

even permeates our prayers (Matt. 6:9-13; 1 Tim. 2:1-2)

### Worshippers are Sanctified by Scripture

Of course, it is no use to have a biblical service if our participation in that service does not please God. Scripture teaches us that our attitude matters deeply when it comes to worship. As God sanctifies us with his word (Eph. 5:26) we are enabled to worship him to his pleasure.

This means first, that worship must be interpersonal. We belong to God. We are his special treasure (Ex. 19:5, Ps. 45:11, Is. 54:5). Therefore, worship is not an abstract experience with the divine. It is an intimate engagement with a Triune being.

Second, our worship must be reverent, whether expressed in gladness or mourning. Toward this end, our worship services must communicate God's transcendence. We do not attempt to bring God down to earth; he raises us up to heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). We should have the sense that we are standing on holy ground (even if we literally aren't).

Third, worship must be sincere and simple. God despises duplicitous worship (Is. 1:15). Simplicity and sincerity are often codependent. The more a worship service resembles a high-tech rock concert the more difficult it becomes to offer thoughtful, sincere worship to God.

Finally, worship must be zealous. God is zealous for his own worship (Ex. 34:14, 1 Cor. 10:22). Do we provoke his jealousy? Should we not instead worship him in such a way as to provoke his satisfaction and pleasure? To do so, his word must be the controlling influence in our services and in our heads, hearts, and hands, as we worship.



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## Thanksgiving Eve Service

In everything  
**GIVE  
THANKS**

1 Thes. 5:18

**Nov. 27, 2013**  
**7 PM | 47 S. Church St.**

# PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic, Christianity  
November 2013, Issue 53

## WORSHIP YOUR WAY (OR GOD'S)?

RECOVERING SECOND COMMANDMENT WORSHIP

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

We live in a place and time of unparalleled individual freedom of choice. We choose how we dress from an almost endless number of options. We decide whether we want our books in paper or digital format.

Young people graduating from high school or college enjoy a host of vocational opportunities. Our culture trains us to think that we should be able to have things our way. In the 1990s, Burger King advertized its menu with the slogan, "Your way, right away." In the 1980s, AT&T advertized themselves as "The right choice" for telecommunication and technology needs. Since the 1970s, abortion advocates have referred to their movement as pro-choice; an extremely clever move considering societal sovereignty of choice.

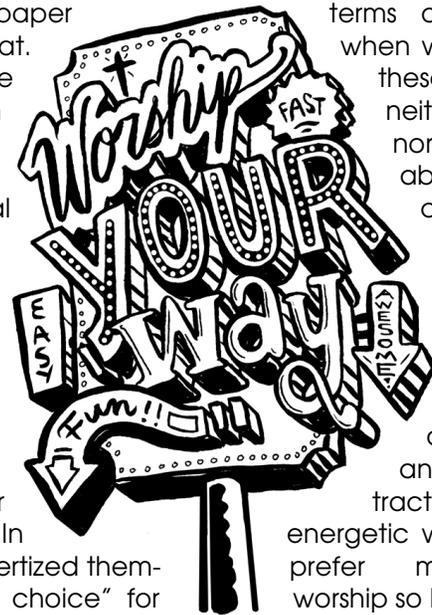
This emphasis on choice and individual freedom has significant im-

plications for how we view worship. With the combination of personal mobility with the increasing smorgasbord of church flavors, Americans today have almost limitless latitude in

terms of how, where, and when we worship. To be fair, these worship options are neither necessarily bad, nor necessarily avoidable. But they do challenge us to sift through the options with biblical wisdom.

Sadly, many people seem to weigh their worship options on the scale of personal preference and emotional attraction: "I like more energetic worship so I attend... I prefer more contemplative worship so I go to..."

Too seldom do people reflect on worship by asking the following kinds of questions. "Does God have anything to say about how I worship? Should something more than my feelings and preferences determine how and where I meet with God? Is there



an authoritative guide to Christian worship?"

In answering these questions we are greatly helped by the Second Commandment, which, like the others, summarizes what God's will both requires and rules out. God tells us that he reserves for himself the right to decide how we worship and that he has explained his will in his word.

### **Worship is Standardized by Scripture**

This thesis makes more sense if we understand how the Ten Commandments are divided. The Reformed and (most) evangelical churches follow the Orthodox ordering of the commandments in which the second commandment prohibits worshiping the Lord according to the habit of the nations, that is, by a visible representation of God (Ex. 20:4-6). By contrast, Roman Catholic and Lutheran Churches include these verses on images in the First Commandment. (To maintain ten commandments, they divide our last commandment into two. The ninth forbids a man to covet his neighbor's wife; the tenth forbids him from coveting his neighbor's goods).

The point is, the first two commandments mandate us to worship God alone and only in a way that conforms to his will. In other words, not everything that moves us emotionally (like an image) is appropriate for worship. The governing question in many modern churches is: "What will produce an stimulating religious impulse?" The question ought to be: "What does God say worship services should look like?" No single church or tradition answers that question perfectly. The problem today is that many churches are no longer asking the question.

Nadab and Abihu should have asked the question. They had been commanded to worship God in a particular fashion. Instead, discontent with God's instruction, they offered "strange fire" for which God consumed them with his own holy fire (Lev. 10:1-2).

The principle that God regulates worship, flies in the face of much worship today which is driven by an itch for innovation. As our lawgiver, God governs our worship with full authority (Ps. 95:2-3, 6-7, Ps. 96:9-10). He still says, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it, nor take away from it (Deut. 12:32; Cf. Matt. 28:20).

### **Worship is Structured by Scripture**

Not only does the Bible regulate worship but it also suggests to us the shape that worship should take.

First, the Bible teaches us that worship is covenantal. A covenant is a binding relationship between two or more persons. Worship is a formal covenant-meeting between the King and his subjects.

God drew Israel out of Egypt so that she could meet with, and renew covenant with him (Gen. 8:1, Deut. 5:2-4). Contrary to contemporary status quo, worship is not meant to be an evangelistic crusade. Yes, the gospel must be preached powerfully with both unbelievers and believers in mind. But the worship service is first a holy convocation between God and believers and their children.

It should (though often doesn't) go without saying, that Scripture assumes family integration in worship (Deut. 31:11-13, Eph. 6:1-4). It should not surprise us that God's commandment regarding the manner of proper worship should contain gen-

erational curses and blessings (Ex. 20:5-6) Our worship services give our children an early, and often unshakeable, impression of who God is, and how we must relate to him. Services which suggest that we can approach God on our terms, governed only by the limits of our imagination give our children a dreadfully erroneous impression of who God is and how we must find him. Seeker-sensitive worship can even threaten one's commitment to the biblical Christ, by whose merits alone, one can approach God (Heb. 10:20).

Second, the Bible teaches us that Christian worship is a conversation, or dialogue, between God and his people which draws them more closely together. God is always the seeker of worship (John 4:23). When God calls us, we respond by pledging our dependence upon him (Ps. 124:8). God responds with his greeting (2 Cor. 13:14). We cry out with our needs (Ps. 18 6). He responds with his provision (Ps. 18:7-19). We worship him for his goodness (Ps. 18:49). He sends us forth with his blessing (2 Cor. 13:14)

We must be diligent in continually searching the Scriptures, and evaluating our worship in light of these principles; we have not yet "built" the perfect worship service. At the same time, we have received a sound pattern of worship from the historic church which we ignore to our impoverishment.

### **Worship is Saturated with Scripture**

Contrary to the practice in some churches, Christian worship is inherently verbal, not visual.

To this point, the Second Commandment explicitly condemns making images of God whereby to wor-

ship him. The golden calf was not another God; it was Israel's attempt to serve Jehovah by visual means (Ex. 32:4-5). By implication, the historic Protestant church has been critical of the use of images of any of the three persons of the Trinity, including Christ (Deut. 4:15-19).

Images give a biased impression of God based on the artist's creative abilities and theological proclivities. A beautiful image of Christ could be in contrast to Isaiah 53:2. An Anglo-Saxon image of Christ, apart from being historically inaccurate, can communicate an ethno-centricity. A cartoonish image of Christ runs the risk of stripping the second person of the Trinity of the dignity which he deserves. No image of Christ can communicate his divinity and so every image necessarily separates Christ's two natures. God saw fit to send to earth Jesus of Nazareth as his fleshly image. But then he took this image back to heaven and gave us the Word which must now form our impressions of God. Instead of crucifixes, paintings, or candles, God gives us the sacraments (Mark 1:5; Acts 2:42).

When God called Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, it was abundantly clear that he had center stage, and that his speech should stop every mouth (Deut. 5:5). Biblical Christians are still convinced that when the church gathers for worship God still speaks (Heb. 12:25-27). We honor God's word the way Cornelius received Peter: "Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us" (Acts 10:33; NIV). This means Scripture must be read (1 Tim. 4:13), preached (2 Tim. 4:2), and sung (Col. 3:16). God's revelation