

Defining Worship, Part I “The Essentials”

“...true worship is the highest and noblest activity of which man, by the grace of God is capable.”

James Montgomery Boice

It is an awesome task to attempt to put the arms of your mind around such an overwhelming subject as worship. At the end of the 20th century there has been a re-defining, re-directing and re-shaping of the understanding of worship which has led to much confusion and division. In the next few articles, I will try to bring us all to some shared understanding of the subject of worship which will in turn help establish a foundation for Sunday morning at Covenant.

The most direct teaching in the New Testament on worship is in John 4 where Jesus and the woman at the well have a *defining moment* concerning worship. Jesus ends his discussion with “*But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*” *John 4:23-24.*

Spirit and truth are the heart of worship. One does not exist without the other. They are two sides of the same coin. Truth is the foundation - spirit is the expression. John Piper restates this paradigm in this way:

“Worship is when the mind comprehends great truths about God and the heart kicks in with feelings of brokenness, forgiveness, awe, wonder, praise and adoration.”

One of the Holy Spirit’s main purpose is that of always pointing toward Christ. Therefore if our worship is Spirit driven then there will be an overwhelming reality of God-centeredness in all we do in our services. That is our chief end, “to glorify God.” The ultimate aim is to so experience God that our response moves us to bow our whole self before Him in praise and adoration. Therefore, the content of our singing and praying and welcoming and preaching and sharing must be conformed to the central object of worship, God. As we direct ourselves toward God, we earnestly seek the nearness of God according to James 4:8. The psalmist knew this intimately when he expressed the essence of worship in Psalm 73:28 “But as for me, the nearness of God is my good.”

O God, teach me to see You, and reveal Yourself to me when I seek you.
For I cannot seek You unless You first teach me.
Nor find You unless You first reveal Yourself to me.
Let me seek You in longing, and long for You in seeking.
Let me find You in love, and love You in finding.

Ambrose of Milan. 339-397

Ambrose’s poem invites us to keep God as the subject of our worship and reminds us that to do so will change our lives.

Cahaba Park is committed to worship that majors on the essentials, namely that God be the Subject and Object, the Infinite Creator of our worship. The essence of our worship has little to do with style, execution or “contemporary vs. traditional.” These are secondary issues. Worship is to be every bit God-centered. And as we are immersed in God’s splendor we will find ourselves thoroughly “lost in wonder, love and praise.”

Tom Saxon
Executive Director of Ministries