

What Is Worship?

Introduction. Worship has always been a main focal point of faith in God (Psalm 84:1-2, 10; 122:1). The “house of the Lord” is now our worship assemblies. Worship is a time when we honor and revere God, and where we reflect on ourselves.

But there is an teaching which says worship in the New Testament is not only about the weekly assemblies, but all of life — all that one does in the body — is worship. We will look at the roots of the doctrine, what worship really is, and the ramifications of this doctrine.

I. The Doctrine

A. The roots.

1. Carl Ketcherside: The doctrine reared its head decades ago in the writings of Ketcherside, who said in 1966 that “worship” was never applied in the Bible to describe a corporate assembly on the Lord’s day. He promoted his ideas declaring that the phrase “acts of worship” was unbiblical in his paper, *Mission Messenger*.
2. Charles Holt: Ketcherside’s disciple, Charles Holt, advanced the same ideas in two journals: *The Sentinal of Truth* and *The Examiner*. He repudiated the basic concept of an organized local church and collective worship.
3. Mike Root: He wrote, “Worship is a life given in obedience to God. It’s not a when or where proposition, but a what. It’s what we are. You can’t go to it or leave it, dress for it or from it, and you can’t start it or stop it ... it doesn’t open and close with prayer, and it doesn’t have a human leader or a special day” (*Unbroken Bread*, p. 115). He went on further, “You won’t find any place in the New Testament where these ideas of special presence or encounter with God are part of the Christian assembly ... There is no more special presence of God on Sunday morning at the church building than there is in your car Monday morning ... The idea of limited or special presence of God comes from temple traditions and cathedral thinking ... What happens in the assembly of the saints is totally up to you” (*Empty Baskets: Offering Your Life As Worship*, p. 185).

B. “All of life is worship” is self-explanatory.

1. If we take advocates at their word, I worship God when I ...
 - a) Sit in my home and watch television.
 - b) Bathe in the morning and brush my teeth.
 - c) Visit the sick or visit the dentist.
 - d) Talk about the gospel or talk about baseball.
 - e) Read my Bible or read *Robinson Crusoe*.
 - f) Talk to God in prayer or talk to my wife about her day.

- g) Pay my bills, shop for groceries, or drive my car.
- h) Hold hands with my wife or play games with my children.
- 2. When confronted by this list, some who advocate "all of life is worship" say they do not believe we worship when we bathe or visit the dentist. If so, they admit that they do not really believe all of life is worship — only some of life is. If only some of life is worship, then God must tell us what that is and when we are to do it.
- C. Advocates equate the words "service" and "worship" in Romans 12:1.
 - 1. They say that since worship is service, then any kind of service is worship. While I agree that worship is service ...
 - a) I deny that all kinds of daily serving is worship.
 - (1) Is my wife worshiping God when she cleans the house for her family?
 - (2) Am I worshiping God when I take the trash out for her?
 - (3) Do waitresses worship when they serve your dinner?
 - (4) Do cashiers worship by scanning your groceries for you?
 - b) Who would say, "All apples are fruit, and all fruits are apples"?
 - No one!
 - 2. The main idea in 12:1 is that the sacrifice we render to God is intelligent and deliberate ("spiritual"), in contrast to the sacrifices of the Jewish worship in which the animals had no part in determining what was to be done with them.
 - 3. "Worship" is too narrow a translation, for in the strict sense worship is adoration of God, which does not fit the concept of "bodies." "Service" is better since it covers the entire range of a Christian's life and activity (cp. Deuteronomy 10:12). Just because we present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice in worship does not mean that every function or action of the body is worship.
- D. Advocates say that worship is not limited to the activities of the Lord's day.
 - 1. Admittedly, we can sing, pray, and study our Bibles in our homes or other places. These activities would be worship (Acts 16:25; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13).
 - 2. However, it is illogical to say that because we can sing, pray, and study in our homes, that there is no formal day of worship on Sunday.

II. What Is The Truth About Worship?

- A. Worship has a very specific meaning in the Bible.
 - 1. When "worship" is used in the Bible, it refers to what people purposefully did when they assembled.
 - a) It was not a nebulous word that applied to any activity at any place. This is what the advocates fight so hard to deny.

- b) Their claim that we can sing, pray, and study in our homes does not negate that we are also to come together on the Lord's day for very specific acts of worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Hebrews 10:23-25).
 - c) Even "worship," when being used of idol worship, still means specific acts as opposed to life and demeanor (Acts 16:14; 17:23; 18:7, 13; 19:27).
 - 2. Christians can and should encourage one another outside of the assembly. But, they are also supposed to assemble for that specific purpose. That they might encourage one another daily does not diminish the encouragement of assembling. Why would corporate worship be diminished by daily prayer and Bible reading?
- B. "Worship" and "service" are not synonymous terms.
 - 1. Sometimes the Greek word for service (lateria) can be translated worship (Philippians 3:3). But there are passages that show they have distinct meanings.
 - 2. Jesus rebuked Satan in Matthew 4:10 saying, "... Thou shalt worship (proskuneo) the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (lateria)."
 - 3. Martha busied herself with serving the Lord, but she was not worshiping Him (Luke 10:40). In fact, Jesus noted that Mary had chosen the "good part" which was to listen to Him teach, while Martha was "careful and troubled about many things" (vs. 41).
 - 4. Paul clearly understood the difference between service and worship (cp. 2 Timothy 1:3; Acts 24:11).
 - 5. There are several other clear examples in the Bible (Deuteronomy 4:19; 11:16; 2 Chronicles 7:19; Daniel 3:12).
 - a) In these verses, why did the writer not simply say worship, rather than worship and serve, if both words are synonyms?
 - b) Clearly, worship and service have different meanings, even if they are only minor differences. All worship is service, but not all service is worship.
- C. Worship has a beginning and an end; it starts and stops.
 - 1. Advocates of "all of life is worship" say that Christians worship all of the time. Worship is more of an attitude of heart or a feeling, and so it is something we are always doing — all day, every day. Mike Root wrote, "... you can't start it or stop it ... it doesn't open and close with prayer ..."
 - 2. But several passages do show that worship has a beginning and ending (Matthew 26:30; Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 24:52; Acts 20:7).
- D. Worship requires forethought, planning, and intent; it does not just "happen."

1. Those who advocate "all of life is worship" seem to want worship to be just a spontaneous "happening."
2. But true worship is never thoughtless or accidental. It is always intentional. None of these Bible characters worshiped God accidentally (Genesis 22:5; Exodus 24:1; 2 Samuel 12:20; Psalm 95:6; Matthew 2:2; Acts 8:27).
3. All of life cannot be worship, if the preceding texts have anything to say about it. Most tasks in life are mundane and we do them almost without thinking.
 - a) I hardly ever think about bathing, shaving, or making coffee, do you?
 - b) I have driven the route from my house to the church building in excess of a 1,000 times, and I often arrive without ever having thought about the drive.
 - c) How can the mindless activity of taking out the trash qualify as worship?
4. Intent is essential. If I were to buy grape juice and unleavened bread at Brookshire Brothers and eat it as a snack in my car, would I be worshipping when I do so? No, because my intent would be to eat a snack, not worship God.

III. What Will This Doctrine Achieve?

A. Laxity of worship.

1. Since "all of life" is worship, then there is no real difference between the rest of life and the so-called worship assemblies. However, this teaching dilutes what we do when we assemble.
2. Mike Root says, "This first day of the week assembly was as unstructured and informal as an unplanned reunion of college friends" (Spilt Grape Juice, p. 50-51). Yet, Paul teaches that the church is to do everything decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40).
3. Many advocates of this doctrine insist that they are not trying to diminish the Lord's day worship assembly, but if we say that mundane activities qualify as worship, then the noble activities of the Lord's day are necessarily diminished.

B. A rejection of the pattern.

1. Since "all of life" is worship, then worship is not something for a set time and place with any kind of pattern attached to it.
2. A lot of brethren want to "pick a bone" with what they consider ritualism or traditionalism.
 - a) Our insistence on "five acts of worship," as taught in the Bible, strikes them as too dogmatic and Pharisaical.

- b) Some may chafe at the expression “the five acts of worship,” but if they do, then do not use the expression. The phrase does not need to exist for the rhetorical purpose of putting worship in a neat little box.
 - c) In 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, Paul showed that purposeful, specific actions were performed in assemblies of a congregation meeting for the purpose of worship.
3. We cannot excuse ourselves from being part of a group on the basis that “all of life is worship,” nor can we use our purposed assembly times to just do whatever we wish. God is always in charge of His worship, and we are still responsible for following His will when we come together in those purposed assemblies.

Conclusion. Go out and serve the Lord faithfully and zealously, then come here to engage your heart in revering the Lord and edifying other Christians. Never neglect one for the other, but strive to keep your life and worship in harmony. If our lives really are worshipful, then our assemblies together will truly be special as we raise our voices as one in praise and seek to teach and edify each other for deeper growth in knowledge and spirituality.

I am deeply indebted to David Weaks for the use of his material.