

1 The restoration of Biblical worship

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(1) The foundation of all worship

The chief goal of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him. So says the Westminster Confession, one of the great Christian confessions of faith, written four hundred years ago but still relevant today. One of the chief ways we glorify God is to worship Him. If that is the case, worship must become a much greater priority in our lives, and we must understand more about it than we have done in the past. One of the sad things about worship is the way believers argue over forms of worship without really understanding what worship is. If we understood worship more deeply, we would argue about it much less.

What is worship? As good a place as any to start answering this question is in Romans 12:1. Note that in the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul has laid out the entirety of the Gospel – all that God has done for us in Christ. Romans 12:1 is a kind of hinge on which the whole letter turns from a description of what God has done to a consideration of what we must do in return. And the very first and most critical thing is worship. Worship is presented here as the offering up of our lives to God: “*Present yourselves a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God, which is your reasonable [properly understood] service of worship*” (Rom. 12:1). Though Paul says literally, “*present your bodies*”, the sense is the same as in Eph. 1:28, where husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, for “*he who loves his wife loves himself.*” To present your body is to present yourself, not just your physical body. The picture of a body being presented is used to illustrate the comparison Paul is making between a human and an animal sacrifice. When we present ourselves to God, we present our lives in their entirety, not just in the physical dimension. This sacrifice, which must occur by our own decision (“*present yourselves*”) causes us to pass out of our own ownership and into the ownership of God. Henceforth we belong to Him. If we have not understood that, we have not made the sacrifice. We can talk of giving up many things, but the only thing that really matters is the giving up of our independence. Many believers refuse to give up their independence, but think they can buy God off by supposedly surrendering less things. But if you haven’t given up your independence, you haven’t really given up anything.

This sacrifice is to be three different things, “*living, holy and pleasing to God.*” These three adjectives all follow the noun, and each describes a different but essential aspect of the sacrifice. “*Living*” translates a form of the Greek word *zoe*. This word is used in the Bible to refer to life not just in its basic aspect (to be alive as opposed to being dead), but to the special new life that is given to us in Christ. It is used in Rom. 6:4 (“*that we may walk in newness of life*”) and 8:13, (“*if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*”) where Paul speaks of the new “*life*” (*zoe*) that Christ has given us. The meaning is that the sacrifice is offered as an expression of our new life in Christ, a life which is to be continually offered back to God as a sacrifice to Him. God has given us the incredible gift of a new life, a life the world does not have, but as soon as we receive it, we are to place it constantly at His disposal. Second, the sacrifice is to be “*holy*”. “*Holy*” means belonging to God. We acknowledge that our new life does not belong to us and that we do not have the right to live it as we want, but that it

belongs to God and must be offered back to Him to do with as He wishes. If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. Salvation is not fire insurance. To believe that accepting Christ without placing our lives under His lordship will gain us entry into heaven is a dangerous delusion. Those who are truly saved will show it by their changed lives. As Jesus pointed out, *“By their fruits you shall know them”* (Matt. 7:16). Every part of our lives must come under Christ’s direction, and all rights to independence must be given up. We were independent or free agents when we were sinners, and what did we gain from that, Paul asks (Rom.6:21)? The answer comes back: nothing but eternal death. The truth, as he also explains in that passage, is that we are never truly free agents: either we are slaves of sin or we are slaves of Christ. Which is preferable? The independence we think we have is a delusion: in reality, it is only freedom to live in sin and to suffer the consequences, both in this life and in the life to come. Finally, the sacrifice is to be *“pleasing to God.”* God will never accept defective sacrifices: *“When you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?”* (Mal. 1:8). A true sacrifice, one in which nothing is withheld and the best of what we are is presented to God, will always be accepted.

But why is the presenting of our lives described as worship, and what light does this shed on what we usually call worship? The answer is found in the last phrase of the verse, *“which is your reasonable [properly understood] worship.”* The Greek word *logikos* here can mean rational or reasonable, but Paul uses it not to suggest that worship is rational in the sense of our word “logical”, but rather than it is reasonable and true in that it expresses and is consistent with a proper understanding of the Gospel. The laying down of our lives is worship as God truly understands it. If the outward expression of worship is the honouring of God with our lips, our voices and our bodies, then the foundation of worship is the honouring of God in the complete submission and sacrifice of our lives and our hearts. When we have reached the point of being willing to serve Christ no matter what the cost, we have come to the true meaning of worship. Whatever else worship is when we come together to praise the Lord with prayer, singing and gifts of the Spirit, it amounts to nothing more than religious exercises unless it is accompanied by the laying down of our lives. The laying down of our lives lays the essential foundation for the rest of our worship. That is what Jesus meant when He condemned those who called Him “Lord” but did not do what He said (Matt. 7:21-23). We can come before God with all sorts of religious motions, but unless we are doing more than singing songs or saying prayers, our worship is meaningless. Matt Redman wrote a famous song about going back to the “heart of worship”. The heart of worship, when worship is properly understood, is the willingness to offer up our lives as a sacrifice to God.

It is interesting that of the various words he could have used for worship, the word Paul uses here (Greek *latreia*) is one reserved particularly for the sacrificial system and temple worship. He is making the point that there is an unbreakable link between what we do by way of worship when the church gathers, and the daily laying down of our lives in obedience to Christ. That daily sacrifice might as well be considered part of our saying of prayers and singing of songs to God. Sometimes we argue over what is the best or most acceptable form of worship. What kind of music should or should not be used? Should we incorporate prayers or the gifts of the Spirit? Should there be more freedom or more traditionalism? If we are honest, we will have to admit that these arguments are usually rooted in our personal tastes and preferences rather than the Word of God. Yet even if we come up with all the Biblically correct answers to these questions,

even if we can say we enjoy the freedom of the Spirit to praise and worship God accompanied by gifts and anointed music and supernatural manifestations, if we are not living out our worship in our lives the rest of the time, not in the songs we sing but in the lives we live, then we have not properly understood worship at all!

(2) What is worship?

Worship begins with God. Worship does not originate with us, any more than faith originates with us. Worship, like faith, is a gift from God. We can only believe in God and enter into relationship with Him because God gives us the ability to do so. In the same way, we can only worship God because God gives us that ability also. This may seem strange, but think about it. We live our own lives – no one else does that for us. Yet where does our life come from? Life itself is a gift from God, even though it is we who must live it to His glory. Faith is a gift from God, which enables us to do things otherwise impossible for us to do, and we must exercise it to His glory. Worship is a gift from God, which takes us into the very presence of God and transforms us, and we must enter into it to His glory. What a tragedy if this gift of worship were set aside, wasted or lost!

Worship is a form of communication. It is the expression of our praise and our thanksgiving to God for who He is and what He has done for us. God would deserve our worship even if He had not sent His Son to die for us, simply because He is our Creator. But how much more should we worship Him because of the great love and mercy He has shown us! Worship is a transaction between our spirit and God, made possible by the presence of God the Holy Spirit dwelling within us. God Himself makes it possible for us to worship Him by giving us His Spirit. Yet worship is still a choice. If we allow worship to be dictated by our emotions or our circumstances, it will quickly wither away into an occasional gust of thanks during moments where we are feeling good. True worship, however, is modelled by Job. After losing his sons and daughters and all his possessions, he fell on his face and cried out, *“The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord”* (Job 1:21). If worship is a transaction between our spirit and God, in which the Holy Spirit enables us to offer our praise to God, then worship must grow out of our fellowship or relationship with God. If we do not know God personally, we cannot truly worship Him. That is what Jesus meant when He said, *“An hour is coming and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”* (John 5:23-24).

Throughout the Bible, worship is connected with the presence of God. And where God is present, He communicates with us. Our response to God’s presence and His communication to us is worship. Worship can be personal or corporate. In it we use different means of expressing to God our love, gratefulness and submission to Him. We all understand that music is an expression of worship. So also is prayer, whether in a corporate or individual setting. As we sing or as we pray, we acknowledge who God is and what He has done for us. We respond to His presence in our lives and to the message He communicates to us in His Word.

(3) The temple of the Garden

In the Garden, both the presence of God and the communication of God to Adam and Eve was perfect. Every time they met Him and responded to Him, they were worshipping Him. Worship was a perfectly natural and normal part of their lives. They did not think of it as a religious exercise, as some ritual performed on certain special occasions when people dress up in special clothes, use unusual words and behave a bit strangely. In the temple of the Garden, God's presence was freely accessible freely by man. When man fell, this perfect worship was lost. Men were alienated, cut off from the presence of God. Yet God is gracious, and He continued to reveal Himself to people. Throughout the Bible, God's purpose is restoration. This includes worship. God's purpose has always been to restore worship to what it had been in the Garden, a place where we respond to the presence and communication of God, and our response is our worship.

(4) The patriarchs

When God appeared first to Abraham and spoke with him, Abraham responded by building an altar so that he could worship God (Gen. 12:7). Then later he built a second altar, the purpose of which was so he could "*call upon the name of the Lord*" (Gen. 12:8). First came God's presence, and with it God's communication, then came worship – Abraham's response to God. God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream which was all about His presence with Jacob. A ladder stretched from earth to heaven, with the angels of God ascending and descending on it. In the midst of this, God communicated with Jacob concerning His promises to him and his descendants. When Jacob awoke, he built an altar and called the name of the place Bethel, ("house of God" in Hebrew) because "*this is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven*" (Gen. 28:17). And at that place – the place of God's presence and His revelation to Jacob – Jacob worshipped God.

(5) The tabernacle of Moses

In the same way, God came to Moses in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2). First came His presence, then came His communication to Moses, then came Moses' response. As God keeps on appearing to Moses and communicating with Him first in the desert, then back in Egypt and finally as he leads the people out of slavery, we realize that Moses is a prototype of restoration, a model of what God wants to do in restoring His presence and restoring worship to His people.

Moses had a revelation of worship. The first words he spoke to Pharaoh were: "*Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go that they may celebrate a feast to me in the desert'*" (Exod. 5:1). And before the plague on the Nile, "*Let my people go, that they may worship me in the wilderness*" (7:16). And before the plague of frogs, "*Thus says the Lord, 'Let my people go, that they may worship Me.'*" (Exod. 8:1). And before the plague on the livestock, "*Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'Let my people go, that they may worship me'*" (9:1). And before the plague of hail, "*'Let my people go, that they may worship me'*" (9:13). And before the plague of locusts, "*Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let me people go, that they may worship me'*" (10:3). The deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt was all about the restoration of worship.

Moses knew how to worship the Lord. God Himself spoke these words about him: *“If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, shall make myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my household; with him I speak face to face, even openly, and not in hidden sayings, and he beholds the form of the Lord”* (Num. 12:6-8). Through Moses, the most significant step in the restoration of worship thus far in the Bible occurred. God chose to allow His presence to dwell in a particular place – the Ark. The Ark was located in the tabernacle. According to Hebrews 5:6, the tabernacle was a model of what already existed in heaven. The tabernacle in heaven represents the ultimate restoration of worship. Moses’ tabernacle, as a model of this heavenly reality, was thus a significant step in the process of restoration. The tabernacle was itself divided into two parts. The Holy of Holies contained the Ark, and into this area only the High Priest could enter, and that only once a year. If his worship were accepted, the peoples’ sins would be passed over for another year. The next area, the Holy Place, contained the altar of incense, the table for the bread of the presence, and the menorah or seven-branched lampstand. Into this area only the priests (the descendants of Aaron) could enter, though they did so on a daily basis. The tabernacle stood in the midst of the courtyard, which contained the altar of burnt offering and the brass washstand or laver for the priests to wash in before they entered the Holy Place. The Levites could enter into this area as they assisted the priests, so long as they did not approach the altar (Num. 18:3). The tabernacle was to become the centre of worship, the place where God would manifest His presence and communicate with His people, and they in turn would worship Him, though only from afar. We often wonder why God gave so many detailed instructions to Moses regarding the construction and operation of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-31, 35-40), but the reason was that it was the place of God’s presence. When God comes, we have to know how He wants us to receive Him. If a visiting dignitary comes to another country, great care is taken in welcoming them and in the proper behaviour of those greeting them. Yet sometimes we treat the presence of God in a casual manner.

The Ark, containing the law and Aaron’s staff of authority, held both the revelation of God to His people and the symbol of God’s authority. The law and the staff represent the Word of God and the power of God. Truth and power, or the Word and the Spirit, are meant to work together to accomplish God’s purposes. Both are instruments or channels by which the presence of God is manifest or real in our lives and in the world. The cherubim over the ark represented the angels placed at the entrance to the garden, guarding access to the presence of God. The Ark thus held both a negative and a positive significance. As far as God’s presence was concerned, it looked back to the Garden and reminded the people that the entrance to God’s presence was still restricted. Yet it held forth the hope and promise of the forgiveness of sins through the yearly service of the High Priest. It also showed that through His law (the two tablets) God was re-establishing communication with His people, and that He was beginning to restore His authority to them (Aaron’s staff). In the tabernacle of Moses, the temple of the Garden was reproduced, but only in an extremely limited fashion. The Ark was like the Garden in miniature. It contained the presence of God, it contained God’s communication to men, and it contained the authority He had given them – all things Adam and Eve had enjoyed. Yet it was also guarded by the angels put in place to ensure that, until the curse was lifted, no man would again have direct access to the presence of God.

From the moment the tabernacle was completed, it was attended constantly by the presence of God: *“And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel”* (Exod. 40:35-38 see also Num. 9:15-23)

(6) Spiritual decline and the loss of God’s presence

When the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, the tabernacle came with them. It was pitched first at Gilgal, near Jericho, where the Israelites stayed for some time (Josh. 4:19, 5:10, 9:6, 10:6), and later, though still in Joshua’s lifetime (Josh. 18:1), it was moved to Shiloh, about twenty miles away in the hill country, a place centrally located for the men to attend the three yearly festivals and not liable to easy enemy attack. Here it stayed through the time of the Judges up till the time of Eli, by which point it had acquired enough permanent fixtures to be referred to twice as a “temple” (1 Sam. 1:9, 3:3). Yet, as Judges bears witness, the level of faithfulness to the Lord had declined greatly during this period, to the point where Eli’s sons despised the sacrifices, ate what did not belong to them, and even had immoral relationships with women right within its walls (1 Samuel 2). Imagine what would have happened to such men in the days of Moses! Having lost the reality of God’s presence, the Israelites thought that the Ark itself, like some pagan idol, held special powers, and hence came their deluded belief that the presence of the Ark could defeat the Philistines (1 Samuel 4), even though the people themselves had fallen away from the Lord. God did not rescue them, yet still He upheld His holiness by causing the sons of Eli to be slain and by inflicting judgment on the Philistines who captured the Ark (1 Samuel 5-6). The Ark, restored by the Philistines, remained at Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam. 7:1-2) and became disconnected from the tabernacle. Shiloh was destroyed (Ps. 78:60, Jer. 7:12), and the next time we hear of the tabernacle it is at Nob (1 Samuel 1:21), where David fled to ask for bread from the high priest Ahimilech, subsequently murdered along with his entire family by Saul. The tabernacle was then removed, presumably by Saul, to Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39), the place of his ancestral home, where the altar continued in use until the time of Solomon, at which time the tabernacle was dismantled and its contents brought to the new temple (1 Kings 8:4). Nowhere do we hear of the presence or power of God being manifest to His people during all this time.

(7) The tabernacle of David

David realized how precious the presence of God was. Something in his heart yearned for the restoration of what Israel had known under Moses, and what God had surely intended to be the norm for His people. David decided to bring the Ark up from Kiriath-jearim to a place of honour in his new capital of Jerusalem. David’s heart for God released a new sense of God’s presence, yet this did not come without cost. David had forgotten how carefully Moses had passed on the Lord’s command concerning the moving of the Ark. Only the one division of the Levites (the sons of Kohath) were to transport it, and no man’s hand was to touch it (Num. 4:4-15). Instead, the Ark was placed on a cart and, on the way, one of the men guarding it stretched

out his hand to steady it and was immediately struck down for failing to honour God's command (2 Sam. 6:7). For three months David left the ark at the home of Obed-edom. When he saw that the Lord blessed that household, he decided to make a second try at moving the Ark to Jerusalem. This time everything was done with great care – only the Levites were to carry the Ark, and they were to carry it as Moses had ordered (1 Chron. 15:2-15). There was also tremendous celebration – shouting, dancing, singing and the playing of many instruments (1 Chron. 15:16-24). David himself worshipped with such energy and intensity that his unspiritual wife Michal despised him and came under God's judgment for doing so (1 Chron. 15:27-29, 2 Sam. 6:20-23). Finally, David placed the Ark inside a tent he had pitched for it (1 Chron. 16:1). He appointed Levites, in line with the command of the law, "*as ministers before the ark of Lord, even to celebrate and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel*" (1 Chron. 16:4). He appointed Asaph the Levite and his family as worship leaders in the tabernacle and to carry on this joyous form of worship continually, both in singing and with instruments (1 Chron. 16:7, 37), while leaving Zadok the priest and his relatives to continue the offering of sacrifices at the tabernacle in Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:39-41), though even there also David appointed others to praise and worship the Lord with singing and instruments (verses 41-42). At a later date (1 Chron. 25:1-7), David appointed the sons of Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman to prophesy, give thanks and sing before the Lord's presence in Jerusalem. Significantly, these three men had twenty-four sons in all, the same number as there are of elders who lead worship in heaven (Rev. 5:8). The total number of those under the leadership of the twenty-four was two hundred and eight-eight (1 Chron. 25:7), representing twelve people under the leadership of each man, twelve being the Biblical number of government. This reminds us that worship is more than just our expression of praise to God. It is an important part of the exercise of God's government and authority on earth, for through it His presence becomes manifest in our midst and His power begins to operate.

The interesting thing about David's tabernacle is that people were apparently able to worship before the Ark. There is no record of a Holy of Holies into which the high priest alone could enter, as was the case with the tabernacle of Moses and as would again be the case in Solomon's temple. Rather, it says simply that the Levites (not the priests) "*ministered before the Ark of the Lord*" (1 Chron. 16:4). And although offerings were made when the Ark was brought into Jerusalem, there is no further record of sacrifices being offered at that location. But we know a lot more about what went on at the tabernacle of David, for many of the songs of worship were written by David, by Asaph or by Asaph's family members, and are recorded for us in the Book of Psalms. Although we no longer have the musical accompaniment, we have the substance of the words, and these are words which have been put to music again and again over the ages, as if God, knowing what is permanent (the words He gave) and what is transitory or temporary (the musical form), had anointed the words forever but left the music to change from age to age and nation to nation, so that the power and meaning of the words could be applied in a relevant and meaningful way to every nation and culture. What this means for us is that the music is never to be put on a level with the words. And where do we argue most over worship? About the music! Why? Because we are trying to make what is transitory permanent, what is relative absolute. If we learned the difference and accommodated one another in love, seeking instead to find the most relevant musical vehicle to reach the culture and generation we are seeking to reach, and concentrated instead on making sure there is real Biblical substance in the words we are singing, there would be a lot less discord and much more harmony, both in the Spirit and in the music.

(8) The Psalms: worship in the tabernacle of David

The Psalms, therefore, are a record of worship in David's tabernacle. Seventy-three of the one hundred and fifty are ascribed to David, twelve to Asaph, and twelve to the sons of Korah, who must have been another worship leader. Not all of them are from David's time – two, for instance, are ascribed to Solomon, and others come from a later date. But the majority of the Psalms were composed at the time of David's tabernacle and were written for use in its worship. Apart from telling us a lot about the God we worship, they also tell us a lot about how to worship Him. Dave Fellingham, in his book on worship (*To the Praise of His Glory*) gives this list of all the things the Psalms exhort us to do. How many of the actions in this list are regularly expressed as part of our worship (whether corporate or personal)?

Bless the Lord
Praise the Lord
Sing to the Lord
Clap your hands
Lift up your hands
Bow down
Worship
Give thanks

Magnify His Name
Shout to God
Shout joyfully with psalms

Dance
Kneel
Praise the Lord with instruments

So far, we have used the word “worship” as a kind of umbrella concept to express our total heart response to God. From a Biblical point of view, however, we can break this down into the two concepts of worship and praise. Taken together, they constitute the fulness of our worship of God. The Biblical words for worship express the aspect of reverence, fear and service to God, whereas the words for praise express the aspect of thanksgiving and rejoicing in God. When we look at the words for praise and worship in the Old Testament generally and in the Psalms specifically, an interesting pattern emerges. The two main words in the Old Testament for “worship” are *chawah* and *abad*. These words are translated in the NIV as “worship” or “bow down” (in the sense of “worship”). *Chawah* has the root meaning of “prostrate oneself” and *abad* has the root meaning of “serve”. A third word, *cara*, with the root meaning of “fear”, also occurs. You will find “worship” and related words (e.g “worshipped”) approximately 180 times in the NIV, and “bow down” and related words approximately 100 times. But of all these occurrences, “worship” (in relation to God, as opposed, for instance, to idols) appears only eleven times in the Psalms, and “bow down” (in relation to God) appears only five times. In the alms (NIV), “worship” usually translates the Hebrew word *chawah*: “*Worship the Lord in the*

splendour of His holiness” (Psalm 29:2), but twice translates *abad*: “*Worship the Lord with gladness*” (Psalm 100:2). “Bow down” translates *chawah*: “*In reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple*” (Psalm 5:7), and *cara*: “*Come, let us bow down in worship*” (Psalm 95:6).

But in the Psalms, representing the worship at the tabernacle of David, something drastically different appears when we look at the dimension of praise. Whereas there are three Hebrew words related to worship, which together occur sixteen times in the Psalms, there is a long list of words related to praise, which, taken together, occur over five hundred times! Here they are:

Praise (about 220 times)

The word “praise” appears about 250 times in the NIV Old Testament, and 220 of these are in the Psalms. There are three main words expressing the idea of praise:

halal. This word means to be acclaim God, to glory in Him, and to be sincerely and deeply thankful for who God is: “*O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good*” (Ps. 106:1), or for what He has done “*Let heaven and earth praise Him... for God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah*” (Ps. 69:34-35). This praise had content to it – it was specific in identifying the reasons for praising God. We also should be specific in our reasons for praising God. When we compliment another person and give a specific reason for our praise, it means more than simply making a pleasant but vague generalization about how nice they are. Why should it be different with God? Most often, the verb is used in the imperative sense – that is, where believers are commanded to praise God. Praise is not an option for the believer. Confronted with the wonder of who God is and what He has done, how can we not praise Him? That is why Jesus said if His followers failed to praise Him, even the stones would cry out (Luke 19:40). Almost all of the occurrences of the word are in the plural, indicating it is the congregation as a whole which is being commanded to give praise. When we gather together, it is not just the elders or worship leaders who are to praise God, it is all God’s people. We are all priests, gathered together to make a sacrifice of praise to our great and mighty God! This word also appears in its noun form *tehillah*, which is likewise used in relation to who God is: “*You are holy, who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel*” (Ps. 22:3), and to what He has done: “*Tell the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done*” (Ps. 78:4).

yadah. The root meaning of this word is to acknowledge or confess. When used in relation to God, it means to acknowledge or confess the character and deeds of God. When used in relation to man, it means to acknowledge or confess the sins of man. Whereas *halal* means to boast of, to acclaim or to glory in, *yadah* means to declare and recognize something or someone, whether good or bad. To recognize God’s glory is also to acknowledge and confess man’s sin. Recognizing one means recognizing the other. The high priest “confessed” the sin of Israel (Lev. 16:21), and Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah made great “confessions” of the nation’s sin (Dan. 9:4, 20, Ezra 10:1, Neh. 9:2-3). But when applied to God, it means to confess and express in public proclamation the attributes of God and the works of God. The best translation is to “confess in thanksgiving”, for the person confesses the attributes and deeds of God and thus praises Him (Ps. 105:1). It is used together with *halal*, for praise to God should naturally be followed by a

thankful confession of who God is or what He has done: *"Praise (halal) the Lord! Oh give thanks (yadah) to the Lord, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting"* (Psalm 106:1). It is used both corporately (106:47) and individually (28:7, 109:30).

barak. The root meaning of this word is the giving of life, prosperity and success by one who is greater to one who is less, and hence is translated as "bless". Where it is used of man blessing or praising God, the meaning is not that man is greater than God, but that, as those who have received the blessing of God, we are returning this blessing to God in praise. In doing so, we acknowledge that He is the Giver and source of all blessing and of all that is good. The One who dwells in blessing can thus be described as "blessed". Again, God is blessed for who He is: *"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting"* (Ps. 106:48). And God is blessed for what He has done: *"Blessed be the Lord, for He showed His marvellous kindness to me when I was in a besieged city"* (Ps.31:21). The word is frequently used for praising God for His mercy and faithfulness.

Sing/sing praise/song or psalm of praise (about 175 times)

In addition to the various words for "praise" in the Psalms, the verbs "sing", "sing praise", and the nouns "song" or "psalm" (meaning a song or psalm of praise to God) appear about a further 175 times. By comparison, these words in total appear only about fifty times in the whole of the rest of the Old Testament. They represent the following Hebrew words:

zamar. The root meaning of this word is to sing praise, whether by voice alone or accompanied by instrument: *"I will sing praise to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being"* (Psalm 104:33, also 146:2). This kind of praise in song rises to the Lord for who He is: *"I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise"* (Ps. 101:1); and for what He has done: *"Sing to Him, sing praise to Him, tell of all His wonderful acts"* (Ps. 105:2). This word is often linked with the use of instruments: *"I will praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God"* (Ps. 71:22); *"Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to Him with the ten-stringed lyre"* (Ps. 33:2); *"Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre"* (Ps. 98:5); *"Let them sing praises to the Lord with tambourine and lyre"* (Ps. 149:3). The related noun *mizmor*, meaning "song of praise" or "psalm", appears at the top of no fewer than 57 Psalms.

shir. Like *zamar*, *shir* means to sing, and often occurs in parallel with *zamar*. *"We will sing (shir) and praise (zamar) your power"* (Ps. 21:13). In its noun form, *shir* appears at the head of about thirty Psalms, indicating they are songs of praise, and is used almost sixty times in total. It is hard to tell the difference between a *mizmor* and a *shir*, both meaning songs of praise, but the Jews felt that a *mizmor* was a psalm accompanied by an instrument, whereas a *shir* was a psalm sung by voice alone. In Psalm 96:1-2, it is used three times in rapid succession; *"Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth; sing to the Lord, praise (barak) His name."* The song of praise thanks God for who He is: *"I will sing of the love of the Lord forever"* (Ps. 89:1); and for what He has done: *"I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me"* (Ps. 13:6); *"Sing (shir) to Him, sing praise (zamar) to Him, tell of all His wonderful acts"* (Ps. 105:2).

Rejoice (about 40 times)

The word “rejoice” appears about forty times in Psalms, always in connection with the work of the Lord. There are four words for “rejoice”:

samach. This is the most frequently-used word for “rejoice” in the Psalms, and means to be glad or joyful. The greatest reason for joy in the Bible is God and His salvation: “*Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in His salvation*” (Ps. 35:9); “*Let the righteous rejoice in the Lord*” (Ps. 64:10). Rejoicing in the Lord is frequently associated with singing and praising Him: “*Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*” (Ps. 32:11); “*Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous, and praise His holy name*” (Ps. 97:12).

gil. This word simply means “rejoice”: “*They rejoice in your name all day long*” (Psalm 89:16).

sush. A third word for rejoice: “*May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you*” (Psalm 40:16).

alatz. This word refers to a rejoicing or exultation which is an emotional response occasioned by the Lord: “*Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you*” (Psalm 5:11); “*I will be glad and rejoice in you*” (Psalm 9:2).

Give thanks/ thanksgiving (about 30 times)

One of the words for praise, *yadah*, is also translated about twenty-five times as “give thanks”. The Psalmist gives thanks to the Lord for who He is: “*Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good*” (Psalm 118:1); and for what He has done: “*I will give you thanks, for you answered me*” (Psalm 118:21). The related noun *todah*, “thanksgiving”, also appears five times: “*Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise (tehillah, from halal)*” (Psalm 100:4).

Exalt (21 times)

The Hebrew word is *rum*, meaning to “lift high through praise”: “*Exalt the Lord our God and worship (chawah) at His holy mountain, for the Lord our God is holy*” (Psalm 99:5); “*The Lord lives! Praise be (barak) to my Rock! Exalted be God my Saviour!*” (Psalm 18:46)

Shout/shout joyfully/a shout (14 times)

Words for “shout” or “shout joyfully” are used fourteen times in the Psalms:

rua. This word means to “raise a shout with music”, the shout being a shout of joy or victory of God or His people. Elsewhere in the Bible it is used in connection with the sounding of the shofar or horn (Num. 10:7, Josh 6:5), which also occurs in Psalm 98:4-6: “*Shout for joy to the Lord...make music (zamar) with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn (shofar) – shout for joy before the Lord, the King.*” It is interesting that the related noun *teruah* (“a shout”) is used in connection with the Ark: “*When the ark of the Lord’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook*” (1 Sam. 4:5). It is particularly significant, in connection with the tabernacle of David, that the word is used when David brought the Ark to Jerusalem: “*So all Israel brought up the ark of the*

covenant of the Lord with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps" (1 Chron. 15:28).

ranan. This word means a shout of jubilation to God, to give a ringing cry. Where it appears in the Psalms, it indicates a jubilant outburst "*Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth*" (Psalm 98:4). The fact that the shout is musical in nature, or mixed with music, is shown by the parallel use of *ranan* and *zamar* in Psalm 71:23: "*My lips will shout for joy (ranan) when I sing praises (zamar) to you.*" It is sometimes translated as "sing for joy" or the like, but more accurately represents a shout, perhaps in the midst of singing. The related noun is *rinnah*: "*And He brought out His people with joy, His chosen ones with joyful shouts*" (Psalm 105:43); "*The sound of joyful shouts and salvation is in the tents of the righteous*" (Psalm 118:15).

Magnify (twice)

gadal. The meaning of the word is to "consider great" or "ascribe greatness to". It is used twice of God in the Psalms: "*Magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together*" (Psalm 34:3).

Other words

"Lift up your hands" occurs four times.

"Clap your hands" (of people) occurs once.

"Dance/dancing" occurs three times.

"Kneel" occurs once.

Joining the words together

Hebrew is a language with a very small vocabulary, by comparison with English. Yet it has so many words to express praise to God. Often these words are combined, as if the Psalmist wanted to create a symphony of praise with his words:

Psalm 9:1-2: "*I will praise you (yadah) O Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad (samach) and rejoice (alatz) in you; I will sing praise (sush) to your name, O Most High.*"

Psalm 33:1-3: "*Shout joyfully (ranan) to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise (shir) Him. Praise (yadah) the Lord with the harp; make music (zamar) to Him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing (shir) to Him a new song; play skilfully, and shout for joy (rua).*"

Psalm 68:3: "*But may the righteous be glad (samach) and rejoice (alatz) before God; let them rejoice (sush) with gladness (samach).*"

Psalm 98:1, 4-8 : "*O sing (shir) to the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things. Shout joyfully (rua) to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth and shout for joy (ranan) and sing praises (zamar). Sing praises (zamar) to the Lord with the lyre; with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn shout joyfully (rua) before the King, the Lord. Let the sea roar (rua) and all it contains, the world and all those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands; let the mountains shout together for joy (ranan).*"

Psalm 100:1-4: "*Shout joyfully (rua) to the Lord, all the earth. Worship (abad) the Lord with gladness (samach). Come before Him with joyful shouting (ranan)... Enter His gates with*

thanksgiving (todah) and His courts with praise (tehillah). Give thanks (yadah) to Him and bless (barak) His name.”

The use of instruments

The worship at the tabernacle of David was accompanied by a great many instruments. Here are some of the references: the ten-stringed lyre (33:2), the harp (71:22), the lyre (98:5), the trumpet (98:6), the ram’s horn or shofar (98:6), the strings (150:4), the flute (150:4) and the cymbals (150:5).

Enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

In Psalm 22:3, David makes an amazing statement: *“Yet you are holy, you who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel”* (Psalm 22:3). What does it mean that God is enthroned on our praises? The verb translated “enthroned” is the Hebrew word *yashab*, the root meaning of which is to sit. However, it is often used in the sense of a king who sits on his throne or who sits in judgment, and hence can mean to “be enthroned”, and it certainly means this when God is the subject of the verb. The word “praises” is the Hebrew *tehillah* (plural of *tehillah*), derived from the verb *halal*, as we saw above. The praises the Psalmist is referring to are the declarations, songs and shouts of praise and thanksgiving to God occurring during the worship at David’s tabernacle. A similar phrase is used in two other Psalms, and this sheds more light on the meaning here. In Psalm 80:2 and 99:1, God is pictured as being *“enthroned between the cherubim.”* The people understood that God dwelt in heaven and could not be contained by any man-made structure, yet they also understood that He had made His presence manifest in the Holy of Holies, above the Ark which itself was covered by the cherubim. This, humanly speaking, was the place of God’s dwelling. Therefore, the phrase *“enthroned upon the praises of Israel”* speaks of the reality of God’s presence over the Ark. The tabernacle of David was the place where God caused his presence to dwell at the time when the Psalmists were writing. As the people of Israel came into His presence and praised Him, God took up His place of authority and protection over them. When God comes, He comes as king. A person can enter a room and sit down in it. His presence is there. But when God enters a place, He comes to sit down as king. With God’s presence comes God’s enthronement, and with His enthronement comes the exercise and release of His power. Sometimes people speak of “building a throne” for God through our praises, but how can we presume to say we could do any such thing? God will build His own throne. But what this Psalm does say is that God responds to our praises by sending His presence into our midst. The fact that He is enthroned means that He comes not as a Dispenser of good feelings. He comes as King and Ruler of all. Where God’s people exercise their Biblical responsibility to give Him praise as happened at David’s tabernacle, we can expect that He will come in power to answer their prayers for the establishment of His kingdom on the earth. This psalm reminds us that worship is not about us coming to God to get a little pick-me-up after having had a bad week. Worship is about our coming to God and exalting Him regardless of what kind of week we have had, because He is the Almighty Eternal One who is always worthy of our praise. But as we exercise our priestly duty of giving Him praise, He in turn will manifest His presence and release His sovereign authority through us to extend His kingdom on earth.

(9) The temple of Solomon

Solomon's temple was a much grander structure than David's tabernacle. David spent years planning for it, though he was not allowed to build it, for he was a man of war (1 Chron. 22:8). Instead, it was to be built by David's son Solomon, whose name means "peace". The dimensions of the temple, at 60 cubits (90 feet or about 30 metres) long by 20 cubits wide, were twice those of the tabernacle, and the height, at 30 cubits or 45 feet (15 metres), was three times greater. The temple was built of stone, and its walls were lined with cedar and overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6:19-35). By contrast with the tent-like structure of the tabernacle, it was a glorious building. It duplicated the pattern of Moses' tabernacle in its restoration of the Holy of Holies in which the Ark was located. Only the High Priest entered in, and that only once a year. The Holy of Holies was separated from the Holy Place by a partition of cedar wood, in which were folding doors made of olive wood, on which were carved cherubim, palm trees and flowers (1 Kings 16:32). Behind the olive wood doors hung the veil in front of the Ark. In addition to the two cherubim installed by Moses over the Ark, two larger cherubim were added, fifteen feet high, with wing spans of twenty feet. In the Holy Place, into which the priests entered daily, stood the altar of incense, with not one but now ten golden candlesticks, and in addition to the table for the bread of the presence (1 Kings 7:48), were installed ten additional tables and one hundred golden bowls (2 Chron. 4:8). In the courtyard outside the temple was located the altar of burnt offering, as in the tabernacle, but the simple washstand of the tabernacle was replaced with the bronze sea, a large structure seven and a half feet high and fifteen feet across. In addition to this, there were ten smaller basins, apparently for the purpose of the washing of sacrifices, whereas the sea was for the priests themselves to wash in (2 Chron. 4:6). When the temple was finished, it was dedicated, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 5. The Ark was brought up from David's tabernacle. The priests entered the Holy Place, and when they came out, the Levitical singers and instrumentalists stood in the courtyard and began to sing praises to God. At this very point, *"the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud... so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God"* (2 Chron. 5:14). More yet was to come, because after the king had finished addressing the people and leading them in prayer (2 Chronicles 6), *"fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord's house"* (2 Chron. 7:1-2).

Although it was an amazing day for Israel, Solomon's temple looked back as much as forward. On its walls, and on the doors to the Holy of Holies were carved the palm trees and cherubim, reminding the people of the barred gates to the Garden. The fact that the Ark was again behind closed doors and accessible on pain of death only under the most limited circumstances showed that access to God's presence was still restricted. Though the temple was much grander than David's tabernacle, its building marked the beginning of a long decline in Biblical worship. The creative outburst of praise and worship recorded for us in the Psalms seems to have diminished, for few Psalms are ascribed to Solomon or his time. Upon Solomon's death, Jeroboam instituted two idol shrines at Bethel and at Dan to stop the people going to the temple. Five years after Solomon died, the temple was plundered by Shishak, the king of Egypt. By the time of Solomon's grandson Abijah, many abominations were brought into it. Subsequent history brought repeated desecrations followed by periodic attempts at restoration. Finally, the temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the people deported to Babylon. Prior to the destruction of Solomon's temple, Jeremiah prophesied of the day to come when the Ark (and by implication,

the temple, for the Ark was the reason for the temple's being) would no longer exist. First will come the destruction of Jerusalem (and of the temple): *"Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land... They will come, and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem... and I will pronounce My judgments on them..."* (Jer. 1:14-16). Later on, God will begin to restore His people and bring them back to Zion: *"Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart... and it shall be in those days... they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' And it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again. At that time they shall call Jerusalem 'The throne on the Lord,' and all nations shall be gathered to it..."* (Jer. 3:15-17). With the destruction of Solomon's temple came the destruction of the Ark. With the destruction of the Ark, God's presence was no longer with His people as it had been before, for He had caused His presence to dwell above the Ark. Yet a day would come when the presence of God would be restored to His people, even though the Ark would never be rebuilt.

(10) The temple of Zerubbabel

Biblical worship was by now only a shadow of its glory in the days of David's tabernacle. It is true that after the exile, the temple was rebuilt under the leadership of Jeshua, Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah. Under orders from Cyrus, the temple vessels were brought back from Babylon, an altar was built and the laying of foundations commenced (Ezra 1-3). The enemies of the Jews petitioned Artaxerxes successfully to halt the building, but it was resumed and completed by command of Darius (Ezra 5-6). All this took place from 538 to 516 BC. Presumably the temple was rebuilt with a Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, though we know this only from Jewish literature, which stated that a veil divided the two, and that the Holy Place contained a seven-branched candlestick, altar of incense and table for the bread of the presence. The Holy of Holies contained only a stone on which the High Priest placed his censer once a year on the Day of Atonement. But the Jews knew that God's presence had departed. At this time, the last two books of the Old Testament were written, following which came four hundred years of silence when God did not speak. Zechariah prophesied between 520 and 480. The entire book is a series of prophetic visions concerned not with worship in the temple but pointing forward to the coming of Christ. In 458 Ezra returned to Jerusalem to encourage the people to be faithful to the Lord, and from 444 to 433 Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the city and attempted to restore godly government. Later, however, he returned (Neh. 13:7-31) to find that the people had again become corrupt. Malachi prophesied at about this time, condemning the people for unfaithfulness to God. Yet in Malachi 4, the very last chapter of the Old Testament, he pointed forward to the coming of Elijah followed by the day when the Sun of righteousness would rise with healing in His wings. Yet for now the Ark was gone, the presence of the Lord had departed, and for four centuries God was silent.

(11) The temple of Herod

The final and disgraceful stage in the decline of Biblical worship occurred under King Herod. In 20 BC, Herod destroyed the temple of Zerubbabel, which had stood for over five hundred years, and in its place, as a monument not to God but to himself, he erected a magnificent structure, copying the general plan of Solomon's temple but with much grander outlying courts and adjacent buildings, the totality of which occupied 26 acres. The temple itself had identical

measurements to that of Solomon, but was higher. The temple took ten years to build, but the entire complex was not finished until AD 64, only six years before the Romans destroyed it, thus fulfilling Jesus' prophetic condemnation, "*Not one stone will be left upon another*" (Matt. 24:2). Jesus told the people it had taken 46 years to build the temple, but He would raise it up in three days (John 2:19). This new temple, spoken of by Jesus, would bring the restoration of worship to its earthly climax.

(12) The temple of Jesus

The Jews did not understand the words Jesus spoke about raising up the temple of His body. He was referring to more than just the resurrection. Jesus was declaring that, after His resurrection, there would be a new temple, consisting of His spiritual body, the church. Paul understood this well. He told the believers they were "*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit*" (Eph. 2:20-22). Peter also understood it, for he wrote almost identical words: "*You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus*" (1 Peter 2:5). We realize that these statements express an understanding of the church as distinct from the old covenant people of God. Instead of being defined as a people of a particular race or geographical nation congregating at a sacred building to witness a select group of priests offering sacrifices to God on our behalf, we are now peoples of every race and nation, all priests to God, gathering together throughout the world irrespective of where we meet. But often we do not realize that Jesus was talking not just about the nature of the church as opposed to Israel, but also about the restoration of worship and of the temple of the Garden. When He made the statement that the temple was His body, He pointed to the coming end of the physical temple, and with it the abolition of all restrictions on entry into the presence of God for any believer in Christ. The presence of God is now defined by the presence of Jesus with each of His followers: "*For where two or three have gathered together in My Name, there I am in the midst*" (Matt. 18:20). For the first time since the Garden, men and women, no matter where they lived, could encounter God's presence. Even in the time of David, that was not so, for even though the Ark was in open view, you had to go to the Ark to experience God's presence.

Yet the early church realized the significance of the tabernacle of David. What the tabernacle of David pointed toward was fulfilled in the temple of Jesus. When the apostles and elders met together in Jerusalem to debate how the Gospel was going to move forward into the Gentile world, Peter pointed to the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12 as the key: "*After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, in order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My Name,' says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old*" (Acts 15:16-18). Peter was making a statement about the church – no longer were God's people to be restricted to Israel. But he was also making a statement about worship. The church is to be characterized by the presence of God with His people, and this has massive implications for worship. The tabernacle of David was the high point of old covenant worship. It was the place where the presence of God was manifest to the people, not just the High Priest. And it was the place where old covenant worship went beyond simply offering sacrifices to the unrestrained offering of peoples' hearts in thanksgiving and praise to God.

There are two critical characteristics of worship in the temple of Jesus: the release of the manifest presence of God, and the priesthood of all believers.

The release of the manifest presence of God

In one sense, God is everywhere: *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there”* (Psalm 139:7-8). Yet God can be present in this sense without His presence reaching out and touching this world in such a way that we become aware of it. God created the world through Christ, and God through Christ to this day holds all things together (Col. 2:16-17). Yet how many perceive or acknowledge this? Paul says we should be able to recognize the handiwork of God in the physical creation: *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse”* (Rom. 1:20). But how many do realize who God is simply through contemplating the beauties of creation? In the Garden, God was visibly and undeniably present. When we fell, we lost the reality of that presence, and with it most of our ability to worship. The Bible is a record of the plan of God to restore His presence to man and to restore his ability to worship Him. His intention is to restore the manifest sense of His presence which was there in the Garden, a real and tangible sense in which anyone encountering it would know He is there. This occurred dramatically, but in a limited and restricted way, when the glory of God came down on Moses’ tabernacle and again on Solomon’s temple. Both of these were miniature replicas of the Garden, complete with palm trees, pomegranates and defending angels, signifying that the presence of God was restored but severely restricted. But now we live in the temple of Jesus, that temple in which all of us can come into the Holy of Holies, the place where the glory of God came down and the priests were unable to stand. This temple represents the restoration of the Garden, to the extent it can be restored on earth. Jesus – through the presence of the Holy Spirit – takes the place of the Ark of the covenant. Wherever the church gathers, there is the possibility of the manifest presence of God coming down, and along with it the release of His eternal and supernatural power. This was imprinted into the DNA of the church at its birth and runs like a thread throughout the book of Acts. Since the destruction of the Ark, the manifest presence of God had completely disappeared from the earth. That is why the Jews spoke of four hundred years of silence, during which there was no word from God. They looked forward to the day the Messiah would come. They believed that the sign of His coming would involve two things: fire and the return of the Holy Spirit. That is why the thousands who gathered at Pentecost to witness the outpouring of the Spirit upon the first disciples were attracted not by the preaching, but by the worship: *“And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance... and when this sound occurred, the multitude came together... And they were amazed and marvelled, saying, ‘Why, are not all of these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born... we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God”* (Acts 2:1-11). For the

first time since the destruction of Solomon's temple over six hundred years before, the manifest presence of God had returned to the earth. And it was happening not as in the days of Moses or the time of Solomon, when the presence was restricted to a place only one man could go but, like the tabernacle of David, it was happening right out in the open amongst the people. As the manifest presence of God came down on the church, the church responded in supernaturally-empowered worship, and this presence and the worship which accompanied it proved to the people of Jerusalem that Jesus Christ was the Messiah. No wonder the worship opened the door for Peter to preach the Gospel, and no wonder three thousand people were saved!

The early church devoted itself not only to the apostles' teaching, but to the breaking of bread, fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:42), all ways of describing their gatherings of worship and what went on in them. When the church was threatened by the authorities, they gathered together to pray and worship God, and the power of God was released in such a manner that the building they were in was shaken by an earthquake and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). The manifest presence of God was so powerful that signs and wonders were taking place as they gathered together for worship in the portico of the temple (Acts 5:12), and as Peter left the worship gathering, the presence of God was still so powerfully upon him that the sick were healed as his shadow fell on them (Acts 5:15) – a miracle not even attributed to Jesus. The people of the city and surrounding areas were bringing the sick and the demonized into the worship gatherings and there they were being healed (Acts 5:16). The commissioning of the apostle Paul came during a time of worship in the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1). A second earthquake precipitated by worship is recorded in Acts 16:25-26: *“But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's chains were unfastened.”* And we need to notice something very significant about this passage. The worship in the Philippian jail had only two participants – Paul and Silas. They did not need to be in a crowd of thousands to receive the blessings of God. Sometimes we feel we have to be in a large worship gathering to be uplifted, then when we go home we lose the sense of God's presence. Paul and Silas teach us that each of us can access the presence of God anywhere we are and even if there is no one else with us. The secret of passionate corporate worship is often based on the fact that many of the worshippers have brought into the large gathering the richness of their own time with God during the week.

The priesthood of all believers

In Moses' tabernacle and Solomon's temple, only the High Priest could enter into the presence of God. Anyone else who tried to do so would die. But in the temple of Jesus, every believer is able to enter. Why? Because Jesus, as our great High Priest, through the sacrifice of His own blood, has entered into the perfect heavenly tabernacle of which Moses' tabernacle was only a copy (Heb. 9:11-12, 24). The curtain of Herod's temple, separating off the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple and reputed to be three feet thick, was at the moment of Jesus' death torn in two (Matt. 27:51). Consequently we can now enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19). We now worship at a different altar. The High Priest took the blood of animals into the presence of God, but we are to follow Jesus outside the camp, to the place of refuse and reproach where the remains of the animals offered at the temple were burned, and where He also suffered

(Heb. 13:10-13). There we are to offer not the sacrifice of animals but the sacrifice of praise to God (Heb. 13:15). We are now a holy priesthood in the house of God (1 Peter 2:5).

So much for the theology of it. But what does this in practice mean for us in relation to worship? Here are some suggestions:

(1) *No one else is a priest for us.* We realize that we do not need anyone else to enter the presence of God for us. That is what distinguishes us from Roman Catholics, for instance, who still have priests offering sacrifices at altars in temples every Sunday. But while we remember that *no one else is needed* to enter the presence of God for us, we forget that *no one else can* enter the presence of God for us. If we do not offer the sacrifice of our praise to God, no one else can do it for us. What this means is that when we gather together for worship, God expects each person to come as their own priest into His presence. That is why Paul says, in the context of teaching on worship, *“To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the working of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues and to another the interpretation of tongues”* (1 Cor. 12:7-10). That is why he also says a little later, *“When you come together, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation”* (1 Cor. 14:26).

(2) *It’s not about the people at the front.* Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 12:14-26 that the body is not just one part, but is composed of all its parts. Each part has a function, and that is true in worship. If one part is missing, the whole body loses out. Paul gives another picture of our worship gatherings in Col. 3:16: *“Let the word of Christ dwell within you richly, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”* Notice the emphasis on the involvement of the many, not just the few. If worship is something primarily involving the band and worship leaders, then they have become priests on our behalf, and we might as well set up a Holy of Holies at the front and wall it off.

(3) *Worship is to bless God, not us.* When we focus on the people at the front, worship becomes an entertainment, an activity done by those people in order to make the rest of us feel better. That is not worship. Worship has nothing to do with anyone making anyone else feel good, cheered up, inspired, uplifted or anything else. Worship is about every one of us coming before God to glorify Him and give Him praise. If it made God feel good, our task in worship would be to make Him feel good. Why is it that we have it the wrong way around? Of course, if God is pleased with our worship, He will send His presence into our midst and we will be touched – but that is not why we do it.

(4) *The danger of the default setting.* Just like computers, human beings have a default setting. It is called sin. If we do not progress in God, we will fall back into our old nature. That is part of the battle we face. God gives us the power of His Spirit to help us, but we have to open the door first. This default setting exists with worship. The default setting in worship is called passivity. I will sit back and expect God to bless me without my exercising my priestly duty to

give Him praise and glorify Him. Worship is an action. It is something we do, not a mist or cloud we enter into that we hope will drop spiritual rain upon us.

(5) *What, then, should we do?* We need to exercise our priesthood. We need to come to worship expecting God to use us, maybe even already having something in our hearts to give – a prayer of praise, a Scripture to read, a gift of the Spirit. Not everyone can participate in every service, and some find it easier to do so than others, but something is wrong when in the vast majority of churches in our nation no one, except the pastor and the worship leader, ever offers a prayer, and the rest is musical interlude, with ninety-nine percent watching one percent make the sacrifice at the front. In churches like ours, where we do encourage participation, something is still wrong if the same two or three people always pray. Why do we pray, read Scripture or declare God’s praise in public worship? Not because we feel eloquent – most of us aren’t. Not because we are on a spiritual mountaintop – most of us aren’t there. Not because we’ve just been struck down by a thunderbolt of the Spirit – that is a rare occurrence for even the most spiritual person. No, we pray and praise because that is our duty as priests: *“Through Him, then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name”* (Heb. 13:15). Yes, those lips can give thanks as they do in every church through corporate song, but there is something strange in a relationship if we only communicate through singing!

(6) *The responsibility of the worship leader.* If all the people in the congregation are regarded as priests who have come to offer their sacrifice of praise to God, the job of the worship leader changes dramatically. Instead of being simply a musical leader who orchestrates a pre-arranged programme of songs, the worship leader must become more like the conductor of an orchestra, but an orchestra where there is no pre-arranged score and you never know which instrument is going to play. The worship leader must therefore himself be an instrument of the Spirit, able to hear His voice and direction, understanding what He is doing on a moment-by-moment basis as the symphony unfolds, knowing when to play, and when to stop and give place to the voice of others. In response to prayers or prophetic words from the congregation, he may have to change course with the music, carry on where he would have finished or finish where he would have carried on. Not so easy! It is not enough to be a gifted musician. A worship leader must also have the heart of God and move in great sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

(7) *The power of a worshipping priesthood.* When the High Priest brought the sacrifice into the presence of God on the Day of Atonement, he was able, through his act of worship, to ensure the favour of God upon the whole nation for another year. There was incredible power in his worship, and in what it released on the nation. What would happen if each of us took up our high priestly duties, entered into the presence of God together and began to offer our worship to Him? How much blessing of God would be released not only on us but also on the world around us? I am convinced that this is why one of Satan’s primary goals is to confuse and deceive the people of God about the nature and power of worship, to do anything he can to prevent them from taking up their privilege and responsibility as priests to enter into the presence of God. That is why worship in traditional churches is often reduced to dreary and ritualistic singing of hymns which once had great power but now are lifeless in the hands of people with no vision. That is why even in Bible-based churches, worship is often reduced to a loud band conducting a

performance at the front which the rest of the congregation observes in somewhat deafened passivity, not even able to hear the sound coming out of their own mouths as they sing. God wants something better. Jesus died so we could enter into His temple, and in that temple first access and then release the power of God.

Having considered these suggestions, we need to ask the question: “What is our perception of worship?” Is it just coming together to sing some nice songs? A pleasant musical lead-in to the preaching? An opportunity for admiring (or criticizing) the abilities of the worship leader or musicians? Is it listening to the same one or two folk praying? Or even occasionally getting a little uplift and feeling a bit better? Or is it something more? A false perception will rob you of worship’s reality and its power. In 2007, the *Washington Post* newspaper arranged for a young man to play the violin in a subway station while hidden cameras recorded peoples’ reactions. Dressed in jeans, a t-shirt and Washington Nationals baseball cap, the busker played continuously for about 45 minutes. One thousand and ninety-seven people – most of them well-educated management-level government employees, walked past. Three minutes went by before anyone even noticed he was there. In the fourth minute, a woman threw a dollar into his violin case. A total of seven people stopped to listen, at least for a minute. In between pieces, when the music stopped momentarily, not a single person applauded or thanked him. A hundred feet away, a continuous flow of people lined up to buy lottery tickets. In the forty-five minutes, not a single one of them ever looked over their shoulder toward the musician. One man, a computer specialist, said he did notice a musician trying to make a couple of bucks but couldn’t remember much else, though he did remember every single lottery number he played that day – all ten of them. One man who passed by didn’t even know a musician was there, because he was listening on his iPod to a song about a man who failed to see the beauty of what was in front of him. A woman running a shoe-shine stall was irritated because the noise made it hard to have conversation with her customers. The only people who did notice were the children – every single one of them stopped, or tried unsuccessfully to get their parents to stop. Toward the end of the forty-five minutes, a demographer at the Commerce Department called Stacy Furukawa entered the Metro station. As soon as she saw the busker, she froze in astonishment, unable to comprehend what her eyes were seeing. She realized who he was, because three weeks before she had been present at a special concert the same man had given on Capitol Hill. It was Joshua Bell, one of the most famous violinists in the world, who had just been awarded the Avery Fisher prize as the best classical musician in the United States. He was playing his three hundred year old Stradivarius violin, for which he had paid \$3.5 million. He had just sold out Boston’s Symphony Hall, where medium-priced seats went for \$100. The first piece he played was a work by Bach considered to be one of the most difficult violin pieces ever written, so hard that very few, no matter how famous or talented, have ever been able to play it. Why did the *Washington Post* do this? To see whether people would recognize they were in the presence of greatness if no one was there to tell them. And the answer as this: the only people who knew were the children, because they were the only ones as yet unprogrammed to live by the values of this world – the demands of work, the cares of life, the winning numbers in the lottery.

I ask the question again: what is our perception of worship? You can come in and out of worship, thinking more about what happened to you last week or what is going to happen next week, the demands of life – hopefully not the lottery numbers! But do you realize you are in the presence of the living God? Do you realize you have come into the temple of Jesus, the Holy of

Holies, the place where we encounter the power of God and see it released into the world through our praise? Or are we like the guy with the iPod? We hear music telling us about not missing the beauty in front of us, yet that's all we hear. Worship is just a bunch of songs, even nice songs, but nothing more. Or do we come like little children, not programmed by the cares and needs and challenges of this world? Remember who it was who said: "*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all*" (Luke 18:17); and: "*You have hidden these things from the wise, and revealed them to children*" (Luke 10:21).

A worshipping priesthood in the temple of Jesus is the most powerful group of people on the face of the earth – and that, incredibly – is you and I – if only we realize it!

(13) The temple of the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb

The temple of Jesus is the closest we can get on earth to what we had in the Garden. It is the Biblical model for New Testament believers. It is God's heart to build this temple on earth. But there is one further temple to be revealed: "*And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple*" (Rev. 21:22). As the first book of the Bible reveals worship as it existed before man's fall, so the last book illustrates worship after man's complete restoration. Several times in Revelation, we behold visions of worship in the eternal kingdom. In chapter 4, the living creatures and elders, heavenly beings representing the saints, are engaged in continuous worship. How can they do otherwise, as they live continuously in the presence of God? In chapter 5, myriads of angels and created beings join this scene of worship. In 6:9-11, those who have died in Christ and are in Paradise awaiting the return of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead, are shown as crying out to God. In 7:9-17, the entire multitude of the deceased saints through all the ages is seen in heaven giving worship to God and the Lamb. It is said of these saints that they "*serve (or worship) Him day and night in His temple,*" that is, the eternal temple of God and the Lamb. It is then said that "*He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them*" (7:15). The heavenly tabernacle is not a building in which was contained the presence of God, as were the earthly tabernacles of Moses and David, but is His presence itself. In this heavenly temple, we live and dwell continuously in the immediate and unrestricted presence of God, thus bringing the restoration of worship to its final fulfilment. The same worshippers reappear in 19:1-8, declaring the final victory of God over all evil, and then in chapters 21 and 22 is revealed the holy city, the eternal temple of God and the Lamb. Here the saints will serve or worship Him and see His face forever, living in His unrestricted presence for all eternity (22:3-4).

Thus is made complete the Biblical restoration of worship. John Piper has said that the ultimate goal of the church is not mission, but worship. Mission exists because and wherever worship does not. Where there is no worship, mission exists to bring people into the temple of God to worship Him. The intention of God throughout human history has been to restore the worship we lost through our own sin, and to do so at His expense, ultimately through the blood of His Son. To fail to worship is not only to be careless, lazy or negligent, it is to sin, because it is your worship which not only gives God the honour He is due, but also releases the authority and power of God into the earth. The greatest exercise of your priesthood to offer to God the sacrifice of your praise. It is not something that anyone else can do for you. Worship is our highest privilege. It is the ultimate expression of our relationship with God. Of all the attacks

of Satan on the church, none is more insidious or dangerous than his desperate attempts to keep God's people from worship. He will do it by distorting what it is, by diluting what it is, by minimizing what it is, by making it into nothing more than a religious exercise, and then by causing people to spend more time arguing about it than doing it. These are the days when God is calling His people to rise up, frustrate every attack of the evil one, and bring the worship of God back into His temple. And then we will see His kingdom come.