



When Is Worship Truly "Biblical"?

dave.detwiler@branchcreek.org

"Worship": What Exactly Are We Talking About?

1. Some common misunderstandings:
 - a. "What time is your worship service?"
 - b. "I really liked the worship today"
 - c. "I really liked the praise and worship today"
 - d. "I'd like you to meet our worship leader"

2. Traditional definition:

Our word "worship" comes from the Saxon/Old English word *weorthscipe* ("worthship"), meaning "to attribute worth to an object." With God as the object, we get definitions like this (affirmed in such biblical passages as 1 Chron 16:25; Ps 29:1-2; 96:1-9; Rev 4:11; 5:12):

"To worship God is to ascribe to Him the supreme worth to which He alone is worthy."¹

"Worship is the dramatic celebration of God in His supreme worth in such a manner that His 'worthiness' becomes the norm and inspiration of human living."²

Important question: Does this understanding adequately convey the meaning of the various words used in Scripture that are translated as "worship"?

3. Greek words translated as "worship":

The NIV translates 9 different Greek words as "worship"—at least at those times where the words appear to be conveying that sense.³ (Of course, there are many other words that clearly relate to the concept of worship, but don't use that specific term, such as "praise" and "glorify.") The major ones, based on their usage in the Greek OT (LXX) and NT, are listed below:

- a. *proskuneo* – Expresses submission to God's supreme authority, ideally motivated by gratitude and joy (e.g., Gen 24:26-27; Mt 28:9, 17; Lk 24:52)

¹ Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972) 166.

² R. P. Martin, "Worship" in *ISBE* 4:1118.

³ *proskuneo*, *leitourgeo*, *latreuo*, *sebomai*, *eusebeo*, *theosebeia*, *phobeomai*, *threskeia*, and *ethelothreskia*. Karen Jobes, in her helpful study, identifies eight different Greek verbs which can all be translated as "worship" ("Distinguishing the Meaning of Greek Verbs in the Semantic Domain for Worship," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 8 [November 1991] 183-191). Accounting for cognates reduces the NIV's list to six, all of which are on Jobe's list. However, she adds to her list *kampto* and *gonupeteo*, both of which share a semantic sense with *proskuneo*.

Example: “‘All this I will give you,’ [the devil] said, ‘if you will bow down and worship me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord Your God, and serve him only.’” (Mt 4:9-10; note also Jn 4:20-24, where the verb shows up 9 times!).

Observations:

- 1) The term originally referred to the outward gesture of bending over or bowing down (lit. “to kiss toward”) as an act of submission, but came to be used of the inward attitude that should accompany such an expression of homage or allegiance.
 - 2) Such “worship” is directed generally to God (Mt 4:10; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 4:10; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4, 10; 22:8) and specifically to both God the Father (Jn 4:20-24) and God the Son (Mt 14:33; 28:9, 17; Lk 24:52; Jn 9:38; Heb 1:6; Rev 5:14).
 - 3) While it implicitly refers to a life of devotion (Mt 4:10; Jn 4:20-24), it primarily refers to corporate or public worship, both informal (Mt 14:33; 28:17; Lk 24:52) and formal (temple worship: Jn 12:20; Ac 8:27; 24:11; heavenly worship: Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 15:4; 19:4).
 - 4) Interestingly, it is used only once in the NT in reference to the gathering of the early church (1 Cor 14:25).
 - 5) It is used to clarify that conversion involves becoming a worshiper of the true God (Jn 9:38; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 9:20; 14:7).
 - 6) All of the above suggests that worship is a response to the revelation of God—especially in Christ Jesus. This holds true for the terms below as well.
- b. *leitourgeo* – Expresses service rendered to God, typically in the context of corporate or public worship (note our word, “liturgy”).

Example: “In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers . . . While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said . . .” (Ac 13:1-2).

Observations:

- 1) In the LXX (where it appears about 100 times) it is used almost exclusively for the service of priests and Levites in the tabernacle or temple (e.g., 2 Chron 31:2; cf. Lk 1:23; Heb 10:11).
 - 2) In the NT it is used a couple of times in reference to churches serving their fellow believers in need through the giving of material possessions (Rom 15:27; 2 Cor 9:12; cf. Phil 2:25).
- c. *latreuo* – Also expresses service rendered to God, but primarily emphasizing the worship of the people and their devotion to God as a pattern of life.

Examples: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Mt 4:10); “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1).⁴

Observations:

⁴ Note the very helpful analysis of this important verse on worship: Michael B. Thompson, “Romans 12:1-2 and Paul’s Vision for Worship” in *A Vision for the Church*, eds. M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 121-132.

- 1) While the term can refer to corporate or public worship (esp. OT worship and the ministry of priests: Rom 9:4; Heb 8:5; 9:1, 6; Ac 7:7), it often speaks more generally of a lifestyle of service or worship (Mt 4:10; Lk 2:37; Ac 27:23; Rom 1:9; 12:1; Phil 3:3; Heb 9:14; 12:28; Rev 22:3).
 - 2) Such service should reflect a deep commitment of the heart (Deut 10:12; Rom 1:9; 12:1; Heb 12:28).
- d. *sebomai* – Expresses reverence or respect for God (note cognates *eusebeo* and *theosebeia*, and the related term, *phobeomai*).

Example: “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom 1:25).

Observations:

- 1) While the term is used occasionally in reference to corporate or public worship (Mt 15:9, quoting Is 29:13; Ac 18:13) it primarily speaks of the proper attitude of “fear” toward God that reveals itself in faithfulness and obedience (e.g., Dt 5:29; 6:2, 24; Ps 25:14).
- 2) It is never used with a Christian believer as the subject (with the probable exception of Ac 18:13); rather, it refers to devout converts to Judaism (e.g., Ac 13:43) and God-fearing Greeks (e.g., Ac 17:4, 17).
- 3) However, the related term *phobeomai*, which also speaks of an attitude of reverence and awe toward God, is frequently used in reference to Christians (Ac 2:43; 9:31; 2 Cor 5:11; 7:1; Eph 5:21; Phil 2:12; Col 3:22; 1 Pet 1:17; 2:17; 3:2; Rev 11:18; 19:5).

Summary: From the above analysis, we can delineate 3 related but distinct senses regarding the word “worship” in the Bible, all of which should be expressions of *adoration*: 1) Worship as proper *allegiance*; 2) Worship as proper *action*; and 3) Worship as proper *attitude*.

4. Toward a few working definitions:⁵

- a. *Worship*:
The proper response (adoration, allegiance, action, and attitude) of one’s whole being to the reality of God
- b. *Christian worship*:
The proper response of one’s whole being to the reality of God revealed in Christ
- c. *Corporate Christian worship*:
The proper response of the gathered church to the reality of God revealed in Christ

⁵ The most substantial definition of worship to date is found in D. A. Carson (ed.), *Worship By the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 26, followed by a detailed exposition of the definition. Well worth your time!

"Corporate Worship": What Exactly Are We Talking About?

1. A working definition (from above): The proper response of the gathered church to the reality of God revealed in Christ.

The key question, of course, is What constitutes 'the proper response of the gathered church'? What does that involve by way of activities and characteristics? (Stay tuned!)

2. Is "corporate worship" biblical?

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find the term "corporate worship" or even our very common phrase, "worship service." Here's what we do find:

- a. "They [the believers] all joined together" (Acts 1:14) or "were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1) or "they continued to meet together" (Acts 2:46; see also 5:12; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17, 20, 33, 34; 14:26; Heb 10:25; James 2:2). This is the basic understanding: believers meet together on a regular basis for some purpose (more on that below).
- b. More specifically: "when you come together as a church" (1 Cor 11:18; see also Acts 11:26; 14:27; 15:30) or "if the whole church comes together" (1 Cor 14:23; see also Acts 6:2; 16:40). This clarifies that we don't "go to church," as is commonly thought, but we "gather as a church." What are some of the implications of this?
- c. Even more specifically (although this phrase is not so clear in the Greek): "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus" (1 Cor 5:4), emphasizing the presence of Christ in our church gatherings (see also Matt 18:20; 1 Cor 14:25). Again, implications?

3. The purpose-driven [New Testament] church

These gatherings were clearly "corporate" in nature (that is, they met *together* as a church), but does the word "worship" adequately sum up what these meetings were all about?

- a. The New Testament clarifies that we are meant to worship God in every sphere of life (see, for example, Rom 12:1-2). Therefore, the *distinctive* purpose for gathering as a church cannot be 'to worship God' per se, as that is to take place all the time and not just when we meet together. In other words, "We cannot imagine that the church gathers for worship on Sunday morning [or Saturday night] if by this we mean that we engage in something that we have not been engaging in the rest of the week."⁶
- b. Rather, according to the New Testament, the explicit purpose of coming together as a church is *mutual edification*, or building each other up—something that can only be done when Christians gather together.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Worship By the Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 24.

Key verse: “When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up” (1 Cor 14:26 see also 14:3-5, 12, 17, 1 Thess 5:11; Eph 4:11-16)

Some implications:

- 1) Our desire to come to church in order to “experience God” or “worship God” must have a social dimension. We are there to encounter God *together*, so that the church—and not just me personally—may be edified (note 1 Cor 14:3-5, 16-17).
 - 2) In addition, our typical mentality of coming to church “to be fed” or “to have my needs met” is really the opposite of how we are to approach our gatherings. Rather, we should come for the sake of others, to build them up in the faith.
 - 3) Further, those who lead Christian gatherings must be doing all they can to encourage mutual edification, rather than to simply provide for individual encounters with God.
- c. However, while the focus of church gatherings is appropriately on edification, this does not mean that worship is out of the picture (a number of important passages argue otherwise: see Acts 2:43, 47; 13:2; 1 Cor 14:16-17, 25). Rather, as one scholar puts it, the New Testament “suggests that we view mutual ministry as the context in which to engage with God. Edification and worship are different sides of the same coin.”⁷
- d. Therefore, “corporate worship,” as we are using the term, is focused not only on God, but on the edification or building up of others as an expression of our love for God (note Matt 22:36-39; Heb 13:15-16; 1 John 4:20-21). In other words, in corporate worship “we should not be so preoccupied with God that we ignore one another.”⁸

4. There’s no place like home

Before we proceed to consider the biblical activities and characteristics of corporate worship, we would do well to remember that when the church gathered in the first century, it did so primarily in the comfort of private homes (see Acts 2:2, 46; 12:12; 16:15, 40; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philemon 2). This has a number of important implications:

- a. According to archaeologists, meeting in a home would have limited the gathering to somewhere between 30-50 people, which creates a very different dynamic than a much larger gathering. For example, in a house church, every individual could share something personally without making for an excessively long meeting.
- b. Further, a home environment would have likely encouraged not only lively interaction, but also informality and intimacy—plus it probably meant that food was always a factor! These characteristics are much more difficult to provide for in a large auditorium setting (and some would say we shouldn’t even try to provide for them there; I disagree).
- c. Therefore, as we seek to apply what the New Testament reveals about the activities and characteristics of corporate worship, we need to recognize the significant differences between the setting and size of our gatherings, and those of the early church. This presents a

⁷ David Peterson, *Engaging With God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992) 215.

⁸ John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1996) 8.

tremendous challenge for us to be creative as we rethink the whole concept of coming together as a church (and, I might add, this is where we need to realize that small group ministry and involvement is a vital part of corporate worship in the local church, as small groups are custom designed for mutual edification).

5. Summary

“Corporate worship,” then, refers to coming together as a church in order to edify or build up one another in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, it is *worshipping together for the purpose of mutual edification*. Now, according to the Bible, what specific activities and characteristics does or should this involve?

Activities of Corporate Worship

At the outset, it should be noted that “The New Testament does not provide us with officially sanctioned public ‘services’ so much as with examples of crucial elements.”⁹ In other words, you won’t find a section of the New Testament that reveals everything we need to know about coming together as a church (1 Cor 14 comes close, but even there some important things are not mentioned, such as the Lord’s Supper).

In addition, “there is no explicit mandate or model of a particular order or arrangement of these elements. Of course, this is not to deny that there may be better and worse arrangements.”¹⁰ That is to say, once we can identify what truly are the ‘crucial elements’ of corporate worship according to Scripture, we have considerable freedom to plan and order these activities in ways that honor Christ and edify his church as it gathers in a particular locale.

So, with that in mind, here’s our question: When a church comes together in the New Testament, what do we find them doing, or what are we *supposed* to find them doing?

1. **Praying** (communicating with God) – Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:24; 6:4; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 20:36; 21:5; 1 Tim 2:1-2, 8; Rom 12:12; 15:30-31; 1 Cor 11:4-5; 14:14-17; Eph 6:18-20; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2-4; 1 Thess 5:17; Rev 5:8; “Amen”: 1 Cor 14:16; 2 Cor 1:20; Rev 5:14; 7:12; 22:20; “Abba”: Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; “Maranatha”: 1 Cor 16:22; see also Rev 22:20.
2. **Baptizing** (welcoming new believers into the church) – Acts 2:38, 41 (implied in 2:47; 5:14; 11:21, 24); Matt 28:19; Acts 8:12, 36; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 1:13-17; 12:13; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 3:21.
3. **Learning** (responding to the preaching and teaching of God’s word) – Acts 2:42; 6:2, 4, 7; 11:26; 13:1; 14:22; 15:35; 18:11; 20:7, 20, 27, 30-32; Rom 12:7; 15:14; 1 Cor 11:2; 12:28; Eph 4:11-13; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Tim 3:2, 15; 4:6, 13; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:15-17; 4:1-4; Titus 1:9; 2:1-15; James 3:1; 1 Pet 4:11; see also Neh 8:8.

⁹ Carson, *Worship By the Book*, 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 51.

4. **Listening** (hearing Scripture as it is read aloud) – Acts 15:21; Rom 10:17; Col 4:15-16; 1 Thess 5:27; 1 Tim 4:13; Philemon 2; 2 Pet 3:15-16; Rev 1:3; see also Deut 31:9-13; Neh 8:2-6; Luke 4:16-21.
5. **Eating** (enjoying intimate fellowship around food) – Acts 2:42, 46; 6:1; 20:7, 11; 1 Cor 11:20-22, 33-34; 2 Pet 2:13; Jude 12; see also “Remembering” below.
6. **Remembering** (celebrating the Lord’s Supper [communion]) – Possibly Acts 2:42; 20:7; definitely 1 Cor 10:14-22; 11:17-34; see also Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20.
7. **Serving** (using spiritual gifts to edify others) – Acts 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12-14 (note esp. the importance of the gift of prophecy as the church gathers, 1 Cor 14:1-5, 29-33; see also Acts 11:27-30; 13:1-3; 15:32; 1 Thess 5:19-22); Eph 4:7-13; 1 Pet 4:10-11.
8. **Giving** (meeting physical needs both inside and outside the local church) – Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37; 6:1-6; 11:27-30; Rom 12:13; 1 Cor 9:11-12; 16:1-2; Gal 2:10; 6:6, 9-10; Phil 4:15-19; 2 Cor 8-9; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Heb 13:16; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:16-18.
9. **Singing** (speaking to the Lord and to one another through song) – 1 Cor 14:15, 26; Col 3:16; Eph 5:18-21; see also Matt 26:30; Acts 16:25; James 5:13; Rev 5:9-10; 14:1-5; 15:3-4; The Book of Psalms. Possible songs or song fragments found in the NT include Eph 2:14-16; 5:14; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-10; 12, 13; 7:10, 12; 11:15, 17-18; 15:3-4; 19:1-3, 6-8.
10. **Praising** (worshiping God in various non-musical ways) – Acts 2:47; 21:20; 1 Pet 2:9; Offering specific expressions of praise (known as doxologies): For example, Rom 11:33-36; 16:25-27; 2 Cor 1,3-7; Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pet 1:3-9; Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9-14; 11:17-18; 19:5; Shouting “Hallelujah!”: Rev 19:1-6; see also the many Psalms that say “Praise the Lord” (for example, 111-113, 146-150); Speaking in tongues and interpreting them (although this also falls under “Serving” above): 1 Cor 14:2, 5, 13-17, 26-28.
11. **Declaring** (confessing their faith, as in baptism) – Heb 13:15; “Jesus is Lord”: Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:10-11; “Jesus is the Christ [Messiah]”: 1 John 2:22; 5:1; see also 4:2-3, 15; Other possible creeds and confessions include: Rom 1:3-4; 4:24-25; 8:34; 1 Cor 15:3-5; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 2:11-13; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:18-22; Rev 15:3-4. See also 1 Tim 6:12
12. **Updating** (catching up on the latest ministry news) – Acts 4:23; 12:17; 14:27; 15:4, 12, 30-31; 21:19; note also the various letters to NT churches sent by Paul and others.
13. **Organizing** (mobilizing to expand their ministry) – Acts 6:1-6; 11:22-23; 13:2-3; 15:1-3, 22; 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:18-19.
14. **Disciplining** (responding to sin in the church) – Matt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 6:1; 2 Cor 2:5-11; see also Acts 5:1-11.
15. **Greeting** (with a holy kiss, no less!) – Rom 16:16 (note 3-16); 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14; see also Phil 4:21-22.

There are perhaps a few other activities that could be added to the list, such as fasting (Acts 13:2), but these appear to be the main ones revealed in the New Testament.

Questions: Are we supposed to engage in all of these activities each time we gather as a church? Why or why not? Are some of these activities more crucial than others? Why or why not? And what about activities that are *not* mentioned in the NT? Can we include those?

Characteristics of Corporate Worship

Engaging in the appropriate activities does not mean that God is pleased with our gatherings (see Amos 5:21-23 for a real shocker!). There are also certain attitudes and dynamics that are crucial when it comes to corporate worship, and we must be mindful of these characteristics as well. Here are some of the main ones, based on what the New Testament reveals concerning coming together as a church:

1. **Christ-centeredness** – The heart of worship, as Matt Redman reminds us in the song by that title, is that it's all about Jesus—his person, his life, his words, his death, his resurrection, and his return. Jesus himself explained that true worship is worship “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24), which is worship that is empowered by and focused on him (this is exactly what the NT reveals: Matt 14:33; 18:20; 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52; John 1:1; 9:38; 20:28; 1 Cor 11:23-26; Eph 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23-24; Phil 2:5-11; 3:3; Col 1:15-20; 2:9; 3:15-17; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 1:3, 6; 4:14-16; 12:2; 13:15; Rev 5; 7:10; 11:15-19; 19). The fact that believers were referred to as “Christians” early on (Acts 11:26) reveals the Christ-centeredness of their life and worship.
2. **Spiritual sensitivity** – Related to the above, it is clear that corporate worship is to be a time where the Holy Spirit, God’s empowering presence, is experienced. Churches are commanded to “be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs . . .” (Eph 5:18-19; see also Acts 2:4, 17; 4:31; 9:31; 13:2; 20:28; 1 Cor 12:3; 14:25; Phil 3:3; 1 Thess 5:19).
3. **Authenticity** – Related to both of the above, corporate worship is to come from the heart, not just the lips (see Mark 7:6-7). The early church is described as being “devoted” and “sincere” (Acts 2:42, 46; see also Rom 12:10; 2 Cor 11:3), and later encouraged “to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts” (Acts 11:23, see also Psalm 51:16-17; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; 1 Tim 2:8-10; Heb 10:22). There is no place in the church for phoniness or hypocrisy (see Acts 5:1-11!).
4. **Simplicity** – The overall picture of the gathered church in the NT, whether by description or prescription, is one of informal, intimate, Spirit-led times of mutual edification in the presence of Christ (see, for example, Acts 2:42-47; 20:7-12; 1 Cor 11-14). Unlike pagan religious practices and Jewish temple worship, there is no indication of elaborate rituals or impressive ceremonies—that is, no big productions, no fancy venues (shrines or temples), no professional priests, no audience mentality. Rather, their gatherings were quite simple by comparison. Powerful, yes, but simple nonetheless.
5. **Participation** – It is also clear from the overall picture in the NT that early church gatherings were highly participatory or interactive in nature (see, for example, 1 Cor 14:26; Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; 1 Pet 4:10-11, and all of the “one another” passages, such as Heb 10:24-25). There is no

place for a passive attitude in corporate worship. "Since all have something to give, there are no mere spectators in church but only active participants."¹¹

6. **Reverence and awe** – The first indication of how the early church responded to God in their corporate worship is that "everyone was filled with awe" (Acts 2:43). This refers to an attitude of profound respect toward God, or having a proper "fear" of him (see , for example, Acts 9:31; 1 Pet 1:17). The writer of Hebrews says, "let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire'" (12:28-29).
7. **Joy** – Corporate worship is associated not only with reverence and awe, but also with joy (see, for example, Acts 2:46-47; Phil 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16; 1 Pet 1:8; Rev 19:7; Psalm 95:1; 98:4-6). This provides us with an interesting challenge in terms of balance in our response to God in corporate worship. Both reverence and rejoicing are to characterize our times together as a church (note Psalm 2:11).
8. **Unity** – Turning now to 1 Corinthians, where Paul taught extensively on corporate worship, we are confronted first of all with the importance of unity: "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Cor 1:10; see also 11:18; Acts 2:44; 4:32; Rom 15:5-6; Eph 4:3; Phil 2:1-5).
9. **Humility/Love** – Tied closely to unity is humility and love. In the Lord's Supper, in particular, the Corinthian believers were acting selfishly, and Paul calls them on it (1 Cor 11:20-22; note also chapter 13 as a whole,) As the next characteristic makes explicit, the church meets for mutual edification, not selfish consumption (see Acts 2:45; 4:32-35). We gather to bless God and benefit others—that's what humility and love are all about.
10. **Edification** – As we have already emphasized earlier in this study, edification is the distinctive purpose for which the church gathers, and 1 Corinthians 14 drives this point home. I'll say it again: Corporate worship is focused not only on God, but on the edification or building up of others as an expression of our love for God. Everything we do should contribute to this fundamental characteristic (see 1 Cor 14:4, 5, 12, 26; Heb 10:24-25; Rom 12:10; 14:19; 15:2; 1 Thess 5:11).
11. **Intelligibility** – Edification is tied largely to whether or not people understand what's being said, or what's going on (see esp. 1 Cor 14:9-19). Paul asks, "Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying?" (v. 9). Everything we do in corporate worship should be as intelligible as we can make it, so that others will be edified.
12. **Seeker-sensitivity** – Among those we want to see edified are the outsiders and unbelievers who are present in our church gatherings (and, according to Paul, we should expect them to be there). More than that, we want them to "fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (1 Cor 14:25; see also Psalm 96). If our gatherings are largely unintelligible to them, they will merely conclude that "You are out of your mind!" (1 Cor 14:23). Which response would you prefer?! How we spend our time together as a church will make the difference (more on this in the next session).

¹¹ Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, Revised Edition (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994) 109.

13. **Order** – Edification is tied not only to intelligibility, but also to order. For ministry to be understandable and effective, it must be orderly, which, for Paul, basically means only one person speaking or sharing at a time so that everyone can hear and be blessed (see 1 Cor 14:27-33). His conclusion concerning corporate worship is that “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (14:40). However, this does not preclude . . .
14. **Spontaneity** – While order is important, Paul fully expects the Spirit to move in corporate worship. Note his counsel concerning prophecy: “And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down [while someone else is sharing], the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged” (1 Cor 14:30-31). This is not to suggest that it’s wrong to prepare for or plan out the times we gather as a church. It is only to say that God may have additional plans that we weren’t aware of during our preparations, and we should allow for this in our gatherings (which brings us back to characteristic 2, “Spiritual sensitivity”). Remember, though, that any spontaneous contributions must fulfill the purpose of edification (1 Cor 14:26).
15. **Inclusiveness** – One final characteristic of corporate worship (at least for this list at this time!) has to do with our attitude and behavior toward the differences among those in attendance. James, for example, urges churches not to show favoritism toward the wealthy in their meetings (Jas 2:1-9). This issue, however, is not limited to socio-economic class, but applies equally to gender, race, and age (see Acts 1:14; 2:17-18; Gal 3:28; Rev 7:9). Corporate worship is no place for discrimination—with the singular exception of disciplining those whose sin is affecting the whole church (see, for example, 1 Cor 5).

Recommended Resources for Further Study

- ◆ The best works from a theological perspective are those mentioned in the footnotes: especially David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (InterVarsity, 1992); and D. A. Carson (ed.), *Worship By the Book* (Zondervan, 2002).
- ◆ For an excellent (and brief) treatment of the backgrounds of earliest Christian devotion, see Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Eerdmans, 1999).
- ◆ To acquaint yourself with Christian worship through the centuries, see James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Abingdon, 1993).
- ◆ The most helpful book from a practical perspective regarding music in worship is Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, Expanded Edition (Baker, 2001). For particular encouragement concerning the use of contemporary worship music, see John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical Defense* (P & R, 1997).
- ◆ To better understand corporate worship in the postmodern context, see Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Zondervan, 2003), and *Emerging Worship: Creating Worship Gatherings for New Generations* (Zondervan, 2004).