

## WORSHIP AS DEFINED FROM *ΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΕΩ*

Virgil Warren, PhD

Worship is an interpersonal act toward God as Thou. It is a conscious, spontaneous self-expression by a person to God as a present, superior, second person. The three most important points about it are that worship is interpersonal, that it recognizes God as superior, and that it is relationship to him as second person. That understanding of worship takes its cue from the word picture in *προσκυνέω*, “to bow low, kneel to, or kiss the feet of another.”

### I. Characteristics of Worship

- A. Conscious nature: involves awareness, imagination, concentration, deliberate action
  - 1. Not automatic (has not happened just because we are present with the right people)
  - 2. Not habit (does not happen just because we are at the right place, *etc.*)
- B. Spontaneous origin: arises from what happens between persons
  - 1. Not artificial
  - 2. Not dependent on form
  - 3. Not stimulus-response, not a reflex action (Pavlov’s dog)
- C. Self-expression: worship expresses me

James 5:16 (“*righteous person*”)  
 1 Corinthians 11:28 (“*prove themselves*”)  
 Isaiah 6:5 (“*Woe is me!*”)

- 1. Not vain repetition: Matthew 6:7
- 2. Not self-negation (as in Eastern religion with its loss of individual identity).  
 The goal is not to lose our sense of self in the worship experience.
- D. By a person: all the aspects of a person are involved here
  - 1. Understanding: 1 Corinthians 14:14-15 NOT JUST FEELING
  - 2. Feeling in the sense of “heartfelt”

3. Heart: Matthew **15:8**      NOT A MACHINE

## E. To God (motive)

1. Not to be seen by other people: Matthew **6:5-6**
2. Not to draw attention to ourselves
3. There is such a thing as public worship: prayer.

F. As present: God who is here, not distant

1 Kings **18:25-29** (omniscience: Psalm **139:7-10**)

G. Superior: humility ( $\pi\sigma\kappa\nu\nu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  means prostration before another person)

1. Not an equal  
closeness plus respect (cp. Dad or Mom)
2. Not overly familiar

## H. Second (direction): You = God

1. Not to other people: benediction  
fellowship  
exhortation  
celebration  
witness  
(though these take place in gathered services)
2. Not meditation, a third-person association; what we think about
3. Not communion, the sense of another's presence without relating
4. Not part of us (not directed inward), nor are we part of him. We do not have a "spark of the divine" within (divination); we have the interpersonal capacity ("the *imago dei*"), but in a different order of being.
5. More than life in general

## I. Person

1. Not a thing [idolatry; God as the universe or part of it: pantheism or panentheism]
2. Not a force particularly in the case of the Holy Spirit

3. Not an idea God of the gaps, symbol of perfection or ultimate causation

General observations:

1. Worship needs to be distinguished from life (even though we do everything as to the Lord).
2. Worship needs to be distinguished from witness.
3. Not everything we do in a worship service is worship.
4. Worship is not primarily an atmosphere, aura, a situation of quietness.

II. Examples of Worship

- A. Prayer
- B. Singing to God in praise, thanksgiving, and love
- C. Lord's Supper
- D. Giving (except giving alms since the direction is more toward the needy than toward God)

III. Validity of Worship Does Not Depend on

- A. Where: John 4:23
- B. How many are present: Matthew 18:20
- C. How often: Acts 2:46

Guidelines for acceptable worship derive from its interpersonal nature.

1. Worship maintains the personal identity of the worshiper. The idea is not to lose yourself. SELF-IDENTITY *vs.* SELF-NEGATION
2. Worship calls for centering attention on God. The idea is not to draw attention to the leader as a performer.
3. Worship maintains self-control. SELF-CONTROL *vs.* FRENZY/ECSTASY

4. Worship maintains proper recognition of God as superior, near, loving, holy, powerful, and the like. He should be exalted, not demeaned, respected and loved, and so on; worshipers do not act silly before their maker.
5. Worship is orderly but not formal.
6. Worship does not embarrass people before others.
7. Worship involves the self; hence, it is not wrapped up in form, ritual, externals, over-repetition.

#### SELF-EXPRESSION vs. SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

The approach above contrasts with using Romans 12:1, for example, as the characterizing statement about worship: “*So I urge you brothers, by God’s mercies to present your bodies living and holy sacrifices, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.*” Λατρεύω/λατρεία, the root Paul uses here, has a broader meaning: *service*. That includes “*rites and duties*” as in Hebrews 9:6: “*Now when these things have been thus prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, performing the divine worship*” (NASB). Λατρεύω/λατρεία ends up meaning what is done in connection with worshiping God not just what is done to God.

Such a broad definition makes everything that happens during a gathering of worshipers an aspect of worship. Identifying a common thread through such a variety of activities makes worship difficult to define. Fellowship, exhortation, singing the content of the Christian faith, preaching the message fall within the term just as surely as prayer, giving, and the Lord’s Supper. The result is to create an attitude toward God expressed in action. It ends up getting spread to life as a whole. Note Barth’s statement that “*life is prayer.*”

Keeping the emphasis on the vertical and on its second-person character makes the experience identifiable, more focused, more specific. It also drives home the fact that we do not do as much of it as we should.