

Biblical Perspective on How to Worship God
Lecture Notes for Ming Dao Press, Hong Kong, China
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Introduction: Expression of appreciation for this invitation.

Mention of my dear wife, Beverly who accompanies me.

Brief greetings from Dallas Theological Seminary

Comment on the nature of the “Assigned Topic.”

Here are some salient features of” of the “**Wonder of Worship.**” These words form the English title of my new book. You may know that the author of a book suggests a title, but the publisher makes the final decision. In this case, the title that was selected by the publisher is a great improvement on my original suggestion. Worship is not just an event, it is not just a collection of actions; it is a great deal more than the singing of some songs—worship is truly a **wonder!**

I. Worship is a wonder, a miracle (Hebrew תִּוְרָא [‘ôṭ]).

A. People all over the world, and throughout time, have sought to worship the gods, but soon they center on things that they have made, and inevitably they succumb to the twisted values of fallen man.

1. Witness Isaiah 40, Psalm 115; Romans 1

2. The worship patterns of the world are the achievements of their creators; they do not spring from revelation.

3. Israel’s faith and worship were given by revelation. Israel did not **achieve** greatness; she was **given** greatness.

4. At the same time, Yahweh in kind providence, **did** allow (even, at times, direct) Israel to adapt some elements from the patterns of their neighbors for a new, holy use—the true worship of Yahweh, the living God of Scripture.

B. Biblical worship is a wonder, a miracle; it is God’s gift to His people.

1. The very idea that the holy God, the Creator of the universe would even care about the worship of His creatures is astonishing.

2. This means that the very fact we may worship God is a demonstration of His **grace**. In true religion, all is of grace! God is all about grace (Exod. 34:5-6).

3. The fact that God **does** care should be an enormous impetus to His people to “get it right.”

C. Yahweh’s purposes in His Torah (the Law that Yahweh gave to Israel on Mount Sinai) focus on these four great issues:

1. A relationship with Yahweh and a respect for others.
2. Distinguishing Israel from the peoples round about them.
3. An attraction to the nations to “taste and see” that Yahweh is good
4. A detailed emphasis on the true worship of God.

D. Many Christians seem to have neglected the rich focus of worship in Torah and in the Psalms.

1. Some people have the notion that only specific New Testament references may inform Christian worship. These people, for example, make much of the lack of mention of musical instruments in certain passages in Acts, and they then conclude that musical instruments are not suitable for Christian worship.

2. It is amazing to me how “Marcionite” many Christians become when it comes to the subject of the worship of God. We have the whole Bible, but some believe only the New Testament informs us on the subject of the worship of God. (Marcion was the early Christian heretic who believed that the “Old Testament” was the record of an inferior deity to the God of the New Testament. He sought a radical divorce between Jews and Christians, between the “God of the Old Testament” and the “God of the New.”)

3. Further, many have only a cursory knowledge of the content of Hebrew Bible to begin with, and they have concluded prematurely that there is little there that is relevant for their tasks today.

II. Worship is something God actually seeks

A. From the beginning in the earliest stories of Genesis there are texts that focus on the worship of God.

1. Genesis 1—the first of the several biblical stories of divine creation is itself a worship text, a verbal celebration of the power and the wisdom of the eternal God of Scripture, Yahweh.

2. Genesis 4—the story of Cain and Abel is centered on the worship of God. (More on this in the Monday lecture, “How to Plan and Lead Worship Services.”)

3. Genesis 12—the story of Abram’s journey to Canaan leads powerfully to the concept of the worship of God

B. The first text describing the worship of the believing community is found in Exodus 15—The Song of the Sea. (See the Tuesday evening lecture: Recovering the Psalms in the Life of the Church).

C. David expressed the heart of biblical worship in Psalm 40.

D. Jesus taught on worship in spirit and truth in John 4.

E. In all cases, the biblical teaching is clear: **true worship is something God actually seeks from His people!**

III. **Worship makes demands on the worshiper**

- A. The very thought of the worship of God is sublime.
- B. The biblical words for worship cover a wide range of ideas.
- C. The principal Hebrew word means “to cause oneself to bow down” (see Gen. 12). Hebrew אָוַן [ḥāwâ] in the Hishtaphel stem.
- D. The principal Greek word means “to serve” (see Rom. 12:1-2; a term that also comes from Hebrew Bible).
- E. Worship is an “active sport,” not a passive mood.

IV. **Worship is centered in the congregation**

- A. Psalms 42-43 demonstrate the idea of the people of God gathered in holy worship as the biblical ideal. A person apart from the congregation may feel that she or he is in torment!
- B. Acts 2 describes believers in Jesus gathered together for the worship of God—continuing the biblical ideal.
- C. While a person in isolation may pray, sing, reflect and center his or her thoughts on the person and work of God, the biblical model is that true worship takes part in the congregation.

V. **Worship is focused on God**

- A. While the **center** of worship is the congregation, the **focus** of worship is not on us! Worship is all about God.
- B. The ideas of biblical worship are not to be determined by our own likes or dislikes.
- C. In our worship we bring praise to the one, true, holy God. And to do so is **wonder!**