

How to Worship God

Purpose of the Series

In the prior series, “The Christian Assembly”, I talked about how the original early Christian gatherings in the 1st century after the death and resurrection of Jesus consisted of meeting at one of the more mature member’s homes, each person sharing something, and enjoying a meal together with thanksgiving about what Jesus did for them—yet all modern church services differ from this. This series aims to explore the question: What needs does worship fulfill in the lives of Spirit-filled Christians? While Christ gives us much freedom in how we live our lives, we must first answer this question *before* we can answer, “How do we to worship God at church?” This series seeks to answer the following:

- Why does worship differ from one church to another?
- How did worship differ between the eras of the Spirit (the Garden before the fall, the time of sin before Christ, and the era of the indwelling of the Spirit)?
- Is it required by Christians to worship to stay spiritually healthy?
- What are the “parameters” of worship? (e.g. Is music required? Can a person do it alone or does it require a group? Is one atmosphere more conducive than others? Is it to God or for God?)
- Is the “music and entertainment” version of church wrong?
- What is the relationship between obedience and worship?
- Is/should there be a difference between the worship of the OC and NC? One of the themes of “The Withered Fig Tree” is that the Old and New Covenants are *very* different from each other; therefore, I would tend to think so.

Part 1: What does it mean to Worship God?

This episode aims to summarize pre-Christian worship and modern Christian worship. To start with, I searched YouTube for “what is worship”. Of the many results, I did find some common themes: 1) [worship is not supposed to be entertainment](#), 2) [worship is obedience and sacrifice](#), and 3) [worship as an overflow of our hearts](#). This is interesting and will help us understand modern church worship.

I. Worship before Christ

- a. Did Adam and Eve worship God? It would be odd to say “no”. We don’t see either of them falling prostrate before God, at least not before the Fall. Gen 3:8 seems to imply they used to walk with God in the cool of the day. That’d be cool, right, to walk and talk with God? After the Fall, with their newfound knowledge of Good and Evil, their behavior changes, and their fear of God dominates their relationship (i.e. they hid from God and God pronounced judgement on them).

- b. Before the Old Covenant. Gen 22 – the first use of a Hebrew word for worship, “עָבַד ׀hāvâ”, is used. It’s doubtful that people would define this as “worship”: Abraham does up to Mount Moriah prepared to sacrifice his son, but God provides the sacrifice. This is a clear foreshadowing of God providing his son, likely in the exact same location, two thousand years later, nevertheless, we see three important elements of OC worship: an altar, fire, and a sacrifice.
- c. Under the OC.
 - i. Lev 9:7 epitomizes priestly worship under the OC: *Moses said to Aaron, “Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifice the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded.”*
 1. Direct Command for Sacrifice – This verse reflects the heart of the priestly role in the temple — offering sacrifices for atonement and intercession on behalf of the people.
 2. Different Types of Sacrifices – The sin offering and burnt offering represent two key types of Old Testament sacrifices: 1) Sin Offering – For purification and forgiveness of sins (Lev 4), 2) Burnt Offering – A total offering to God, symbolizing complete devotion (Lev 1).
 3. Atonement – The purpose of the sacrifices was to secure reconciliation between God and His people.
 4. Priestly Mediation – Aaron, as high priest, stood between God and the people, pointing to the priestly function of intercession and mediation.
 - ii. Psalms 100:4 epitomizes what the people were to do: Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.
 - iii. Come to the temple.
 - iv. Have or make your heart right by filling it with thanksgiving.
 - v. Praise the name of God.
 - vi. Therefore, under the OC, worship activity different types of sacrifices done by priests at the altar in the temple.

II. What do Liturgical churches think?

- a. I would say this series is mostly done with Evangelical and Non-denominational churches in mind but let’s start briefly with the Catholic and Orthodox churches.
- b. Catholic and Orthodox services are centered around the Eucharist, which is the culmination of the service. Hymns, homilies, and creed recitals that are done before the Eucharist are meant to prepare the congregation for communion.
- c. The ordinary bread and blood become the sacrifice. The Eucharist is prepared on the altar and becomes Christ’s flesh and blood—Christ is offering himself again as a sacrifice.
- d. Worship is therefore communal, sacramental, and liturgical (formalized procedures for public worship).

III. Worship in Modern Evangelical and Non-denominational churches

- a. Members of these churches tend to offer wide and varied elements of worship. Basically, anything done at church is worship, and things in life where one devotes themselves to God are worship.
- b. As described in the prior series, churches are “vertically organized”. This means the rows of chairs that point to one location, the pulpit (often on a stage), and that congregants focus on the pulpit and do not communicate with each other.
- c. Characteristics of worship in these churches
 - i. Worship is centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ — His death, resurrection, and lordship.
 - ii. Songs, prayers, and sermons typically emphasize salvation through faith in Christ and the believer’s relationship with Him (e.g., John 14:6).
 - iii. Communion (Lord's Supper) is often celebrated regularly as a remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice but is purely symbolic (i.e. the Real Presence is not present).
 - iv. The reading, teaching, and application of God's Word are central to worship.
 - v. Expository preaching (verse-by-verse teaching) is common, but some churches also use topical sermons.
 - vi. The sermon is often the central element of the service, emphasizing both theological depth and practical application.
 - vii. Worship is often viewed as led by the Holy Spirit, not confined to a fixed liturgy.
 - viii. Spontaneous expressions of worship (e.g., raising hands, clapping, dancing) are encouraged. Charismatic and Pentecostal churches practice spiritual gifts during worship, such as: Speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecy, and words of knowledge.
 - ix. Worship is informal and the atmosphere is relaxed. Dress code is generally casual. Services are welcoming to seekers and newcomers. Multimedia elements (screens, video, lighting) are often used to create an engaging atmosphere.
- d. Conflict over the type of music. Music is considered a key element of worship that can help or hinder an individual’s ability to worship, churches have divided over it and differentiate themselves as their worship style (e.g. as opposed to doctrine). If the assumption here is true, then this would be reasonable.
 - i. This is particularly the case in the United States, which is a melting pot of diverse cultures, each with their own style of music.
 - ii. There can be friction between age groups, i.e. old people’s music vs. contemporary music.
 - iii. Mixed congregations often settle on one form of music, leaving others feeling left out and unable to worship as they would like.

Next week: We’ll talk about how New Covenant worship defined in the Bible. There are a surprisingly few passages in the New Testament that contain “worship” and refer to the New Covenant.

Part 2: New Covenant Worship as defined in the Bible

Review: Last week I kicked off the series talking about the types of worship found in different periods (or eras) of mankind's relationship with God. Adam and Eve (before the Fall) simply walked with God. Hebraic worship involved a location, an altar, an intermediary, and a sacrifice. Modern liturgical religions, which have remained unchanged since the 4th century, share the elements of Jewish temple worship, but their sacrifice, the Eucharist, differs. Modern evangelical services, which have remained mostly unchanged since the Reformation, have fewer temple-elements, but since meet in large, dedicated-purpose buildings with "vertical" worship services (i.e. the focus is on whatever is happening center-stage).

I. What is Worship (again)

- a. Why "again"? Because I've already attempted to define this twice. In part 3 of the prior series, "The Christian Assembly", I gave the contemporary definition of worship: "Acts of devotion directed toward God that evoke a spiritual experience", and I gave a Temple-period Jewish definition: "A reverent, fearful, and humble devotion to God at the Temple."
- b. A more general definition. These two definitions apply only to the Hebrew God of the Bible. Is it possible to make a more general definition that would include pagan gods, human rulers, and idols?
 - i. Here's what I came up with: *"The reverent and submissive preparation and engagement with an idol, ruler, or deity."*
 - ii. Let's break it down: < could add superstition >
 1. Reverent: A deep-seated feeling of solemn respect. Reverence is often associated with feelings of fear or anxiety.
 2. Submissive: Ready to conform to the authority of someone or something else. Things that have no real or perceived impact on one's life cannot be submitted to.
 3. Preparation: There are elements that must be in place and things that must be done before the object of worship can even be approached. Preparation includes things like:
 - a. Prostrating oneself.
 - b. Dressing properly.
 - c. Ceremonial washings and consecrations.
 - d. Going to an agreed upon location.
 - e. Bringing a sacrifice.
 - f. An altar on which to prepare sacrifices.
 - g. An intermediary (aka a priest) to prepare sacrifices. The intermediary stands between public worshippers and the object of worship, wears different garbs, and has additional consecrations. All preparations which must be done in accordance to stricter instructions and which have more serious punishments for failures must only be done by someone very familiar with the requirements and proper training and experience.

4. Engagement: After the proper preparation, the object of worship can be approached, albeit with fear that the preparation was done to the satisfaction of the object. Singing and other joyful rituals may be performed.
5. Idols, rulers, and deities: Worship is strictly limited to these objects. There may be similar objects where something akin to worship is done, but one or more of the preceding elements are missing. In essence, only deities can be worshiped, as rulers must narcissistically claim the status of deity in some form to require worship from their subjects. Likewise, people often grant a god-like presence to an idol, and in many cases, the idol represents a deity.

iii. Why is it important to have a good general definition? To be able to distinguish worship from non-worship.

1. How is being a superfan not worship? Not reverent or submissive.
2. How is respect shown to a leader, like a president, not worship? If it's not in their presence, then there is no special location. Say you go to meet a leader at a special location (like a capitol office), the preparation is minimal and does not include things like sacrifices and priests. There are no ramifications for not meeting the leader, like imprisonment or confiscation of property.
3. How is respect shown to a spiritual leader not worship? The preparation is minimal and does not include things like sacrifices. There are no ramifications for not meeting the leader like disfellowship or loss of position.

c. In many ways, one can say that we do not worship in the New Covenant. At a minimum, one has to say NC worship differs greatly from OC worship and that the worship of pagan gods, which had elements like temples, altars, priests, physical sacrifices, prostration, and fear.

II. A new kind of worship. Let's look up verses in the New Testament that specifically discuss NC worship.

John 4:21-24: *Jesus says: "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."*

- NC worship is at a different location (both the proper location at the temple in Jerusalem, and improper worship at the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim).
- NC worship is spiritual and not physical.
- NC worship is done with truth. I believe this refers to the false/partial way Jews had approach God, for example, how Moses could only see his back and the high priest would go only once a year behind the curtain. We could not see face to face because our sins were still present. Heb 10:4, *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take*

away sins. Even now, our interactions with God are not perfect but will be in Heaven. 1Cor 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face."

The Sacrifice of Self

Romans 12:1-2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

- This is probably the most important NT verse on NC worship.
- Worship is no longer about external sacrifices but about offering oneself to God through righteous living and transformation by the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:4-5: *As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

- Worship in the New Covenant is likened to spiritual sacrifices offered by believers as a royal priesthood.

Service to one another at Christian gatherings

Hebrews 13:15-16: *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

- Like Romans 12, this describes a new type of personal sacrifice through living.
- Worship includes praise and confession of Christ's name, but also practical expressions of goodness and generosity.

Philippians 3:3: *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve (latreia worship through service) God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.*

- True worship under the New Covenant is characterized by worshiping God in the Spirit, relying on Christ rather than external works or rituals.

Colossians 3:16-17: *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

- Christian gatherings are a time to serve (latreia) one another.
- It includes singing, mutual teaching, and gratitude—all empowered by the indwelling of the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:26: *What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.*

- Worship in the New Covenant assembly is characterized by participation, edification, and spiritual gifts being used to build up the body of Christ.

Ephesians 5:18-20: *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

- Worship is Spirit-filled, involving joyful singing and thanksgiving from the heart.

1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8: *I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people... Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*

- Worship includes prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving offered with holiness and unity.

Hebrews 10:24-25: *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

- Since God has given us everything, we need to worship him by ourselves, gathering with disciples is for fellowship and building each other up; and as such, is still necessary.

Part 3: A New Kind of Everything

Review: I gave yet another definition for worship. This one is very general and aims to address the essence of pagan temple, ruler, and idol worship and Jewish temple worship, while at the same time filtering out typical admiration or respect for individuals: *“The reverent and submissive preparation and engagement with an idol, ruler, or deity.”* The preparation part is very important and distinctive and contains elements like prostrating oneself, dressing properly, ceremonial washings, consecrations, going to a specific location, and bringing a sacrifice. The addition of an intermediary and their special preparation is also important, who has stricter preparations and ensures the worshippers fulfill their preparations. This is because there is great risk (at least from their own perspective) approaching a deity without properly fulfilling their demands.

The liturgical services of the Catholics and Orthodox churches contain these elements, and, therefore, they can make the claim that their adherents actually do “worship”. However, Protestants take pride in *not* having any of these elements in their services and their pastors and ministers are not priestly intermediaries; therefore, do they worship at all?

At best, Protestant, specifically, Evangelical and Non-denominational churches, can argue that worship under the New Covenant *is very different*. This argument is supported by Jesus’ statements in John 4 to the women at the well and by the scriptures from Paul and Peter which metaphorically describe the sacrifice of oneself in the service of others as a form of worship. However, the vertical nature of their church services greatly obstructs the fulfillment of these “one another” passages.

Are the OC and NC that different? It’s a point I’ve made in my prior series, *The Era of the Spirit*, but in this series, I’ve only touched upon it. In my opinion, if a Christian cannot *strongly and definitively communicate the difference between the OC and NC, then they don’t understand either of them.*

The book of Hebrews is the quintessential argument of the difference between the OC and NC. Rather than assume worship between the Old and New Covenants is different because the covenants themselves are different, today I will go section by section through Hebrews to show how the intention of the author was to differentiate the two covenants and show how one cannot have one foot in both covenants. Indeed, the NC is a new kind of everything contained within OC.

Note: Obviously, I don’t have the time to read through the entire book of Hebrews, so I’ll go through each section and highlight some key verses—but I do recommend you read through the book with this lens of “newness” in your personal time with God.

I. A new kind of revelation – Hebrews 1:1–4

God spoke in many ways in the past, but now He speaks through His Son—the ultimate and final Word.

Key verse: 1:1-2a: *In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...*

II. A new kind of messenger – Hebrews 1:5–2:18

Jesus is greater than angels and became human to redeem humanity, unlike angelic intermediaries of the Old Covenant.

Key verse: *To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?*

III. A new kind of rest – Hebrews 3:1–4:13

Not the Sabbath or rest from work or the Promised Land’s rest from building and war (these deter from obedience), but a deeper, spiritual rest from relating to God through obedience, but relating through grace, entered into by faith in Christ.

4:8-9 *For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;*

IV. A new kind of high priest – Hebrews 4:14–5:10

Not from the line of Aaron, but according to the order of Melchizedek—eternal and perfect.

5:2-3 *He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. “he” is the human high priest.*

5:8-9 *Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

“learned” and “once made perfect” – very controversial as God should know everything. Yet he had never lived as a mortal human until Jesus.

V. A new kind of teaching – Hebrews 5:11–6:20

Not based on elementary teachings of the law, but on growing through faith and hope in God’s promises.

6:1-2 Were they unable to teach the OC because of a lack of preparedness or effort? No. The OC, while comprehensible, is not *attainable*. They need to move on from the basic foundation established by the OC: 1) Repentance from acts that lead to death – things that require sacrifice, 2) faith in God – they had a general belief in God’s existence and authority, but without the fuller understanding of the Messiah, Jesus, 3) cleaning rituals -- when is actually unclean, 4) the laying on of hands – one would lay their hand on the head of the sacrifice, and 5) the

resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment – the spiritual afterlife, something completely lacking in the OC.

VI. A new kind of priesthood – Hebrews 7:1–28

A priesthood that brings perfection, unlike the Levitical one, because it is based on the power of an indestructible life.

VII. A new kind of covenant – Hebrews 8:1–13

The old is obsolete; the new is written on hearts, with true forgiveness and internal transformation.

VIII. A new kind of sacrifice – Hebrews 9:1–10:10

No more repeated animal offerings; Christ's once-for-all sacrifice cleanses the conscience.

IX. A new kind of confidence – Hebrews 10:11–39

We can now enter the Most Holy Place boldly, by the blood of Jesus, not with fear but with faith.

X. A new kind of faith – Hebrews 11:1–40

A faith not rooted in law-keeping or land promises, but in trusting God for better, heavenly realities.

XI. A new kind of discipline – Hebrews 12:1–29

God trains us as sons, not as distant subjects; we've come to a heavenly Zion, not Sinai's terror.

XII. A new kind of worship – Hebrews 13:1–25

Lived out through love, hospitality, purity, and sacrificial praise, centered on Jesus, outside the camp.

Heb 13:7-9a Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.

Note how NC worship is very different than the tabernacle temple worship of the OC.