



Worship in the 21st Century

*“You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall **worship** Him and swear by His name.”*

Deuteronomy 6:13

***Worship** the LORD with reverence
And rejoice with trembling.*

Psalm 2:11

*“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must **worship** in spirit and truth.”*

John 4:24

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of **worship**.*

Romans 12:1

I may have crossed that inevitable line from young, free-spirited thinker to old-fashioned curmudgeon, because I’ve become deeply concerned at how often the word “worship” as applied to the 21st Century church in the western civilized world has somehow come to mean “music”. How can you possibly infer from these and the many other scriptural instances of “worship” that it has anything to do with music?

There are 2 main Hebrew words used in the Old Testament which are translated as “worship”: “*shachah*” (shaw-KHAW) and “*abad*” (aw-BAD). *Shachah* literally means to bow down or to fall down, to prostrate one’s self before the object of one’s worship. It’s describing one’s attitude in the course of worship, to completely rid one’s self of any vestige of pride or honor in one’s self and be completely and

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totally submissive to that which is greater. *Abad* means to serve, a word that brings with it a very clear understanding of who is the Master and who is His servant. It describes how the attitude induced by *shachah* is applied to our personal behavior regarding worship.

I don't know the exact day and time that it happened, but at some point over the past 30 or so years the word "worship" has become synonymous with "music". A typical church bulletin listing the order of service will typically show the heading "Time of Worship" followed by the songs that will be sung. Perhaps a bit of prayer will be thrown in with it. Or the worship team will announce to the congregation, "Are you ready to worship?" as they launch into their set. I'm not convinced that the tool of music, which is used occasionally in the Bible as a supplement to worship, is fulfilling the whole and true biblical definition of worship.

The Greek words used in the New Testament don't justify a redefinition of "worship" either. (And if you haven't noticed, the New Testament has far less references to music than the Old.) It uses "*proskuneo*" (pros-koo-NEH-o) – to fall upon the knees and touch the ground with one's forehead; "*sebomai*" (SEB-om-ahee) – to fear or to honor; "*eusebeo*" (yoo-seb-EH-o) – to act piously or reverently; and "*latreia*" (lat-RI-ah) – to perform services for or to serve. I'm not sensing any "new" aspect to worship but an affirmation that it is an absolute throughout the whole of Scripture and unchanged from end to end.

Perhaps the most telling information comes from looking at each instance of the word's use throughout Scripture and noting what was taking place, what attitudes were present, what common reactions took place so as to identify what it means to undertake worship.

*Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD.
Genesis 24:26*

So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD was concerned about the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed low and worshiped.

Exodus 4:31

So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate.

2 Samuel 12:20

All the sons of Israel, seeing the fire come down and the glory of the LORD upon the house, bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground, and they worshiped and gave praise to the LORD, saying, "Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."

2 Chronicles 7:3

*While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers **also** sang and the trumpets sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped.*

2 Chronicles 29:28-29

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.

Job 1:20

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:11

And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

Matthew 14:33

And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.

Matthew 28:8-9

And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him.

John 9:38

And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Revelation 5:14

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And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Revelation 7:11-12

And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign."

Revelation 11:16-17

Do you see what is actually taking place? Even in the one instance where music is present – and the vast, vast majority of the appearances of “worship” throughout Scripture have *no* immediate references to music – it’s not the focal centerpiece, but an adjunct.

You get the same picture if you look at all the instances in the Bible describing false worship. What people do in the course of worshipping the wrong thing explains the specific actions which identify worship, even when its focus is wrong.

"They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"

Exodus 32:8

They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and went after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. They forsook all the commandments of the Lord their God and made for themselves molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal.

2 Kings 17:15-16

Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Daniel 3:7

they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"

Revelation 13:4

At it's most basic, the act of worship is coming to the humble knowledge and admission that "You are God and I am not". It's an attitude of submission, an offering of service to the Master. It's possessing a right heart. And it has far more to do with the prayers and praises of our lips than engaging in the physical act of singing.

I can't help but wonder what the spiritual condition of the church would be if it only devoted half of its currently allotted time to music to instead worship according to biblical guidelines. I can't help but wonder if our devotion to music is distracting us from actually engaging in true worship, the acknowledgment of who Christ is and how we might enter into His service. The fact is that worship in the 21st Century doesn't need to be "new and improved", but "business as usual".

In His Love,

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