



The Modern Gateway for Deception's Foothold

So the king consulted, and made two golden calves, and he said to them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from the land of Egypt." He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.

– 1 Kings 12:28-30

Throughout all of Scripture which documents that period of Israel's history from the time the original Temple was built until it was destroyed centuries later, there is a unit of measure by which God holds all leaders accountable. Their righteousness is contrasted to the faithfulness of King David and their wickedness is compared to King Jeroboam, seen in these verses initiating what will later be repeatedly referred to as "the sins of Jeroboam". Jeroboam does not create something completely new from day one. Instead, he ultimately takes everything connected with the One True God and systematically twists each and every item into a shadow of its former self. This activity is particularly evil in that it is not directed at everybody in the whole world but exclusively toward God's people alone. Jeroboam twists every single direction God gave for how His people should serve and worship and replaces it with a duplicate which looks very similar on the outside, but is a complete apostasy on the inside. And where does this apostasy start? What was the first step taken to achieve total

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corruption of God's people? Worship. And I believe it is most often the way that deception and apostasy enter into Western churches today. There may be cases where it makes its first appearance through the pulpit or an ancillary ministry activity, but it most often first enters through the worship team.

One of the constant battles with which all believers deal is the meaning of words. Having been born and raised in the old life prior to coming to faith in Christ, our vocabulary was shaped by the world. When we become a new creation one of the things we have to do is re-learn the definition of words according to God's view. The world defines "love" quite differently than God defines it. The dictionary definitions of "faith" and "hope" are quite different from the Bible. One of Satan's favorite and most prolific tactics is to take the basic words used throughout the Bible and get the world to teach just enough of a variation so as to render them ineffective. The commandment to love others is not to act according to the **world's** definition of love but according to how love is defined by **God's Word**. I say this so that you might understand the full weight of my assertion that in this present age there may be no term more twisted and removed further from its true biblical meaning than "worship". I do not believe that the average Christian today can articulate what it means to "worship" as defined by God's Word.

For the average church-goer reading this, they are already thinking about music. This is what "worship" has come to mean today. "Worship Time" in the Sunday morning order of service now means the amount of time devoted to singing and/or musical performance. Many modern worship teams begin each session with, "Are you ready to worship?" as a signal that there will now be a time of music. But the old story goes that a pastor and worship leader were meeting to plan the upcoming week's service and the worship leader asked the pastor, "How long do you want to worship?" The pastor said, "Three days

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would be nice.” The worship leader responded, “I don’t think I can play guitar that long”. The wise, old past replied, “That is because you are talking about *music*; I am talking about *worship*.”

Allow me to insert at this point that I am not anti-music or unhappy with a particular style or category of music. I just want to challenge each and every Christian to be sure for themselves that they know *what* they do, *why* they do it, and that their confidence rests in the fact that these things conform to *God’s Word*. We can “recontextualize” the Gospel so as to present it in many different ways. It can be done with preaching, singing, a puppet show, a dramatization, a ventriloquist act, flaming batons, and so on and so on as long as the message never varies from the biblical definition. But once something begins to stray from God’s definition it begins to *mimic* instead of *mirror*. The issue I am exclusively addressing is whether or not you know the *biblical* definition of the term “worship”.

Why am I making this assumption that most Christians don’t know the biblical definition of “worship”? Because the only thing they do when they “worship”, the only activity they engage in when they “worship”, the only thing they think of and talk about and plan for when it comes to “worship” these day is music. And if we actually picked up our Bible concordances and looked up every instance of “worship” appearing in Scripture, we would quickly discover that “worship” *rarely* has anything to do with music. Seriously, now. Open your concordance and start looking up the verses. Count the number of verses which explicitly reference music in any way. Since almost none of them do, start to count how many verses forward or backward from each verse you have to go in order to even find an actual reference to music. There are biblical examples to provide us with the right application of music in the church, but nowhere do we find that “worship” is broadly defined, much less exclusively associated, with music.

Let's look at the very first use of the word "worship". It is first mentioned by Abraham during the account of his offering Isaac as a sacrifice.

Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you."

– Genesis 22:5

The things Abraham subsequently did provide the answer to Abraham's definition of "worship". It involved an altar and a sacrifice and prayer, but there doesn't appear to be any reference to music. In fact, the Hebrew word itself means "to bow down", "to prostrate one's self", "to pay homage to". This, along with the examples of how people worship in Scripture, should clue us in to the right meaning of "worship". In fact, let's poll those verses which reference something happening while worship is taking place in order to see what takes place when biblical worship occurs. There are many references to "worship", but these verses provide additional information as to what someone was doing when "worship" took place.

- *"And I bowed low and worshiped the LORD, and blessed the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had guided me in the right way to take the daughter of my master's kinsman for his son."* (Genesis 24:48)
- *"...Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed."* (Gen. 47:31)
- *"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)
- *"'you shall say, "It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He*

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*smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.” And the people **bowed low and worshiped.**” (Exodus 12:27)*

- *“Moses made haste to bow **low toward the earth and worship.**” (Exodus 34:8)*
- *“When Gideon heard the account of the dream and its interpretation, he **bowed in worship.** He returned to the camp of Israel and said, ‘Arise, for the LORD has given the camp of Midian into your hands.’” (Judges 7:15)*
- *“‘In this matter may the Lord pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon **to worship there,** and he leans on my hand and **I bow myself** in the house of Rimmon, when **I bow myself** in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon your servant in this matter.’” (2 Kings 5:18)*
- *“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come before Him; **Worship the Lord in holy array.**” (1 Chronicles 16:29)*
- *“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)*
- *“Jehoshaphat **bowed his head with his face to the ground,** and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem **fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD.** The Levites, from the sons of the Kohathites and of the sons of the Korahites, **stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel, with a very loud voice.**” (2 Chronicles 20:18-19)*

- "While the whole assembly worshiped, **the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded**; all this continued **until the burnt offering was finished**." (2 Chronicles 29:28)
- "Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer. **So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped**." (2 Chronicles 29:30)
- "Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen!' while lifting up their hands; then **they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground**." (Nehemiah 8:6)
- "While they stood in their place, **they read from the book of the law** of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth **they confessed and worshiped** the Lord their God." (Nehemiah 9:3)
- "For they **performed the worship of their God and the service of purification, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command** of David and of his son Solomon." (Nehemiah 12:45)
- "Worship the Lord **with reverence** And rejoice **with trembling**." (Psalm 2:11)
- "'All the earth will **worship You**, And will **sing praises to You**; They will **sing praises to Your name**.' Selah." (Psalm 66:4)
- "Come, **let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD** our Maker." (Psalm 95:6)

- "Thus the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day. They will even **worship with sacrifice and offering, and will make a vow to the LORD and perform it.**" (Isaiah 19:21)
- "Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes one of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image and **falls down before it**...But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He **falls down before it and worships**; he also prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god." (Isaiah 44:15, 17)
- "Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god; **They bow down, indeed they worship it.**" (Isaiah 46:6)
- "that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, **you are to fall down and worship** the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. But **whoever does not fall down and worship** shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." (Daniel 3:5-6)
- "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and **have come to worship Him**'...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 2:2, 11)
- "And those who were in the boat **worshiped Him, saying**, 'You are certainly God's Son!'" (Matthew 14:33)

- "And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and **took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.**" (Matthew 28:9)
- "When Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and **fell at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up,** saying, 'Stand up; I too am just a man.'" (Acts 10:25-26)
- "But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so **he will fall on his face and worship God,** declaring that God is certainly among you." (1 Corinthians 14:24-25)
- "for we are the true circumcision, who **worship in the Spirit of God** and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh," (Philippians 3:3)
- "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, **by the same sacrifices** which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because **the worshipers,** having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" (Hebrews 10:1-2)
- "And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will **fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him** who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.'" (Revelation 4:9-11)

- *"And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders **fell down and worshiped.**" (Revelation 5:14)*
- *"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,**" (Revelation 11:16)*
- *"And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures **fell down and worshiped God**, who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!'" (Revelation 19:4)*
- *"I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, **I fell down to worship** at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. But he said to me, 'Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. **Worship God.**" (Revelation 22:8-9)*

Seriously, folks – I am not being facetious or sarcastic here – but after reading all these references to worship and what someone recorded in the Bible does to “worship”, can you honestly make the case that it’s all about music? As I stated previously, the references to a role played by music in the course of worship is not zero in Scripture, but they certainly are few and far between. I would argue from these and the myriad other references in Scripture to both “worship” and “music” that music is something which plays a supporting and secondary role to what is supposed to be taking place. And if I am not making myself clear enough, let me offer this challenge: How close does the

“worship” taking place at your local church align itself with these Scriptures? When was the last time your worship team facilitated **anything** that remotely looked like what these verses are describing? Shouldn't that alone warrant your attention?

I am tempted at this point to extensively document my resume where music is concerned, but I am going to resist disclosing all the anguishing details. Suffice it to say that at one time in my life I was stupid enough to introduce myself as a “Christian musician”. I have **been** a worship leader. I have **been** in bands and made albums. I have **been** in this situation personally. And I am only disclosing this much so you will know that I speak with sincerity and experience that if marijuana is the “gateway drug” leading to hardcore addictions such as heroin or cocaine, the typical organization of the “worship team” in Western churches today is the “gateway drug” by which deception and apostasy most often achieves its first toehold in the church. Why? Because like everything else belonging to the realms of deception and apostasy, it forsakes the Word of God and strongly favors the lusts and desires of the flesh. To paraphrase Paul, “It has the appearance of wisdom but in reality gives way to the flesh”. (Col. 2:21-23)

I am sure that there are some worship teams who get it right. No matter how bad things get, there is always a faithful remnant. From time to time I am personally and pleasantly surprised to visit a church where there is a genuine, biblical spirit of worship. But I no longer believe that is normative. One of the ways we can tell that something is either presently wrong or soon to be wrong with a particular worship team is if we are able to discover their priorities. To what do they devote most of their time and resources?

In today's environment, the typical worship team I am speaking of requires a lot of rehearsal, planning, and resources. It is a polished imitation of a secular band with a healthy helping of instruments and vocals demanding lots of practice and direction. Beside the musicians themselves, it can require stage hands, sound engineers, video

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technicians, and lighting directors. It can even get to the point where it needs costume mistresses. make-up artists and talent agents. (No kidding. (No kidding. I know of churches who hire professional musicians, some of whom aren't even a Christian, in order to get a "professional" worship experience.) And a lot can be gleaned from getting to know the worship leader and their team in order to understand their goals and the direction of their efforts. No doubt the conversation will begin with a passing reference to leading the congregation in worship, but far more time will be devoted to rehearsal and the music, what it takes to "be as good as the world", coordinating all the aforementioned resources, and making church "relevant" for visitors or a specific demographic like "young people". In other words, their overwhelming focus is music, *music*, **music**.

If you have a worship team who spends more time in fellowship, prayer, and Bible study than rehearsing music, you have a true treasure of God's kingdom. Do everything you can to encourage and support them. But let's be realistic; they are the exception. The worship teams who define "worship" as meaning "music" rather than researching and subscribing to God's definition of this activity are almost exclusively devoted to music rehearsal and "getting the music right". Prayer and fellowship and Bible study, if present at all, are minimal, temporal activities which at most are briefly visited in passing before the more important priority of music rehearsal. The desire of their heart is betrayed by what they themselves "bow down to" or "worship": music. That is the hard truth about such groups. Their worship is "music" itself.

This isn't entirely their fault, you know. What is the criteria most church leaders or congregations use to select a worship leader or qualify someone to join the worship team? Is it the quality of their Christian walk? Is it a life committed to prayer and Bible study? Is it because they are the best example of what it means to be a Christian? No, it is most often because they are the best musician. Yes, I know someone will say, "They have a heart for worship." That may be true,

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but if it is not **biblical** worship, if it is not a heart devoted exclusively to the Word and ways of Christ, it= is not the kind of worship you really want in the Body of Christ.

Jesus advises that we will know something by its fruit. Let's be fruit inspectors for a moment.

A common practice today is to hold try-outs for the worship team. And what takes place during a try-out? What is being evaluated? The quality of their walk, the regularity of their prayer life, their commitment to God's Word, their ministry experiences in sharing the Gospel? Those may be tangentially addressed, but no, it is musical ability. This is why things begin to go wrong. The emphasis from the outset is "music", the focus during worship time is "music", and everyone involved eats, drinks, and sleeps music far more than anything else. But the common assertion goes something like, "Shouldn't our music be as professional and polished as the world's? Doesn't God **deserve** the 'best'?" And no one even bothers to address the error of wanting to bring "the best of the world" into the church to begin with.

Yes, this is why "worship" is the gateway drug to deception and apostasy. It is most often the first area by which church leadership is approached and told, "If we make worship more polished and professional, we will make church more relevant and attractive to visitors." The seduction is that this is the "reasonable" compromise that can be made in order to grow the church, make the most people happy, and still do God's work. Do you really believe that? Is that what God's Word advocates?

I am not a member of the Church of Christ who disallow the use of musical instruments in their services. They employ music, they just sing a capella. That is not my cup of tea, so to speak. But I will say one thing for them. They may have struggles in other areas, but one thing they do not have to deal with are the egos and in-fighting of the

members of the modern worship team. They do not have to deal with people who are more committed to “music” than they are to “worship”. They also do not have the recurring drain on their local resources for all the needs of a modern worship team. I am sure that like the rest of us they are not perfect, but I am also confident this is not near the problem for them that it is for the rest.

All I am saying is that whatever we do – evangelism, fellowship, missions, Sunday School, worship or whatever – we should be doing it biblically, not as an imitation of something the world does. Since music has biblical applications, why not direct our efforts to knowing God’s mind on the topic and seeing to it that such efforts conform to His given thoughts?

I think there are two verses which provide the foundation from which everything else should proceed where worship is concerned. However the tools of music, sound, lighting, staging, etc. are employed, everything should first and foremost conform to the parameters of how Jesus defines true worship:

*“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the **true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”*
– John 4:23

This does not automatically disqualify music as one of the tools to accomplish this goal, I am just saying that music as a tool, like anything else, should conform to this overriding principle.

How do we know for sure if someone is a true or false prophet, a true or false pastor, a true or false believer? Again, we become fruit inspectors. And what criteria do such fruit inspectors use? How do they know what is “good” versus “bad” fruit? God’s Word. **ALL** things are measured against the standard of His Word. This not only applies to each person assigned the role of leading the congregation in worship, but in how they conduct worship itself. Is it grounded in the Truth of

God's Word? When music is employed, are the lyrics clearly biblical? Is the overall focus to worship "in spirit and truth"? Do you really think that something polished to the world's standard of perfection automatically meets these qualification? Or ever really will? It is possible to do so, but that is the core source of the problem. Is the emphasis on delivering the best, polished performance possible, or something defined by "the spirit and truth"? How would today's typical worship leader or a member of their team respond to this fruit inspection rule? That in itself might be revealing as to what is really taking place.

But the second verse by which I believe worship needs to be defined is probably the verse many of you kept thinking of in the course of this discussion:

*"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 am sure someone will inform me of an exception, but in all my life I have never heard someone testify that they came to faith in Christ while listening to the worship team. I have heard many testimonies time and again from those who were deeply moved by people *in* the congregation worshipping, or by the simple testimony of how a Christian neighbor or co-worker lived their everyday life, or by the "difference" they saw in a believer's life or their attitude at church, but I have never heard of someone being saved by the "music". And in fact, I worry that when present-day visitors are attracted by the music that it seldom allows them to see the greater testimony of the congregation present, that it might actually inhibit the greater testimony that would normally be visible.

I have come to believe that like Jeroboam, Satan's tactic is most often to gain a foothold in the way worship is conducted. It is the gateway to eventually making other ministries and activities in the church worldly,

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and sooner or later it overtakes the pulpit itself. And just like Jeroboam's day when he had **everything** the true adherents of the faith had – a capital, a temple, an altar, a priesthood, festivals and sacrifices – so the deceived and apostate congregation still maintains the façade of its Evangelical, Bible-believing roots. What happens to worship is what happens to all things once they are taken over by the flesh. What God intended for good through the Spirit, man corrupts and brings to evil through the flesh.

In His Love,

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