

“Piper shows how true preaching and true worship go hand in hand in the most natural way. This takes place when the preacher works carefully to exegete the text through the anointing of the Spirit and comes to the pulpit under the same influence. The goal is to bring out the spiritual reality behind each text of the Scriptures to honor the intention of the human writer, but especially to exalt the glory of the divine author who inspired the text. This is what this book is all about. Read it slowly, digest its content carefully, and then bring its principles into practice piously.”

Miguel Núñez, Senior Pastor, International Baptist Church of Santo Domingo; President and Founder, Wisdom and Integrity Ministries

“John Piper writes with the expository conviction we expect, encouraging preachers not only to say what is true but also to *show* how the Bible establishes that truth. He writes beyond our expectations, however, when putting his pastoral finger on the chief expository errors within our ranks: the moralistic error (‘Just do it!’) and the replacement error (‘You can’t do it, so merely enjoy justification by imputed righteousness’). Finally, he advocates for the preaching we need, urging that in all our expositions ‘we would make a beeline *from* the cross to the resurrection to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the giving of Scripture to the blood-bought miracle of new birth to the mystery of *Christ in you, the hope of glory*, to the beauties of Christ-permeating, Christ-exalting self-control and sober-mindedness and love.’ This is great writing to exult the glorious power of the gospel that pervades all of Scripture.”

Bryan Chapell, Pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, Illinois

“John Piper’s new book on preaching is a dream come true. I have personally been waiting for this book for nearly twenty years. Piper’s first book on preaching was monumental. This book is even better. It was worth the wait.”

Jason C. Meyer, Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis

“Piper has written more than fifty books, so there is something a bit outrageous in suggesting that *Expository Exultation* is his best. But such a case can be made. Perhaps that is because I, like John, am a preacher, and was profoundly instructed, rebuked, encouraged, and given even greater hope for my ministry through the insights he provides in this book. I trust John has many more volumes to come, but for my money, this is the culmination of his contribution to pastoral ministry. If you’re not a pastor or preacher, read it anyway. If you are in full-time ministry, dig deeply into this immense treasure trove of homiletical insight. I’m confident that if you do, it will radically transform your approach to God’s Word and the passion with which you preach it.”

Sam Storms, Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision, Bridgeway Church, Oklahoma City

“John Piper’s *Expository Exultation* is fittingly dedicated to Martyn Lloyd-Jones, because it may well do for the present generation what *Preaching and Preachers* did uniquely for previous ones—instruct, humble, challenge, and inspire. Here are heat and light combined—what Lloyd-Jones called ‘logic on fire.’ All the emphases we have come to expect from Piper are here: God-centered, Christ-focused, Spirit-imbued, with rigorous attention to the text of Scripture and passionate theological conviction. Piper displays a take-you-by-the-throat honesty and a sense of the weight of glory that marks true worship. Here is a book about preaching in which God himself takes center stage. *Expository Exultation* is a stunning utterance, a leave-you-wanting-more kind of book. It prostrates us in the dust, then sets us on our feet, and thus makes us want to be and do better for God. It is simply a must-read for every preacher of the gospel.”

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary

“The first time I heard John Piper preach the Bible, I was in my early twenties and had never experienced anything like the passion and power that proceeded from a zeal rooted and tethered to the text. This became for me a blueprint to be emulated. I am grateful that he has written the great lessons of over thirty years of ‘expository exultation’ for the generations to come. There is gold in these pages, and I am eager for the next group of those who will herald the good news of the gospel to be shaped by it. We are in desperate need of serious preaching in these serious days.”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas;
President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network; author, *The Mingling of Souls* and *The Explicit Gospel*

“It is a refreshing change to read a book on preaching that contains almost nothing about technique but rather focuses on the Bible’s teaching about the nature and awesome privilege of the task—and, above all, on the majesty of God, whose servants we are and whose glories we are called to proclaim. Many preachers will be spurred on by these pages, as I have been, to keep giving themselves to the solemn and joyful tasks of explaining Scripture and exulting in God.”

Vaughan Roberts, Rector, St Ebbe’s, Oxford, England; Director,
The Proclamation Trust; author, *God’s Big Picture*

Expository Exultation

Other Books by John Piper

Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian

Brothers, We Are Not Professionals

The Dangerous Duty of Delight

Desiring God

Don't Waste Your Life

Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die

Finally Alive

Five Points

Future Grace

God Is the Gospel

God's Passion for His Glory

A Hunger for God

Let the Nations Be Glad!

A Peculiar Glory

The Pleasures of God

Reading the Bible Supernaturally

Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ

The Supremacy of God in Preaching

Think

This Momentary Marriage

What Jesus Demands from the World

When I Don't Desire God

Expository Exultation

Christian Preaching as Worship

John Piper

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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To
Martyn Lloyd-Jones,
who never trifled with the word of God

“We are not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word,
but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God,
in the sight of God we speak in Christ. . . .
We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word.”
—The apostle Paul

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Introduction

The Roots and Scope of Expository Exultation

I have dedicated this book to Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), minister of Westminster Chapel in London for almost thirty years. No preacher has inspired in me a sense of the greatness of preaching the way Lloyd-Jones did. When he preached, I felt, as with no others, the weight of the glory of heralding the very word of God. When he gave his lectures on preaching at Westminster Theological Seminary in 1969, he gave two reasons why he was willing:

My reason for being very ready to give these lectures is that to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called. If you want something in addition to that, I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching; and as it is the great and most urgent need in the Church, it is obviously the great need of the world also.¹

It was typical of Lloyd-Jones to state things in superlatives. His aim was not to minimize other callings. He knew as well as anyone that in the last day the Lord will reward a person's faithfulness, not his office. He knew that the one who would be great must be the servant of all. And he knew that "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7).

But he also knew that to be an ambassador of the King of ages is a

1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 9.

staggering privilege and burden. He had tasted something of the glory that moved the apostle Paul to say that faithful servants of God’s word are “worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 5:17). He had trembled at the warning, “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). The supernatural nature of his calling amazed him: “As commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:17).

He knew that the great aim of preaching is the white-hot worship of God’s people. And he knew that this worship is nothing small or constricted or parochial. It finds expression in weekly worship services and daily sacrifices of love, and finally will be freely and fully released in the perfecting of the bride of Christ and her cosmic habitation. And so he knew that this worship is as personal as the heart’s deepest desire, as expansive as the universe, as enduring as eternity, and as visible as the radiance of love and the renewal of creation.

He knew that the Bible is true and exists for the glory of God. Therefore, reading it and preaching it share that goal. The unrelenting seriousness of Lloyd-Jones’s handling of the glories of God’s word has been a great inspiration to me in a world that seems incapable of serious joy. I am deeply thankful that God raised him up in the middle of the twentieth century and gave me a taste of what J. I. Packer meant when he said that Lloyd-Jones’s preaching came to him with the force of electric shock and brought him “more of a sense of God than any other man.”²

The Origin of This Book

This book is an organic outgrowth of two previous books. Together they form a kind of trilogy. The first volume, *A Peculiar Glory* (2016), focuses on how we can know that the Bible is God’s word and is completely true. The second volume, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* (2017), focuses on how to read the Bible—specifically, how to read it in the pursuit of its own ultimate goal that God be worshiped with white-hot affection by all the peoples of the world. This third volume, *Expository Exultation*, now asks, If the Bible is completely true and is

2. Quoted in Christopher Catherwood, *Five Evangelical Leaders* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1985), 170.

to be read supernaturally in the pursuit of worship, what does it mean to preach this word, and how should we do it?

Foundations of Worship and Preaching

Most preachers assume that their congregations should gather weekly for corporate worship. Many of us have devoted little time and effort to justifying this practice from the New Testament. We take it for granted. Further, most pastors assume that preaching should be part of that corporate gathering. This too is taken for granted by most, though some fall prey to the predictable put-downs of preaching in every generation. In fact, both of these assumptions—that we should gather for worship and that we should preach—do have explicit biblical foundations. And preachers need to know them. On what basis does the congregation gather for worship, and why is preaching part of it?

Focus on Preaching in Worship

As I set out to write a book on preaching, I assume that perhaps 95 percent of the preaching in the world happens in “worship services” of some kind—whether with a dozen believers in the shade of a tree or with five thousand people in a modern auditorium. Preaching in such worship contexts is what I will be defending and describing and celebrating.

The reason for this focus is not that I don’t think preaching belongs on the streets, or in the stadiums, or on the campus quad, or in the jails, or before kings. It emphatically does belong there. I would certainly like to see more of it there. The reason is that I believe with all my heart that preaching in corporate worship is essential for the health and mission of the church. God has appointed preaching in worship, I will argue, as one great means of accomplishing his ultimate goal in the world.

Why Preach in Corporate Worship?

I am aware that my conception of worship and preaching is not shared by all Christians. Nor do all Christians believe that preaching is an essential part of corporate worship. So the first task I set for myself is to show from Scripture that Christian congregations should gather for

corporate worship and that preaching should be part of that gathering. That's what I do in parts 1 and 2.

Part 1 is a description and a defense of corporate worship. It may seem strange, in a book on preaching, to devote so much space to corporate worship. But if you believe, as I do, that corporate worship is divinely appointed for a unique and indispensable impact on God's people, and that preaching is uniquely designed by God to assist and express that worship, then the strangeness might vanish. The most important thing to establish about corporate worship is what the *essence* of it is. There will always be a thousand variations of the *forms* of worship around the world in thousands of cultures. But what is the essence? That's the task of chapter 1. What emerges, then, in chapter 2 is that the essence of worship leads Christians to discover how beautifully fitting it is for the people of Christ to gather for corporate worship.

Then, in part 2, I try to show what preaching is and why it belongs in corporate worship. It is precisely *what* preaching and worship *are* that justifies that they should be—and that they should be *together*. So in part 2 I try to show how this extraordinary form of communication—and which I call “expository exultation”—became a biblically sanctioned, normative part of corporate worship. The reasons are both historical and theological (chapters 3 and 4), reaching into the Trinitarian nature of God (chapter 5).

Preaching as Worship and for Worship

One of the primary burdens of this book is to show that preaching not only *assists* worship, but also *is* worship. The title *Expository Exultation* is intended to communicate that this unique form of communication is both a rigorous intellectual clarification of the reality revealed through the words of Scripture and a worshipful embodiment of the value of that reality in the preacher's exultation over the word he is clarifying. Preachers should think of worship services not as exultation in the glories of God accompanied by a sermon. They should think of musical and liturgical exultation (songs, prayers, readings, confession, ordinances, and more) accompanied and assisted by *expository* exultation—preaching as worship. Music is one way of raising and carrying the heart's exultation. Preaching is another. I will argue that preaching *is* worship. And preaching serves worship.

Worship: All of Life, Forever

When I say “preaching serves worship,” I don’t mean that it serves only “worship services”—not even *eternal* worship services. When I say that the ultimate goal of Scripture and preaching is that God be worshiped with white-hot affection by all the peoples of the world, I am referring to the complete transformation of all God’s people and the final renovation and renewal of heaven and earth (Rom. 8:19–23). This transformation of God’s people and this renovation of the universe will be such that its greatest effect will be to magnify the supreme value and excellence of God.

What we will see, in more detail and with biblical argument, is that worship means consciously knowing and treasuring and showing the supreme worth and beauty of God. When I say that preaching serves this worship, I am thinking of it in at least three expressions:

1. This worship may be expressed in worship services (Ps. 34:3). We worship together as we *know* God truly in song lyrics, prayers, and other expressions of right doctrine; and as we *treasure* God with awakened affections for his excellence; and as we *show* this in heartfelt singing and praying and hearing—participating in all the forms suitable for the service of worship.
2. This worshipful knowing and treasuring and showing the supreme worth and beauty of God also may happen by magnifying Christ in life and death (Phil. 1:20), as we rejoice in God’s sovereign care through the painful sacrifices of loving others (Matt. 5:11–12; Phil. 3:8–10). All of our physical existence becomes “a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1).
3. Such worship will happen completely and perfectly in the resurrection, when we know even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12), our joyful treasuring of God is perfected (Ps. 16:11), and the fullness of joy’s outward display is unimpeded by sin (Heb. 12:23; Phil. 3:12).

This God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, Spirit-sustained worship—expressed in worship services, daily sacrifices of love, and eternal perfection—is the goal of *Expository Exultation*, the act and the book.

So, as I said at the beginning of this introduction, there is nothing

small or constricted or parochial about the goal of preaching. It is as personal as the heart's deepest desire, as expansive as the universe, as enduring as eternity, and as visible as the sacrifices of love and the renewal of creation. But the goal is radically God-focused. The Bible exists for the glory of God, now and forever. Reading it and *preaching* it share that goal.

Preaching in the Hands of God, with All Our Might

Worship is not a merely natural act. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural. Therefore, to say that preaching is worship and serves worship raises two questions. One relates to how the preacher is taken up into the supernatural. The other relates to how the preacher uses all his natural powers in the service of the miracle of worship. With regard to the first, we ask: How can preaching, as a human act, also *be* a work of God and *serve* a work of God? How does the preacher preach so that it is not he but God who is acting (1 Cor. 15:10)? How does he become an instrument of God so that his preaching becomes an act of worship and a means of awakening worship? That is the focus of part 3.

The second question is this: What about the preacher's use of his natural powers? Or, what natural means are legitimate in the pursuit of supernatural ends? If the aim of preaching is the Spirit-given worship of the people, can human thinking, explaining, and eloquence be legitimate? If not, what's left of preaching? If so, how does the use of such natural powers become a divine means of spiritual worship? Part 4 addresses these questions.

Text, Reality, and Preaching

Part 5 deals with the question, Do we preach the text or the reality revealed through it? Two of my greatest burdens in writing this book are related to each other paradoxically—as paradoxical as the relation between the divine and human in Jesus Christ. Jesus was human with flesh and bones. But he was so much more. But the more is known through knowing the incarnate man. That's why Paul referred to the “glory of God *in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor. 4:6). The Bible is like the incarnation in this regard. It is human—words, phrases, clauses, logic, narrative. But it is so much more. It carries and communicates

realities that are vastly more than words. You might say, “the glory of God *in the words of Scripture*.”

Therefore, it is not enough to say, “What we preach is the text.” Nor is it enough to say, “What we preach is the reality behind the text.” These two inadequate views correspond to my two burdens.

Two Burdens: Text and Reality

One burden is to plead with preachers to give rigorous attention to the wording of their texts and help people see how the very words of the text reveal the points the preacher is making about reality. The other is to plead with preachers to penetrate deeply into the reality that the words are pointing to. These realities—whether aspects of human nature, God’s nature, the way of salvation, the horrors of evil, or the mysteries of providence—are profound. The aim of preaching is that our people see these realities for themselves *in the text*. The certainty of their sight should rest in seeing reality *in the text*, not in the opinion of the preacher. So part 5 deals with “the reality factor” and aims to illuminate the relationship between rigorous attention to the text and radical penetration into reality.

An Author’s All-Encompassing Vision of Reality

Part 6 asks more specifically: What is the reality that we preach? It becomes clear that it is inadequate to answer: Preach the reality that the text aims to communicate. This answer is not wrong. But it provides no help in answering the question, What aspects of an author’s all-encompassing vision of reality should be included in the exposition of the text? I argue that we must keep in view the author’s larger vision of reality (chapter 12). Otherwise, we may draw inferences from the text that are not there. Sometimes this larger vision is communicated in the nearer context. Sometimes not.

Overarching Biblical Concerns in All Our Preaching

If keeping the author’s overall vision of reality in view is essential, how shall the preacher decide what aspects of this all-encompassing vision of reality to include in his preaching? My approach to answering this question (part 6) will be to ask three additional questions based on three assumptions. First, I assume that the more ultimate the overarching goal

of an author's meaning, the more important it is that it be woven into our preaching of particular texts. So I ask, What is the ultimate goal of the biblical authors?

Second, I assume that what the apostle Paul says is indispensable to *his* preaching should be indispensable to *ours*. So I ask, What does Paul say is indispensable to his preaching?

Third, I assume that there is a way to live the Christian life that leads to final salvation, and there is a way to try to live it that leads to destruction, and that understanding this is relevant for the right handling of every text. So I ask, What way of life is necessary for final salvation?

The answer I give to the first question is: The ultimate goal of the biblical authors is the glorification of God (chapters 13 and 14). The answer to the second question is: Paul said that proclaiming Christ crucified was indispensable to his preaching (chapters 15 and 16). The answer to the third question is: The way of life that is necessary for final salvation begins with being justified by faith alone and proceeds by walking in love through the power of the Holy Spirit by faith. This way of life may be called the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26)—the holiness—without which our people will not see the Lord (chapters 17 and 18).

You can see that this is a Trinitarian depiction of the reality we preach—living for the glory of God, magnifying the crucified Christ, walking by the Spirit. I try to make the case that these three realities will not be seen clearly if we think of them as separate from the specific wording of the texts of Scripture. Preaching that drifts (or leaps) away from the particularities of the text in order to preach the reality of the glory of God, or the cross of Christ, or the power of the Spirit, becomes untethered from divine authority and spiritual power. The inspired text of Scripture is where our authority lies. And it is in the very wording of the inspired text where the most vivid, reliable, and explosive revelations of these realities shine forth.

Faithful to the Old Testament's Inspiration

Finally, the question presses to be answered whether we can be faithful to the intentions of the Old Testament authors—who were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21)—if we draw out of their texts a steady emphasis on the glory of God, the cross of Christ, and the obedi-

ence of faith. To answer that question is the aim of part 7. My answer is yes, we can be faithful to their intentions. In fact, since these Old Testament authors yearned to show more clearly the future implications of their teaching (1 Pet. 1:10–12), they would regard it as contrary to their intentions if twenty-first-century emissaries of the Messiah preached from their writings as though he had not come!

Ultimate Goal

A single ultimate purpose has given rise to the existence, the reading, and the preaching of Christian Scripture. The purpose is that God's infinite worth and beauty be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood-bought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation. In the pursuit of that greatest of all purposes, I have written *A Peculiar Glory* to show how we may know that the Bible is the infallible word of God. For that same purpose, I have written *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* to show how we may discover the meaning of that infallible word. Finally, the present volume, *Expository Exultation*, aims to show how preaching becomes and begets the blood-bought, Spirit-wrought worship of the worth and beauty of God.

God has ordained that until his ultimate purpose of white-hot worship is achieved in the regular gatherings of his people, the everyday sacrifices of love, and the everlasting pleasures of the age to come, reading the Bible supernaturally and preaching its reality by the Spirit will not cease from the earth. God's purpose on the earth will advance through Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting, God-centered churches, where the gravity and gladness of eternal worship is awakened and rehearsed each week in the presence and power of expository exultation.

PART 1

A Setting for Preaching

God's People Gathered for Worship

The Essence of Corporate Worship

This is a book about preaching in worship. I am hoping to show that preaching *is* worship and *serves* worship. I conceded in the introduction that not all Christians think of the weekly gathering of God's people as worship.¹ If you are among those who think, "Since the New Testament never calls the regular gatherings of the church 'worship' or 'worship services,' therefore it is futile to make a case that we should think of our weekly gatherings that way," may I put some provocative bait on my hook in the hopes of snagging a bit more of your attention?

It may be that we don't mean the same thing by "worship." Maybe if I clarify my view of worship, you might not draw the same lines between services for "teaching" or "edification" or "exhortation," on the one hand, and "worship," on the other.

My provocative bait is to say that the plan to meet weekly, say, for teaching but not worship is like the plan to marry without sex. Or eating without taste. Or discovery without delight. Or miracles without wonder. Or gifts without gratefulness. Or warnings without fear. Or repentance without regret. Or resolves without zeal. Or longings without satisfaction. Or seeing without savoring.

Essence of Worship: Savoring What We See of God

But if you believe, as I do, that *seeing* the spiritual beauty of biblical truth without *savoring* it is sin, then you probably will be slow to

1. David Peterson, former lecturer in New Testament at Moore Theological College, Sydney, Australia, has lamented this development. He notes that in reaction against the distortion of the language of worship as referring *only* to a liturgical act, instead of a whole life, "many seem to have abandoned any application of the language to what we do in church. With this development has come an emphasis on meeting for fellowship and mutual encouragement, with little apparent expectation of encountering God together." Accessed June 23, 2017, http://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/ministrythinking/a_church_without_worship.

minimize worship as a reason for gathering as a church—indeed the ultimate reason. And, yes, I do believe that savoring the glory of God is the essence of true worship.

I wonder if you agree with that. Do you agree that the inner essence of worship is savoring the glory of God in Christ, or being satisfied with all that God is for you in Jesus? Or is that too subjective? Be sure to notice that I am using the word *essence*, not *totality*. I'm not saying that savoring what we see of God is the *totality* of worship—but the essence, without which worship is empty (Matt. 15:8–9).

So it seems to me that the first thing we must do, if we are to make a biblical case for preaching as part of God's plan for the regular worship gatherings of Christ's people, is to make the biblical case that there should be such gatherings. The burden of that argument comes in chapter 2. But it hangs on the claim that the *essence* of worship is the heart's experience of affections that magnify the beauty and worth of God. This is true whether worship is thought of as the obedience to Christ in daily life, or as the tasks of church ministry, or as the gathering for corporate praise.

I have argued elsewhere in some detail² that worship in the New Testament, compared to worship in the Old Testament, moved toward a focus on something radically simple and inward, with manifold external expressions in life and liturgy that could be adapted over the centuries in thousands of different cultures. Worship in the New Testament took on the character suited for a *go-tell* religion for all nations (Matt. 28:18–20), as opposed to the detailed rituals prescribed in the Old Testament suited for a *come-see* religion (1 Kings 10:1–13). In other words, what we find in the New Testament is a stunning degree of nonspecificity for worship as an outward form and a radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart.

Biblical Pointer to the Inner Essence of Worship

We can see pointers to this. For one example, in John 4:23 where Jesus said, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such

2. See John Piper, “The Inner Simplicity and Outer Freedom of Worldwide Worship,” in *Let the Nations Be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 239–54.

people to worship him.” I take “in spirit” to mean that this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event, not mainly as an outward, bodily event (cf. John 3:6). And I take “in truth” to mean that this true worship is a response to true views of God and is shaped and guided by true views of God.

For this and other reasons, I argue that Jesus broke decisively any necessary connection between worship and its outward and localized associations. It is mainly something inward and free from locality. “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father” (John 4:21). This inwardness of the essence of worship is what Jesus had in mind when he said, “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me” (Matt. 15:8–9). When the heart is far from God, worship is vain, empty, and nonexistent, no matter how proper the forms are. The experience of the heart is the defining, vital, indispensable essence of worship.

So it appears in the New Testament that worship is significantly de-institutionalized, delocalized, deexternalized. The entire thrust is taken off of ceremonies and seasons and places and forms and shifted to what is happening in the heart—not just on Sunday but every day and all the time in all of life.

Godward Essence of Worship

This inner Godwardness in all of life is what Paul intends when he says, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). And, “Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:17). This is worship: *to act in a way that shows the heart’s valuing of the glory of God and the name of the Lord Jesus*. Or, as we said in the introduction, worship means consciously knowing and treasuring and showing the supreme worth and beauty of God.

But the New Testament uses those greatest of all worship sentences (1 Cor. 10:31 and Col. 3:17) without any reference to worship services. They describe life. Even when Paul calls us to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name

of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18–20), he makes no reference to a time or a place or a service. In fact, the key words are “always” and “for everything”—“giving thanks *always* and for *everything*” (cf. Col. 3:17). This may, in fact, be what we should do in a *worship service*, but it is not Paul’s burden to tell us that. His burden is to call for a radical, inward authenticity of worship and an all-encompassing pervasiveness of worship in all of life. Place and form are not of the *essence*. Spirit and truth are all-important.

Inner Experience Pervading All of Life

My conclusion, then, is that the New Testament shows a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship. At the same time, there is a radical intensification of worship as an inward, spiritual experience that has no bounds and pervades all of life. One of the reasons for this development in the New Testament is that the New Testament is not a detailed manual for worship services. It is, rather, a handbook for living out the Christian faith among thousands of cultures, which are free to put flesh on the spiritual and moral reality of worship found in the New Testament. This is why my most detailed argument for this view of worship in the New Testament is found in my book on missions.³ The radical shift from the detailed, outward worship forms in the Old Testament to the flexible forms expressing the inner essence of worship in the New Testament is a missiological issue, not just a theological one.

What Is This Inward, Spiritual Experience of Worship?

In place of the longer argument in *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, let me give just one biblical example of how the Bible reveals the inner essence of worship as the *savoring of the glory of God in Christ*, or *being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus*. I take it as a given that worship—whether an inner act of the heart, or an outward act of daily obedience, or an act of the congregation collectively—is a magnifying of God. That is, it is an act that consciously shows how magnificent God is. I say “consciously” because the moon and stars show how magnificent God is, but they are not worshiping, since they have no consciousness. But worship is a conscious act (inwardly or outwardly) that reveals

3. See note 2.

or expresses how great and glorious God is. Worship is knowing and treasuring and showing the worth of God.

One of the texts that reveals the inner essence of worship most clearly is Philippians 1:20–23:

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by *life* or by *death*. For to me to *live* is Christ, and to *die* is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

Notice that Paul’s passion in life is that what he does with his body, whether in life or death, will always be worship—that “Christ will be honored” (v. 20). The question then becomes, Does Paul tell us what kind of inner experience exalts Christ in this way? Yes, he does. He shows what it is by the way verse 21 is connected to verse 20.

Notice that “life” and “death” in verse 20 correspond to “live” and “die” in verse 21. And the connection between the two verses is that verse 21 gives the basis for how living and dying can magnify Christ. “It is my eager expectation and hope that . . . Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. *For* [because] to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Key Connection: Death Gain, Christ Magnificent

Verse 21 describes the inner experience that exalts Christ and is the essence of worship. To see this, let’s just take the pair “death” and “die.” “My hope is that Christ will be honored in my body . . . by *death*. . . . For to me . . . to *die* is gain.” That is, Christ will be magnified in my dying, if my dying is for my gain. There it is. The inner experience that magnifies Christ in dying is to experience death as gain.

But why is that? Why does my experiencing death as gain magnify the greatness of Christ? Verse 23 gives the answer: “My desire is to depart [that is, to die] and be with Christ, for that is far better.” This is what death does: it takes us to be “with Christ”—that is, it takes us into a fuller experience of Christ. We depart and we are with Christ, and that, Paul says, is gain. And when you experience death this way, Paul says, you magnify Christ—you make him look magnificent.

Experiencing Christ as gain in your dying magnifies Christ. It is the essence of worship in the hour of death—and in life (as Phil. 3:8 shows).

Gain Means All-Satisfying in Loss

We can now say that the inner essence of worship is cherishing Christ as gain—indeed as more gain than all that life can offer—family, career, retirement, fame, food, friends. The essence of worship is experiencing Christ as more gain than all that life can give. And this is what I mean with the words *savoring Christ, treasuring Christ, being satisfied with Christ*. This is the inner essence of worship. Because, Paul says, experiencing Christ as gain—greater satisfaction—in death is the way Christ is magnified in death.

I love to sum up what I call “Christian hedonism” with the phrase “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” If you wonder where I got that phrase, the answer is, right here in Philippians 1:20–21. Christ is magnified in my death, when in my death I am satisfied with him—when I experience death as gain because I gain him. Or another way to say it is that the essence of praising Christ is prizing Christ. Christ will be praised in my death, if in my death he is prized above life. The inner essence of worship is prizing Christ—cherishing him, treasuring him, being satisfied with him.

Next Step: Are Worship Services Essential?

We have not yet established that the regular gathering of God’s people for corporate worship is essential or normative. But if we can establish such importance from Scripture, this inner essence of worship would profoundly shape what we do and what preaching is designed to do. In preaching and in every other part of the service, we would “go hard after God,” meaning this: we would go hard after *satisfaction* in God, and go hard after God as our *prize*, and go hard after God as our *treasure*, our *soul food*, our *heart delight*, our spirit’s *pleasure*. Because we know from Philippians 1:20–21 and 3:8 that experiencing Christ as our supreme gain magnifies him, exalts him, worships him—whether on the street or in the sanctuary.

We turn now to this next step in the argument: Is there a biblical warrant for believing that regular gatherings of local Christian churches for corporate worship are essential for the achievement of God’s goal for his people in this world?

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