Divine Presence

Throughout the Scriptures, people have encountered the divine presence of the Lord. In the beginning, God created man and woman – the pinnacle of his creation. For Webber “The picture is one of relationship. Adam and Eve in harmony with God, with each other, and with nature.”¹² God and humankind enjoyed close fellowship together in the garden. Ross writes, “Adam and Eve could enjoy God’s presence; they could walk with God, commune with God,

¹⁰ Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for This Urgent Time* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 119.

¹¹ New Revised Standard Version

¹² Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God’s Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 32.

and serve God with undiminished capacity in their garden sanctuary.”¹³ Adam and Eve enjoyed immediate access to God. After the Fall, however, they were sent out of the garden and no longer experienced the same close, intimate fellowship with the Lord. From this point in the story of redemption, people would need mediated access to God.

The new reality of mediated presence is revealed in the lives of the patriarchs, beginning with Abraham. God initiated a covenant relationship with Abraham, giving him promises and his divine presence to which Abraham responded by building an altar to the Lord (Gen. 12:7). Thus, divine presence for Abraham was in the form of a theophany, or an appearance of God, accompanied by revelation, after which Abraham responded with an act of worship. Such appearances and divine presence would also characterize the relationship between God and Abraham’s descendants, Isaac (Gen. 26:23-25) and Jacob (Gen. 28:10-22; 32:22-32). Each would encounter the Lord and respond with an act of worship – profound expressions of a covenantal relationship.

As we move from the patriarchs to Moses at the burning bush and the people of God at Mount Sinai, we find a new dynamic associated with God’s divine presence. At the burning bush, Moses takes off his sandals before the holiness of the Lord and also hides his face (Exod. 3:5-6). At Mount Sinai, the people are commanded by God to consecrate themselves so that they won’t die in the Lord’s presence (Exod. 19:12). According to Hill, “These acts of reverential awe before a holy God represent the beginnings of the idea of the fear of the Lord in Hebrew worship.”¹⁴ The fear of the Lord became a new posture for the people of God as they came to understand God’s holiness, power, and might.

¹³ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 82.

¹⁴ Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 35.

The fear of the Lord and his divine presence at Mount Sinai have been discussed in light of Calvin's doctrine of accommodation. "God accommodates, or adjusts, himself to human capacity in order to reveal himself to us."¹⁵ Because we cannot withstand the full weight of his glory, God's divine presence must accommodate our human limitations; yet, even partial disclosure evokes awe, wonder, and holy fear. Our God is both transcendent and immanent.

The doctrine of accommodation finds its greatest expression in the incarnation, God emptying himself and "being born in human likeness" (Phil. 2:7). This "Immanuel theology" is revealed in the institutions of the tabernacle and the temple as further representations of divine presence, foreshadowing the one who would "tabernacle" among his people and whose glory would be revealed to us (John 1:14). These institutions played a vital role in Israel's history.

Throughout their wilderness wanderings, the people of God erected a dwelling place for God, the tabernacle. Detailed prescriptions were given by God on how to build and furnish the tabernacle (Exod. 26:1-27:21). Feinberg describes the significance of the various elements and furnishings in this way:

The dwelling of God with humanity is the dominant theme of the symphony of the tabernacle, pointing to the future, eternal communion with God. The ark of the covenant, with the propitiatory, was the symbol of God's meeting with his people on the basis of atonement (Rom. 3:25). The shewbread spoke of God's sustenance of spiritual life; the lampstand represented Israel as God's channel of light (Zech. 4); the incense was a symbol of prayer (Rev. 5:8; 8:3-4).¹⁶

¹⁵ Michael Kibbe, "Present and Accommodated For': Calvin's God on Mount Sinai," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (2013): 115, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001941544&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁶ Charles L. Feinberg, "The Tabernacle of Moses," in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 118.

Thus, everything about the tabernacle highlighted the way in which a holy God accommodates himself to an unholy people. The elements also pointed to their future fulfillment.

Interestingly, the Exodus narrative slows down when we read about the prescriptions for the tabernacle, and “when the story of God slows down, we need to slow down” to discern what is being emphasized.¹⁷ In this context, we can discern a connection between the tabernacle and Christ. The reality of “God with us” is prefigured in this divine institution, and through it we can understand how God is drawing near to his people in a progressive manner. He is revealing his holiness and the need for sacrifice; he is providing symbols of how he will nourish and sustain his people; and he is highlighting the place of prayer and intercession. The climax is when “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exod. 40:34). God is with his people.

In time, God gave prescriptions for a more permanent dwelling, a temple that David’s son Solomon would build (2 Sam. 7:1-13). God could not be confined to a physical space, “but his people needed a place where they could find him, where others would pray with them, and where their communion with him would be most meaningful and beneficial”¹⁸ Thus, once again, God accommodated himself and dwelt among his people, manifesting his divine presence in the temple.

Though the tabernacle and the temple share much in common as a dwelling place for God, “a new theological emphasis surfaces in King Solomon’s prayer of dedication... Solomon’s dedicatory prayer reveals the temple stood as a monument to the God of Israel who heard and answered the prayers and petitions of his people (1 Kings 8:27-40, 44-54).”¹⁹ Thus, the temple

¹⁷ Andrew Hill, “Survey of the Historical Development of Worship During the Biblical Period,” (online lecture, Institute for Worship Studies, June 25, 2021).

¹⁸ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 248.

¹⁹ Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 178.

was to be a “house of prayer” (Isa. 56:7). Though God’s glory filled the temple as it did the tabernacle (2 Chron. 7:1), his presence is now further punctuated through the various praises, petitions, intercessions, and confessions of God’s people (1 Kings 8:29). These prayers were not only for the people of Israel, but also as a witness and a light to the nations around them (1 Kings 8:41-43). Jesus reminded Israel of this as he rebuked the leaders and overturned the tables in the temple, calling it, not a house of prayer, but a den of robbers (Matt. 21:13). When we reflect on sacred time, the house of prayer theme will emerge as a point of continuity and discontinuity between the early Christians and the Jews. Here, it is further evidence of divine presence.

In the New Testament, we find divine presence truly fulfilled in the person of Jesus, Immanuel, for John proclaimed, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Hill describes, “The return of the divine presence in the New Testament shifts the focus from the building, the temple, to the person, Jesus Christ.”²⁰ God’s presence is made tangible through the incarnation. Ross describes this new understanding and fulfillment in this way:

The New Testament writers saw in the sanctuary a prophetic type of access to God through Christ Jesus. When the disciples heard the things Jesus was teaching and later came to realize the significance of his death, resurrection, and exaltation, they looked back into the institutions of Israel to see how God had prepared for the full revelation in his Son. Guided by the Spirit of God, they perceived that the meaning of the tabernacle and its furniture and every act connected with them found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus the Messiah.²¹

Jesus fulfilled everything to which the tabernacle and temple pointed. At his death, the veil in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), signifying that God’s divine presence was now accessible through Christ. Thus, the author of Hebrews speaks of Jesus as the

²⁰ Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 188.

²¹ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 190.

one who ushered in a better covenant with better promises (Heb. 8:6). We no longer need to tremble for fear that we may die in God's presence. We are encouraged to come before the throne of grace with boldness (Heb. 4:10) for Jesus is our mediator, high priest, and the final sacrifice (Heb. 10:11-12). The new covenant realities invite us into divine presence with confidence; yet, there is still the admonition to acknowledge the holiness of God. Acceptable worship includes "reverence and awe, for indeed our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29).

The new covenant promises continued to be fulfilled and found new expression on the day of Pentecost. Here, we find an even more intimate form of divine presence as it is experienced within the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17) and the believer (1 Cor. 6:19-20) through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is God's intimate presence, leading us and comforting us, interceding for us "with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). In worship, the songs we sing and the words we say, "though surely important, are merely carriers or instruments that allow God through the Holy Spirit to work in believers' lives"²² This fulfills Jesus' promise to the disciples that he would send another Advocate, the Holy Spirit, who would be with them and guide them into all truth (John 14:15-17; 16:4-15). In addition, divine presence is particularly made known "in the sacrament of communion, when the Spirit lifts the believer up to be joined with Christ, who sits at the right hand of the Father."²³ Thus, Christ is *spiritually* present with believers in the Lord's Supper, a further fulfillment of the new covenant promises (Eph. 2:4-7).

Though we enjoy a closeness with God through the Holy Spirit, divine presence will, once again, take on an immediate dynamic (as in the garden) when we finally reach the new heaven and the new earth. Hill declares, "But eventually, God's divine presence will pervade the

²² Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship*, 49.

²³ Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship*, 84.

restored creation, with his very throne found among humanity (Rev. 21:1-4).²⁴ In the new heaven and the new earth there will be no temple “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22). This is the most satisfying place of divine presence, God himself.

Sacred Time

Having discussed divine presence, our biblical theology of worship will now focus on the way we commune with God through the various daily, weekly, and annual rhythms of sacred time. We will explore these rhythms as they developed in the life of Israel and in the context of the early church. These rhythms gave shape to the worship of Israel (as they celebrated the exodus event) and to the early church (as they celebrated the Christ event), providing regular remembrance of God’s saving acts on their behalf.

The daily rhythms of prayer and sacrifice were a regular part of Jewish worship in the Old Testament. During the time of the tabernacle and the temple, worshipers had the opportunity to bring sacrifices to the priest which included prayer and other ritual actions. As already mentioned, the temple was to be a house of prayer; thus, the leaders in Israel prayed in the house of the Lord each day in the morning and in the evening (1 Chron. 23:30). Prayer was also a regular part of synagogue worship, on the Sabbath and on weekdays.²⁵ Thus, the leaders and the people of Israel communed with God through a daily rhythm of prayer and sacrifice.

²⁴ Hill, *Enter His Courts with Praise*, 188.

²⁵ Grant Sperry-White, “Order of First-Century Synagogue Worship,” in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 139.

Daily prayer was also a regular part of worship for the apostles and the early believers. In the book of Acts, Luke records Peter and John going to the temple for prayer at the ninth hour (Acts 3:1).²⁶ He describes Peter going up on a roof for prayer around the sixth hour (Acts 10:9). And the coming of the Holy Spirit occurred at the third hour (Acts 2:15) as the disciples were gathered together, most likely for prayer and worship. These were all designated times for prayer in the Jewish culture. Thus, though there is “no direct evidence in the New Testament of a community-wide, daily worship... it seems that the early Christians continued the practice of prayer at particular times of the day.”²⁷ Remaining faithful to their Jewish customs, the early followers of Christ still practiced a daily rhythm of communion with God. A juxtaposition emerged, however, as prayer and proclamation in the temple ultimately divided these two sects.

The temple as a house of prayer in Luke-Acts has been discussed as way to demonstrate both the continuity and discontinuity between the Christian church and Judaism. Holmas acknowledges Luke’s emphasis on the temple as the place where the early Christians continued to pray; however, he believes that the “the depiction of the temple gives a narrative arc in which, *from a positive starting point, there develops a scenario of a somewhat tragic nature.*”²⁸ Though, for a while, the temple was a place of prayer for Christians; later, it was where they experienced arrest and opposition. The early apostles went to the temple to pray, but also to preach the

²⁶ New American Standard Bible

²⁷ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 220.

²⁸ Geir Otto Holmas, “‘My house shall be a house of prayer’: Regarding the Temple as a Place of Prayer in Acts within the Context of Luke’s Apologetical Objective,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 4 (2015): 397, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001509906&site=ehost-live>.

message of Christ. “Such a message inevitably led to the exclusion of Christians from the temple and in due course also from the synagogues.”²⁹ Thus, the daily rhythm of prayer continued in homes and house churches for the early followers. It is a vital practice for believers today.

The weekly rhythm of marking time in the Old Testament is exemplified by the observance of the Sabbath which is commanded in two places in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). Frame describes how “in Exodus, the chief reason for keeping the Sabbath is imitation of God’s creative work and rest. In Deuteronomy, it is celebration of God’s giving Israel rest from the bondage of Egypt.”³⁰ Thus, Exodus highlights creation; Deuteronomy highlights redemption. The idea of rest, however, is associated with both passages. For the people of Israel, the Sabbath was a God-ordained rhythm: one day in seven to cease from all labor and to renew and restore their whole selves, physically and spiritually.³¹ Thus, the Sabbath was created, not as a burden, but as an opportunity for weekly rest, worship, and communion with God (Mark 2:27).

For a period of time, the early followers of Christ observed both the Sabbath (e.g., Acts 17:1-2) and the Resurrection. Eventually, because of the discontinuities mentioned above, they only observed the Resurrection, what became known as the “Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10). The resurrection of Christ was a foundational part of the early faith (1 Cor. 15:3-4), and because of its significance, it still marks the weekly rhythm of worship for the church today.

²⁹ Petersen, *Engaging with God*, 139.

³⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 514.

³¹ Hobart E. Freeman, “Sabbath and Sabbatical Seasons,” in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 186.

The annual rhythm of sacred time in the Old Testament is marked by three major festivals and pilgrimages that the Israelites observed throughout the year: Passover (Exod. 12:43-49), Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-22), and Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-36). Passover commemorated their freedom from slavery and bondage in Egypt. Pentecost derives its name from the fact that it is celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover (Lev. 23:16). The Feast of Tabernacles was the third pilgrimage feast of the Jewish calendar in which the Israelites lived in booths over a seven-day period, remembering their wilderness wanderings when their ancestors lived in temporary shelters. The feast of Tabernacles was a joyous occasion and a highlight of the year.³²

In these celebrations, the people of God remembered and recalled the saving acts of God, and thus, “The reenactment of these historic events sanctified the present moment, gathering it up in the eternal meaning of the event that represented the presence of the transcendent and eternal God in time.”³³ The annual rhythm of worship allowed Israel to commune with God in a tangible way, making each feast significant for their past, present, and future.

For Christians, the annual calendar and rhythm of sacred time would not develop until the second and third centuries; however, some scholars believe that Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 point to “an annual celebration of the Resurrection” among the early Christians.³⁴ Paul writes, “For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival”

³² Hobart E. Freeman, “Feast of Tabernacles,” in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 189-190.

³³ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 218

³⁴ Richard C. Leonard, “Easter (Pascha) to Pentecost,” in *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations of Worship*, ed. Robert E. Webber (Nashville: Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 205.

(1 Cor. 5:7-8).³⁵ Thus, an annual celebration around the Resurrection may have occurred within the first century among the first followers of Christ. For the church, Christ has become the fulfillment of the Jewish festivals. Passover is fulfilled in the cross (Good Friday) and the resurrection (Easter), and Pentecost now remembers his sending of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, his birth, death, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Spirit, and future return are all celebrated throughout the Christian Year as a way of marking time and remembering God's story.

Spiritual Formation

The final topic in the development of a biblical theology of worship is spiritual formation. When God's people enjoy the divine presence of the Lord through the regular rhythms of sacred time, we are transformed in the process. Castleman writes, "When God is glorified through worship that is pleasing and acceptable to him, God's people...become who they were always meant to be: truly human, people who bear the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26)."³⁶ The worship of God shapes, sanctifies, and forms us over time.

For this reason, we must ensure that we are not endorsing worship that is shaping our people in an unacceptable manner. Dawn writes, "To form character, the means much match the ends...That is why it is so essential to plan worship well, for we must be concerned with how every action in the process of the faith journey affects the development of our character."³⁷ Thus,

³⁵ New Revised Standard Version

³⁶ Robbie F. Castleman, *Story Shaped Worship: Following Patterns from the Bible and History* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 114.

³⁷ Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, 117.

our biblical theology of worship must give attention to how we are being formed into the image of Christ through the elements of worship as they are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Over and over, the prophets rebuked the hypocritical and unacceptable worship of Israel. Amos declared, “Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:23-24). Going through the motions of worship without a heart for the poor and the oppressed should lead us to repentance. Ross describes such hypocrisy in this way:

But as long as the poor and the needy, the widows and the orphans, or the foreigners in the land are abandoned, as long as religion serves to secure the comfortable lifestyle we desire, as long as money, power, and lust continue as the gods we serve, then there can be no hope that God is pleased with our worship, no matter how well we sing or how much we give. Worship must transform us into the image of Jesus Christ.³⁸

Acceptable worship is not hypocritical, but embodies God’s love for the world. Dyrness writes, “At the heart of the polity of worship is the claim that despite differences, prejudice, and suspicions, we can be reconciled not only to God but also with each other.”³⁹ Thus, genuine worship should lead to lives that bring reconciliation and restoration to the brokenness of this world. Love, service, and care for others are sacrifices that are “pleasing to God” (Heb. 13:16).

As Christians, we worship in the divine presence of our Father who initiates a covenant relationship with us; with Jesus, the mediator of our worship; and with the Spirit, who fills us and empowers us. We respond to God’s invitation through rhythms of sacred time, rooted in the practices of our spiritual ancestors and fulfilled in Christ under the new covenant. And as we commune with our triune God we are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18) through the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God.

³⁸ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 340-341.

³⁹ Dyrness, *A Primer on Christian Worship*, 127.

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