

What is the Purpose of Worship?

Our modern word 'worship' comes from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'worthiness.' This tells us that the essence of worship is *to ascribe worth*. This is how the Bible uses the term: "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness," (Psalm 29:2).

But what is the purpose of worship?

The best place to go to answer this question is the Bible itself. Psalm 100 gives us an excellent, full-orbed answer:

A Psalm for giving thanks.

1 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth!

2 Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

3 Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!

5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

From this psalm we should notice four things. Firstly, worship is *service* (v. 2): the goal is not to serve ourselves, but to serve God. Secondly, worship is *adoration* – ascribing worthiness to God for who he is (v. 3) and for what he has done (v. 5). Thirdly, worship establishes *communion*. The Hebrew word for 'know' (v. 3) implies intimacy, a loving communication. This communication has both horizontal and vertical components: Christians commune with one another as they commune with God. Fourthly, worship brings *fulfillment*. Because Christians belong to God (v. 3), in worshipping him they are refreshed (Exodus 23:12) and blessed (Psalm 16:9-11). Jesus said that when Christians gather together in his name, he himself is present (Matthew 18:20). And in thus drawing near to the glorious God, Christians are themselves "transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another," (2 Corinthians 3:18).

It is crucially important that we not reverse the order in all this. *What do we mean?*

The Bible teaches that if we seek to serve and adore God in worship, we will find personal fulfillment. But the reverse is not true. If our primary goal in worship is personal fulfillment, we will not ultimately succeed. Why not? *Because we have neither adored nor served God, the source of joy (Psalm 16:11)!*

When we put personal fulfillment before God's glory, we attempt to turn the Creator into a commodity. When we make worship about fulfilling people rather than glorifying God, we make people into idols and God into a credit card. Such behavior is not the worship of God. It is the worship of self.

The purpose of true worship, then, is to serve and adore God. If we do this faithfully according to the way God shows us, we will find fulfillment. Why? Because it is what we were made for: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever," (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 1). Note both the singular and the plural in this statement. Human beings have only one primary purpose. But that one primary purpose is like a coin with two sides: enjoying God cannot be separated from glorifying him.

Do you want to glorify and enjoy God? Join us for worship at Resurrection OPC this coming Lord's Day!