

**Xenos Christian Fellowship**  
**Christian Leadership 1**  
**Ecclesiology 1**  
**Week 3 - Worship in the New Testament**

**Introduction**

(1 Corinthians 3:10) According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.

We have retained an inherited concept of worship that is more Jewish than Christian. Clement of Rome, late in the first century, made a defense of the office of presbyter and of certain prescribed ordinances. He based this defense on a comparison with the Old Testament priesthood and its liturgical duties (1 Clem. 40ff). This prepared the way for a revival of Jewish concepts of worship in the following centuries. The *Didache*, a Christian document of the second century, shows evidence of the continuance of this same kind of thinking. It refers to the "prophets" of the church as its "high priests" (Did 14). Accompanying the continued expansion of these ideas in the second century, there was a thoroughgoing return to OT concepts of worship associated with the Temple and its sacrificial ceremony. The result of this transfer of Jewish ideas to Christianity is most evident today in the elaborate sanctuaries and ceremonies of the heirs of Catholic and Orthodox tradition...

As heirs of the Reformation and Restoration movements, we have made good progress in brushing aside much of this ecclesiastical and ceremonial tradition accumulated over hundreds of years, but our thinking has not yet been swept clean of the dusty concepts which lay beneath this tradition. These inherited concepts make it difficult for us to see the clear teaching of the New Testament. (Ervin Bishop, "The Christian Assembly")

Therefore, because we limit ourselves to the New Testament teaching on the church we find 3 things:

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## Selections from “Are Evangelicals Missing God at Church?” by Gary Burge (*Christianity Today* October 6, 1997)

“In reading my semester exams, I discovered that one particularly insightful student, Amy, wrote about worship: “I think that much of modern society has lost a sense of divine, holy space. This becomes obvious to me in our church architecture. The splendor and holiness of cathedrals which created the ultimate feeling of divine space has been replaced by gymnasiums and impermanent buildings. A sanctuary should be a place that is completely separate—that radiates the holiness of God. Plastic cups and folding chairs aren’t enough. There has to be an environment that communicates God’s holiness to my senses and to my spirit...”

“A new Greek Orthodox church opened in Wheaton just last year. Already a sizable number of our students are passionately committed members. Chrismation is a new word on campus. Some of us are predicting a small migration there, with icons soon to follow in Fischer dormitory...”

“So what is worship? Worship, I believe, is a divine encounter that touches many dimensions of my personhood. It is an encounter in which God’s glory, Word, and grace are unveiled, and we respond, in songs and prayers of celebration. Worshipers seek an encounter with the glory of God, the transcendent power and numinous mystery of the divine—and in so doing, they recognize a Lord whose majesty evokes strong praise, petition, and transformation.

“But my evangelical training has emptied Sunday’s worship hour of God’s majesty and mystery. Divine encounters seem few. Two factors have stood in our way.

“First, we have been taught that the sermon must exposit the biblical texts, and that immediate and timely application should follow every message. While all of this is true, nothing has been left to our imaginations. Little has been left to our hearts except postsermon feelings of conviction and exhortation. We leave the hour heavy, thinking more about what we must do than wondering about the mystery of God and his doings on our behalf. Therefore we have evolved an experience that is at best intellectual, a worship that studies the Bible. Homilies evolve into 30-minute teaching sessions. And when it touches our emotions, it weighs us down, convicting us of wrongdoing and inadequacy...”

There is a second barrier. Paul suggests that worship includes the mundane affairs of living, that we should “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Some of us have used this verse to distort the principal meaning of worship. Rather than encountering God, our worship has become ethical.

“I believe evangelicals are yearning to recapture worship that lifts us—as a medieval cathedral lifted the eyes of the fourteenth-century worshiper—to truly meet God.

“I tell this story only to suggest that many worshipers come looking for more than fellowship, exposition, and exhortation. They seek an experience of “the holy.” They come looking for awe and reverence, mystery and transcendence. Furthermore, many of their sensory faculties need to be engaged: Their senses of sight, sound, touch, and smell are powerful avenues of communication. One glance at the Old Testament directions for orchestrating temple worship will remove all doubt that this is our task. Fire, incense, tapestry, and gold joined with ritual activities that reminded worshipers of the reverent awe demanded of them. Bells and breastplates provided a visual feast evoking images of God’s presence. Even the temple’s architecture did this. One climbed higher as steps led “up” to the Holy Place.”

“Evangelicals need to reclaim their Old Testament heritage. We need to unburden ourselves of those reflexes forged during the Reformation and Enlightenment that shunned the pageantry and visual media of medieval Catholicism...”

“My evangelical roots have reminded me in no uncertain terms that the pastor is “one” with the people. We uphold Luther’s “priesthood of all believers.” In Presbyterian parlance the pastor is one of the elders—a teaching elder—alongside so many other elders. And so our demeanor, our dress, our participatory leadership style have evolved to communicate that there is no hierarchy in our congregations.

I now disagree with this model. I am not suggesting that pastors have privileges in the grace of God or the economy of the church unavailable to others. But I am suggesting that in worship, the pastor must become priest. The pastor plays a role—a significant role—in the divine encounter offered in worship. The pastor assumes the role of

mediator, incarnating God to the people, forging an atmosphere and image that men and women will absorb when they contemplate divine things.”

## ‘Wine’ - A New Testament Theology of Worship

### New Testament Words<sup>1</sup>

#### *Leitourgia* -- "Liturgy"

The word *leitourgia* does occur in the NT, but infrequently and not in its traditional sense. Most often, it refers to the Jewish Temple service (Luke 1:23; Heb. 10:11). Paul makes an extraordinary use of this term in reference to his own "service" of proclaiming the Good News. In Rom. 15:16 (cf Phil. 2:17) he pictures himself as a priest performing the "liturgy" of the Gospel, that his "offering" of the Gentiles might be acceptable.

#### *Eusebeia* -- "Godliness"

This word is rare in the NT, and apparently unrelated to worship, but is of interest because of the way its usage contrasts with that in Greek literature. The popular Greek view was that religious piety consisted of honoring the gods, especially in worship paid to the gods in cultic acts. When used in connection with the Christian faith, however, *eusebeia* **does not** "consist of cultic acts as in the Greek world, not even in acts of congregational worship" (W. Foerster, TDNT, vol VII, p 183). It refers rather to a Christian's manner of life (1 Tim. 2:2,10; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6; 2 Pet. 1:3).

#### *Threskeia* -- "Religion"

The lexical definitions of this word relate it to the "external ceremonies of religious worship" (K.L. Schmidt, TDNT, vol III, p 157). Its very scarcity in the NT supports the view that Christian worship is not expressed primarily in outward ceremonies. But James defines it in terms more closely identified with real Christian worship (James 1:27).

#### *Proskuneo* -- "Worship"

This is the word most often translated "worship" in the English NT. It is a concrete expression that carries with it the idea of falling down before an object of devotion. For this reason, its use in the NT is mainly limited to the Gospels, where Christ is visibly present among men, and to Revelation, where he is again visible to those who worship him as the exalted Lord. The word is not used however, in reference to Christian worship. An exception is its use in John 4:20ff (see below). Here it is applied to a revolutionary concept of worship that contrasts sharply with the kind of worship inherently implied by the word itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited from Ervin Bishop, "Christian Assembly"

*Proskuneo* is generally avoided in the Epistles. Its absence is conspicuous and indicates that, because of the concrete ideas associated with the word, it was not well suited for expressing the kind of all-encompassing spiritual worship intended for God's people under the new covenant.

*Latreuo, Latreia* -- "Worship"

Although this word means, first of all, "to worship cultically," and "in the OT its primary reference is to the sacrificial cultus," in the NT its meaning is elevated "to a total view according to which the whole life of the Christian is fundamentally brought under the concept" of worship (Heb. 9:14; 12:28; Phil. 3:3). *Latreia*, in this sense, finds its highest expression in Rom. 12:1 (see below).

Jesus' teaching on worship (John 4:23,24)

- In spirit
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- In truth

The Apostles' teaching on worship

A Change in Priesthood & Sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5)



## Quotes from other scholars on New Testament Worship

"One of the most puzzling features of Paul's understanding of *ekklesia* for his contemporaries . . . must have been his failure to say that a person went to church primarily to 'worship.' Not once in all his writings does he suggest this is the case. Indeed it could not be so, for he held a view of 'worship' that prevented him from doing so. This is crystallized in his plea at the beginning of Rom. 12 . . . For Paul, worship is obedience rather than literal sacrifice and is rational or voluntary rather than ecstatic . . . The striking feature of Paul's statement, however, is his noncultic use of this language, that is, its metaphorical application to the sphere of everyday behavior. . . . In practice this means behaving in such a way that all their actions are determined by God's will, which is by definition good and perfect, rather than by the characteristics of the times in which they live. So worship involves the whole of one's life, every word and action, and knows no special place or time. The remainder of this section in Romans brings this out most forcibly . . . Since all places and times have now become the venue for worship, Paul cannot speak of Christians assembling in church *distinctively* for this purpose. They are already worshipping God, acceptably or unacceptably, in whatever they are doing. While this means that when they are in church they are worshipping as well, it is not worship *per se* but something else that marks off their coming together from everything else they are doing." Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, pp. 88,89)

" . . . Jewish, pagan and even traditional Christian ideas of worship contrast sharply with the concept of worship in the New Testament. An examination of Jesus' teaching on this subject revealed that worship in the new age is not to be limited to special acts performed at any particular place or time. Instead, New Covenant worship consists of the 'true worshiper's' total relationship and service to God. This new and revolutionary concept of worship is taught consistently throughout the New Testament . . . These (New Testament) writers borrowed words for 'worship' from Jewish and pagan contexts of formal, ceremonial, Temple worship. However, whenever these words were applied to Christians, they referred not to a 'worship service' but rather to a life of service." Ervin Bishop, "The Christian Assembly"

"The presentation of ourselves 'as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God,' now means serving him in a whole range of relationships and responsibilities. When Christians become preoccupied with the notion of offering God acceptable worship in a congregational context and thus with the minutiae of church services, they need to be reminded that Paul's focus was on the service of everyday life . . . Obedience to apostolic teaching and apostolic ministry to nurture Christian faith and obedience are different aspects of worship by which Christians are to honor God and express the reality of their relationship with him through Jesus Christ. This means that evangelism and the strengthening of believers emerge again as a priority for those concerned to offer 'acceptable worship.'" David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), pp. 187,188.

## Why is this so important?

- The traditional view of worship tends to hinder the mission of the church.

EVANGELISM

DISCIPLESHIP

COMMUNITY

- The traditional view of worship tends to promote formalism

- The traditional view of worship tends to promote a clergy/laity distinction, and (for the “laity”) a passive view of worship.

### **“Wineskins” – Xenos’ structures for New Testament Worship**

- We ground people in the New Testament theology of worship. *Why is this so important?*
- We do not have large corporate “worship services.” *What is the purpose of our large meetings?*
- We move most of the elements of corporate worship into the home groups. *Why do we do this?*

### **Memory Verses**

John 4:23,24\*

Romans 12:1\*

### **Assignment**

Read Master Plan of Evangelism Chap 2 & 3 (“Association” & “Consecration”) and write a paragraph summary of content for each chapter and a paragraph of personal application.

### **Week Three Exam Guide**

1. Be able to show how the Old Testament worship service is replaced in the New Testament.
2. Discuss the danger of making an emotional experience of corporate worship the most important function of the church.