

Biblical Worship

"In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." (Isa 29:13)
(ref. Matt 15:9, Mark 7:7, Col 2:22, Tit 1:14)

Nothing in the realm of Christian faith practice is more important to do according to New Covenant biblical principles than our service of worship to God. The entirety of the Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation, can be summarized as the advent of human self-worship with the original sin of Adam (Gen 3:6), which is to eat from "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (Gen 2:9, 17), and the restoration of "*the righteous requirement of God*" (Rom 1:32) for "*worship in Spirit and truth*" (John 4:23-24) through the enthroned and glorified Jesus Christ, which is to eat from "*the tree of life*" (Gen 2:9, 3:22-24). To worship God the way God desires to be worshiped is the only means by which all the commandments of God are fulfilled, that is, loving God with all of one's being (Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and loving one another (John 13:34). Therefore, an essential part of this faith practice is that the church must properly understand and apply biblical principles relative to worship.

There are three Greek verbs that relate directly to the biblical context of worship to God:

- 1.) προσκυνέω (*proskouneō*; 228 LXX, 60 NT), from κυνέω (*kouneō*; means "to kiss"; 0 LXX, 0 NT)
- 2.) λατρεύω (*latreuō*; 109 LXX, 21 NT) and the cognate noun λατρεία (*latreia*; 9 LXX, 5 NT)
- 3.) σέβω (*sebō*; 26 LXX, 10 NT)

In contrast, the verb δουλεύω (*douleuō*, 157 LXX, 25 NT) means "to serve" or "to be a servant," is not used in the context of formal worship to God. (1Thess 1:9 is a rare exception.) In particular, the uses of this verb in Eph 6:7 and Col 3:23-24 are frequently misrepresented as meaning that anything and everything can be considered worship if one has the right mindset of "*serving as to the Lord*." Paul intended no inference of worship to God in these exhortations concerning service to men. He was simply telling the children of God to do their chores in this world, whether voluntary or compulsory, with a good attitude and one's best effort, as if doing the same thing for the Lord. Both of these passages are explicit that this *service* is "*from the soul*" (ἐκ ψυχῆς), and not "*in the Spirit*" (ἐν πνεύματι; e.g. Eph 5:18, 6:18, Col 1:8). In short, it is not a biblical principle that any *service* that a child of God might render to men can potentially constitute worship to God. God is very particular concerning worship to Himself, that "*the praise should be from God and not from men.*" (Rom 2:29)

More problematic, however, has been the confusion in the church relative to singing religious songs. Given the scarcity of a correct understanding of God's two-dimensional plan of salvation, for which God's end-purpose is according to "*the obedience from faith*" (Rom 1:5, 16:26) into "*spiritually-spoken worship*" (Rom 12:1), which is the functional spiritual punctiliar realm of *sanctifying* justification, the historical practice in most church traditions has ostensibly been to worship God through singing songs. In other words, not understanding and fulfilling the commandments of God according to the faith practice of "*spiritually-spoken worship*" the church has largely created its own form of worship

through singing songs and, as discussed above, by attributing many services that are ἐκ ψυχῆς ("from the soul") as constituting worship to God.

To complicate matters further, this failure to understand *sanctifying* justification as the end-purpose of God's salvation plan in this present age of the New Covenant has caused misunderstanding concerning Paul's meaning with "*singing praises with the Spirit*" (1Cor 14:15) and "*spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart with the Lord*" (Eph 5:19). These two Pauline 'song' references, which are synonymous with "*spiritually-spoken worship*," are often misappropriated as referring to singing cognitively with one's own mind. Rather, when a Spirit-regenerated believer "*sings with the spirit*," his or her "*mind in unfruitful*" (1Cor 14:14). These two Pauline references to spiritual singing cannot be understood absent an understanding of Paul's two-dimensional theology of justification, for which Romans is his systematic theology. Refer to the *Statement on Justification* at LBCDFW.org (the 'Who We Are' button) for a summary of Pauline theology, which outlines the scriptural basis for both positional *forensic* justification and functional *sanctifying* justification.

There are 220 Old Testament and 12 New Testament references to song and singing. The two Old Testament references to song that are also within an explicit context of formal worship (less than one percent, 2Chr 29:28-30 and Psa 66:4) both represent singing as a separate accompaniment to the worship. In other words, the singing is not a part of the formal act of worship toward God.

The Old Testament references to song and instruments in the context of the temple service were essentially a construct of King David, who was a lover of music and song and the author of most of the Psalms. In other words, David established music and song as a manmade adjunct to accompany the formal Mosaic worship requirement. And while singing might ostensibly seem to be for God, the reality is that singing is for the emotional benefit of the worshipers.

The New Testament makes reference to both singing with the mind (Matt 26:30, Mark 14:26, 1Cor 14:15, and Jas 5:13), which like the Old Testament is always for the emotional benefit of the singers and hearers, and singing with the Spirit (Acts 16:25, Rom 15:9, 1Cor 14:15, Eph 5:19, Col 3:16, Heb 2:12, Rev 5:9, 14:3), which is the dying-to-self according to "*the obedience from faith*," wherefore "*the mind is unfruitful*," and is always a service of worship to the Lord.

Summary:

Biblical worship is most always associated with a humbled posture, becoming fulfilled in the New Testament dying-to-self according to *the obedience from faith* into *spiritually-spoken worship*. The Old Testament refers often to bowing down, bowing low, kneeling, faces to the ground, and falling on the face. In short, all singing through the human intellectual faculty is in effect for the emotional benefit of the singers and hearers. In other words, singing songs through the instrumental faculty of the human mind is not a biblical form of worship to God. Rather, insofar as singing *with the mind* having replaced biblical worship, singing songs is nothing other than man-made religion, which has effectively usurped and replaced *spiritually-spoken worship to God*.

Church traditions that attribute singing songs (or any other activity that is governed by the human mind) as formal worship to God are lacking in biblical support and have misled the children of God. Furthermore, giving a ‘song leader’ in the church the title of ‘worship leader’ not only lacks biblical support, but usurps God’s self-appointed role and ministry to be His own worship leader, for there is now only “*the ‘in the hidden’ Jew and circumcision of the heart in the Spirit—not in the letter—out of whom the praise is not from men, but from God.*” (Rom 2:29) In other words, as the resurrected and glorified Jesus speaks from the throne of God in heaven, so then the subjected children of God on earth worship the Father with Spirit-empowered prayers of unknowable groanings. (Matt 16:19, Rom 8:26)

Scripture References:

The following is a list of biblical references to both song and worship, with a brief description of the usage for each reference. The clear and irrefutable conclusion to be drawn from the biblical usage of the terms “song” and “worship” is that the formal biblical act of worship to God is never in the form of singing, apart from New Covenant “*singing praises with the spirit*” (1Cor 14:15), that is, “*spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart with the Lord*” (Eph 5:19).

Old Testament ‘Song’ references:

- a. The people sing to the Lord, a hymnal (Exo 15:1, Num 21:17)
- b. The Song of Moses as a witness against Israel (Deut 31:19-32:47)
- c. The Song of Deborah (Jud 5:1-31)
- d. The women sing and dance to celebrate David’s victory (1Sam 18:6-7, 21:11, 29:5)
- e. David’s song of thanksgiving (2Sam 22:1-51)
- f. Solomon wrote 1005 songs (1Kgs 4:32)
- g. David institutes the service of song in the house of the Lord (1Chr 6:31-53)
- h. Singing and instruments and dancing before the ark. (1Chr 13:8, 15:1-29)
- i. David’s psalm of thanksgiving (1Chr 16:7-36)
- j. Song and instruments to accompany the temple service (1Chr 16:42)
- k. The temple musicians (1Chr 25:1-31)
- l. Singing and musical instruments to inaugurate the new temple (2Chr 5:12-13)
- m. Rejoicing and singing in the house of the Lord according to the order of David, the sacrifices being attributed to Moses (2Chr 23:18)
- n. Under Hezekiah, song and trumpets accompany the burnt offering and worship (2Chr 29:28-30)
- o. Under Josiah, singers according to the order of David accompany the burnt offering (2Chr 35:15)
- p. Singers of the Levites (Ezra 2:41, 65, 70, 7:7, 24, 10:24)
- q. Levitical singers for the service of the house of God (Neh 7:1, 44, 67, 73, 10:28, 39, 11:22-23, 12:8, 27-29, 42, 45-47, 13:5, 10)
- r. The Psalms (mostly Davidic) have 110 verses that make reference to song and singing, spread rather evenly throughout, 42 being in the Psalm title or verse 1.
- s. Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard (Isa 5:1-7)
- t. Judah’s Song of Victory (Isa 26:1-21)
- u. Hymn of Praise pointing to New Covenant worshiper (Isa 42:10-20)
- v. A victory call, “Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Jer 20:13)
- w. The return of the exiles: “For thus says the Lord, ‘Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob.’” (Jer 31:7)
- x. Singers in the temple inner-court (Eze 40:44)
- y. The songs of the temple (Amos 8:3)

New Testament ‘Song’ references:

- a. Jesus and the disciples sing a hymn at the end of the Passover meal in the upper room. (Matt. 26:30, Mark 14:26)
- b. Paul and Silas praying were praising God. In other words, they were not praying and singing, but praising by praying. (Acts 16:25)
- c. Paul quotes Psa 18:49 as reference to the spokenness of spiritual worship. (Rom 15:9)
- d. Paul differentiates unknowable prayer and song *with the spirit* from cognitive prayer and song *with the mind*. (1Cor 14:15)
- e. Paul differentiates “*speaking in Psalms and hymns among yourselves*,” which is with the mind, from “*singing and making melody in spiritual songs in your heart to the Lord*,” which is in the Spirit. (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16)
- f. Quoting Psalm 22:22, the author of Hebrews attributes Jesus as singing the praises of the saints in the functional spiritual punctiliar realm of *sanctifying* justification. (Heb 2:12)
- g. James exhorts the one who is cheerful to *sing praises*, clearly being a cognitive act with the mind. (Jas 5:13)
- h. Reference to a *new song* (Rev 5:9, 14:3; cf. Psa 33:3, 40:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1, Isa 42:10), clearly a reference to the unknowable song according to “*the obedience from faith*” (Rom 1:5, 16:26) into “*spiritually-spoken worship*” (Rom 12:1).
- i. Reference to both the Song of Moses and the Song of the Lamb. (Rev 15:3)

Old Testament ‘Worship’ references:

Directly:

- a. Bowing down, bowing low, kneeling, faces to the ground (many scriptural references)

Indirectly:

- b. Serving God
- c. Sacrificing animals
- d. Do His deed/commandments
- e. Reading Scripture
- f. Swear (oaths) by His name (Deut 6:13, 10:20)
- g. **Accompanied** separately by singers (שִׁיר) and trumpets (2Chr 29:28-30; separately, they all bowed down and worshiped)
- h. Confession (Neh 9:3)
- i. Purification (Neh 12:45)
- j. Accompanied by rejoicing with trembling (Psa 2:11)
- k. In holy attire (Psa 29:2)
- l. **Accompanied** separately with singing praises (Psa 66:4)
- m. At His holy mountain (Psa 99:9, Isa 27:13)
- n. At His footstool/throne (Psa 132:7)
- o. In the house of the Lord (Jer 26:2)
- p. At the gate of the inner court (Eze 46:3)
- q. At the appointed feasts (Eze 46:9)
- r. To keep the feast of Booths at Jerusalem (Zec 14:16-17)

New Testament ‘Worship’ references:

- a. Fall down before Jesus and make offerings (Matt 2:11)
- b. Confess the Son of God (Matt 14:33)
- c. Taking hold of the feet of the resurrected Jesus (Matt 28:9)

- d. When they saw the resurrected Jesus (Matt 28:17)
- e. What we (the two Paracletes sent by God the Father) *oida*-know and bear witness (John 3:11)
- f. In Spirit and truth (John 4:23-24)
- g. Believing (John 9:38)
- h. According to the Way, believing everything in the Scriptures (Acts 24:14)
- i. Presenting your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, and well-pleasing to God, which is your spiritually-spoken service of worship (Rom 12:1)
- j. Falling on one's face (1Cor 14:25)
- k. In the Spirit of God, boasting in Christ Jesus, having no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:3)
- a. Falling down before the One seated on the throne (Rev 4:10, 5:14, 7:11, 11:16, 19:4)
- b. Fearing God and giving God glory (Rev 14:7, 15:4)
- c. Worship God (Rev 22:9)

Excursus:

So deeply seated is the *singing* tradition in the fabric of contemporary Christian faith practice, that the proper biblical vernacular term “*worship*” has been hijacked and morphed, such that it is ostensibly now synonymous with singing songs. To complicate matters, most churches have also usurped God’s role and responsibility as His own worship leader (Rom 2:29) by appointing so-called worship leaders, who are for all intents and purposes talented stage performers leading their audiences in singing songs. These extra-biblical church appointees are often highly venerated individuals within the church community, whose influence can even approach that of the teacher-pastor (Eph 4:11), the one responsible to guard church doctrines and traditions from unbiblical intrusions. Sadly, correcting such an entrenched human mindset and tradition is not an easy task and often will not happen except with a high cost. This was demonstrated by the European Religious Wars of 1500-1650, which were fought to secure the Reformation battle cries of *sola fide* (only faith) and *sola scriptura* (only Scripture).

To use a secular example, the founding fathers of America faced a significant prewar domestic constituency who would choose to remain bound and subservient to an oppressive so-called “common wealth” king whose life and loyalty was across an ocean and on another continent. Centuries of tradition had blinded these New World colonial subjects to the oppressed state of their being and the possibility of another reality. They did not know what they did not know. They were comfortably numb to their bondage, and they were blinded by fear to the alternative of a better life that freedom from their bondage would afford them. They believed that their safety, prosperity, and identity were indelibly tied to this foreign king. To this falsehood Samuel Adams declared, “*This is a vulgar error, which like many others, has gained credit by being confidently repeated.*” (Speech delivered to the State House by Samuel Adams; Philadelphia; August 1, 1776.) It would be the blood and sacrifice of their countrymen that would tear them from the comfort of their traditions and bring them into a strange new reality in freedom.

Such is the current state of an enslaved modern Christian church relative to freedom in the strange New World of the New Covenant, freedom that God has made available *through faith* in the cross and the empty grave, freedom which is only accessed according to *the obedience from faith*.