

It's Not About You: What is Christian Worship All About?

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Via Community Church

Romans 16:25-27

I want to begin by asking you a question: Do you know what this is?

SLIDE #1



Image.Jack.

Very good. Let me ask you a second question: Do you know what this is?

SLIDE #2



[Image.Cat.](#)

If you're over the age of one, or If you're taking a cognitive test for older adults, you should have gotten both of these questions correct. Years ago, I heard a talk by a man named Stephen Hawthorne who is a great leader in Christian missions. He said there is a major difference between dogs and cats. Dogs say, "You feed

me, you care for me, you walk me; you must be God.” Cats, on the other hand, say, “You feed me, you care for me, you clean my litter box; I must be God!”

Stephen Hawthorne said that the problem we have with the Bible is this: the Bible was written for dogs, but it's read by cats.

It's no wonder that we're a nation of cats. For the last 30 years, we Americans have heard thousands of advertising messages every day that tell us, “Have it your way,” and “Be you all you can be.” “It's all about you.” One of the saddest advertising campaigns that I saw was a few years ago. DoorDash ran an ad for Valentine's Day in which they were advertising the “Self- love bouquet.”

SLIDE #3



Image.Bouquet

The basic idea was that even if you're not in a relationship on Valentine's Day, you deserve to feel loved, so you can buy yourself flowers and give yourself the gift of self-love.

When I saw that, it made me feel really sad. I mean, people buying flowers for themselves on Valentine's Day! And the message reinforcing that "life is all about us" is not just coming from marketers and advertisers. Every year at graduations across America, the commencement speaker says to the college graduates something like this, "Follow your passions; chart your own course; be true to yourself; march to the beat of your own drummer; pursue your dream; don't compromise!"

Rick Warren wrote a huge best-selling book 20 years ago called The Purpose Driven Life. Many of you may remember the first four words of Rick Warren's book. It starts this way:

SLIDE #4 "It's not about you."

Here's here is how Rick Warren continues:

SLIDE #5 "The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose, and for his purpose." [Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life]

This morning, we're going to continue in the series that Michael started a few weeks ago, titled "Imagine." Remember, the series is called "Imagine" not because the leaders of this church are sitting down and with human imagination, attempting to come up with what they want for the church. Rather, we're talking about God's imagination, what God's dream for the church is. As part of this series, I want to talk today about worship, because the way we worship is a core value that God wants to create.

In the course of my talk this morning, I'm going to try to answer four questions about worship. First, when do we worship? Second, who do we worship? Third, how do we worship, then fourth and finally, why do we worship? When, who, how, and why do we worship? Let's pray and then we'll turn to God's word..

SLIDE # 6 ²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith— ²⁷ to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. [Romans 16:25-27, NIV]

So let's tackle the first question is:

SLIDE #7 When do we worship?

The Apostle Paul begins this doxology, which, by the way, means “an expression of praise and glory to God,” with the statement “Now.” When do we worship God? Paul's answer is now. Now means now. Period. Now does not mean later. The command to worship God always confronts us in the present moment. Now is never tomorrow. Now is never next week. Now is not next Sunday. Now is now. We do not wait to worship. We do not wait until we feel like worshipping; we do not wait until we're moved by the Spirit of God. We don't wait for the worship leader that we prefer or a song that we like. We worship now!

It's interesting that when the New Testament calls us to worship, it begins with the word now. Here's what we read in Ephesians 3 verses 20 and 21.

SLIDE #8 ²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. [Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV]

And this is what we read in the book of Jude:

SLIDE #9 ²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God,

our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time^[a] and now and forever. Amen. [Jude 1:24-25, ESV]

There is an old Brian Doerksen song That begins,

SLIDE #10 *Come, now is the time to worship.*

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are, to worship.

Come, just as you are, before your God.

Come.

The Bible commands us literally hundreds of times to worship. And we see a similar thought in Psalm 96, verse 9:

SLIDE #11 Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness;

tremble before him, all the earth. [Psalm 96:9, NIV]

And again in Psalm 100, verse 2:

SLIDE #12 Worship the LORD with gladness;

come before him with joyful songs. [Psalm 100:2, NIV]

These commands to worship now are not addressed to our feelings; they are addressed to our wills, to our convictions. We live in an age of total subjectivism. We live in a time where we Americans believe that our real selves, the real us, is our feelings. We're told a million times in making decisions, "Go with your gut." We're told that we need to express our feelings, otherwise they'll get bottled up and we'll explode. We live in such an incredibly subjective time in history. We believe that if it feels good, we ought to do it. We say to one another, "How can it be wrong, if it feels so right?" The most important thing to us is how we feel. We think that our feelings reveal our truest self, our real self, our authentic self.

But the real you, friends, at least according to the Bible, is not your feelings. The real you is your deepest convictions about life. The real you, the place where you're most authentic is that place inside you that contains your core beliefs about life, about God, about what matters most, about what's right, about the kind of person you want to be, about what counts for you. You're not being inauthentic when you choose to behave in accordance with your convictions, rather than your feelings in the moment. You're being as true to yourself as you possibly can be. On the other hand, when you deny your deepest convictions and simply follow your feelings, you are betraying yourself. You're being two-faced. You're rejecting what is most fundamental about you.

You know, in the old days when someone behaved according to their beliefs, according to their convictions, we used to call that being a good and decent

person - a person who acted in accordance with their convictions and resisted temptation, who didn't just go with the flow, who swam against the tide. That person was said to be acting with integrity. We saw those people as courageous, as whole and healthy people.

And in the old days when someone acted against their convictions, we thought those folks were cowards, that they were weak, that they had no backbone, that they were people-pleasing, or had a flabby will. They didn't have the courage of their convictions. Now we say that if you're just living out of your convictions, that's being fake, that's being inauthentic, while being true to yourself is just following your desires, following your feelings. Or as Woody Allen put it years ago, "The heart wants what it wants."

But the Bible says now is the time to worship. Some days you feel emotionally up, and you feel like thanking God for your life. You feel like worshiping. You feel like reading your Bible. You feel like praying. And some days you're emotionally down. You feel depressed. You feel numb inside. You feel like you don't want to give thanks to God. You don't feel like praying or reading your Bible. The psalmist says in Psalm 96, verse 2,

SLIDE #13 Sing to the LORD, praise his name;

proclaim his salvation day after day. [Psalm 96:2, NIV]

In other words, worship the Lord on good days and on bad days, when you're up and when you're down, when you feel like it and when you don't. Do I feel like reading the Bible and praying every morning? No, I don't feel like it. Am I glad that I do? Yes. And I can tell you that anyone who comes in touch with me is glad that I do as well. I'm a lot more pleasant to be around after I spend time with God.

I think private prayer, private Bible study, private worship is like showering and brushing your teeth. Do you feel like showering and brushing your teeth every day? Maybe not, but I'll bet other people around you are glad when you do. You're a lot more pleasant to be around!

Now it's great when you have a feeling to go along with your convictions - when I feel grateful as I give thanks, when I feel loving as I show love, when I feel like singing as I sing, when I feel generous as I give. But often the Bible calls us to do things in utter contradiction to our feelings. For example, here's what we read in Psalm 56, verse 3.

SLIDE #14 When I am afraid,

I put my trust in you. [Psalm 56:3, NIV]

The emotion of fear is overruled by a deeper mindset, deeper conviction, deeper choice of faith, Or how about this? In Job 13:15:

SLIDE #15 Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;

I will surely defend my ways to his face. [Job 13:15, NIV]

I'm going to hope in God, whatever happens. I've decided to cast my lot with the Lord. Or how about this in Philippians 4, verse 4.

SLIDE #16 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! [Philippians 4:4, NIV]

I can tell you, I do not always feel like rejoicing. But I can choose to find joy and find solace in the Lord. I do not always feel thankful, but I can learn to give thanks in all circumstances. I can choose to worship God at a funeral. I can choose to praise God in a hospital room. I can choose to sing to the Lord in the midst of my tears. People in the Bible frequently choose in contradiction to their feelings.

One of my favorite texts is Habakkuk 3. Verses 17 to 18.

SLIDE #17 ¹⁷ Though the fig tree does not bud

and there are no grapes on the vines,

though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food,

though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. [Habakkuk 3:17-18, NIV]

You know that old Brian Doerksen song has a verse that goes like this,

SLIDE #18 Willingly we choose to surrender our lives

Willingly our knees will bow

With all our heart, soul, mind and strength

We'll gladly choose you now

You know, this idea that you act in accordance with your deepest convictions - what you believe is true rather than what you feel in the moment, I've never seen it better expressed than was expressed decades ago by my favorite Christian author, C.S. Lewis, in his book, The Screwtape Letters - which if you haven't read, you need to read. If it's a long time since you read The Screwtape Letters, I would encourage you to pick it up again. Lewis wrote this book about the advice that a senior devil gives to a junior devil in the art of temptation. And the senior devil, Screwtape, cautions the junior devil, Wormwood, to not gloat over the fact that his victim is currently emotionally down, as if the battle was won. And here's what Screwtape says:

SLIDE #19 “Do not be deceived, Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending to do [God’s] will looks around upon a universe from which every trace of him

seems to have vanished, and ask why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.” [C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters]

When do we worship? We worship now. Second,

SLIDE #20 Who do we worship?

The Apostle Paul says this in Romans 16, verse 25.

SLIDE #21 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past [Romans 16:25, NIV]

Christian worship is God-centered. It doesn't matter what worship style we adopt, whether it's high church or low church or Presbyterian or Pentecostal. It doesn't matter. To be authentically Christian means that our worship is directed to God. There's so much discussion in churches today about creating a worship “experience”. Highly paid Christian consultants come into churches and engage in “secret shopping.” They evaluate the worship experience. How singable are the songs that were chosen? How skilled are the musicians? What's the sound quality like? Does it all tie together? Then they sit down with church leaders and figure out what the consumers of worship want. “That is what you guys want - to

have a great worship experience. And what will make you come back to church?”

Many of us church members function every week like church worship consultants. We go home and we ask the question. Did I like worship today?

“Well, I really don't like the way so-and-so leads worship. I really prefer this other worship leader. I'm not sure that I like that second song. How did you like it?”

I love the way one pastor responded when someone criticized the worship. The church members said, “I didn't like today's worship. I liked our old songs better.” The pastor responded very sweetly and said, “That's okay, because, as you know, we weren't worshipping you. We were worshipping God.” The issue, friends, is not primarily whether we enjoy the worship. The issue ultimately is whether God enjoys the worship. Whatever style the church has, Christian worship should be God-centered. The aim is to please God - not us churchgoers.

Worship leaders exist as a kind of matchmaker, a sort of dating service in which their job is to introduce us to God and then get out of the way. If all the attention is drawn to the matchmaker, to the worship leader, they're doing something wrong. If we all pay attention to the worship leader doing these exotic vocals and jumping on the stage and showing off their musical talent, then they are not ultimately connecting us to God. They're connecting us to themselves.

The point is to cause us to see God, to adore God, to praise God, and to thank God. As we see God, we are transformed. So the controlling question should never be, "Did people enjoy our worship service?" It's not like that's completely irrelevant. But that's not the fundamental question. "Did people enjoy the service?" Or even "Did our worship service attract people?" The primary question is, "Did the people who attended church today glorify and adore God?" We don't ask, "What do the people want?" That's not the first question. It's, "What does God deserve? What should we be giving him today?"

Worship is one of those times during the week where we are radically countercultural. The whole culture is saying, "It's about you; it's about you; it's about you. It's about your feelings, your desires, your wants," and worship reorients us and says, "You know what? Life is about God. About his will. About what he wants, about what pleases him."

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to begin with God, our Father, who is in heaven. Jesus is giving us counsel on how we best can pray. Start with God. Try to get your eyes off yourself when you pray. Don't start with your anxieties. Don't start with your fears. Don't start by listing all of your frustrations. Focus on how great God is, how powerful God is, how good God is, how wise God is, how competent he is. That's why the Apostle Paul says, "Now to him who was able to establish you," start with God - a God who can strengthen you.

And there's lots of different ways to start with God. You can start with God by reading words from the Psalms. The Psalms is the Christian prayer book. Jesus, almost certainly had the entire book of Psalms memorized like many religious Jews of his day. He quotes the Psalms when he's hanging on the cross. It's what he meditated on. And so we can read. I do that over and over. I read several psalms out loud each day and use them to focus my prayers and my worship. You can play worship songs. I go on YouTube and play different worship songs so that I focus my attention on God and not just on me.

Who do we worship? We don't worship ourselves. We don't worship our feelings. We worship God. Third question.

SLIDE #22 How do we worship?

SLIDE #23 Worship involves singing.

Here's what we read in Romans 15, verse 9:

SLIDE #24 "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles;

I will sing the praises of your name." [Romans 15:9b, NIV]

When we worship God, we're joining the church around the world in worshipping the Lord. I mean, think about it. Every weekend worship is building from the eastern part of the globe, starting maybe in the Philippines as thousands of

people in the Philippines are on their feet, lifting their hands, praising God and singing with all their hearts. And then, the wave continues to New Zealand and Australia. And millions of Chinese and Japanese believers gather in small churches and house churches and they lift their voices to God in song. And the worship wave continues. As it continues west across Asia, small groups of people gather in secret in Iran and in the Arabian Peninsula. And then it hits Africa. And there's dance and instruments and songs lifted to God. Then, across Europe, and finally, it hits the western hemisphere. Throughout the scripture, worship involves singing. By singing, you have the privilege of joining the global church in surfing this wonderful wave of worship. Don't just stand silently and watch the worship leader sing. Join in. Even if you're like me - a terrible singer!

When we sing, we not only join the global church, we join God himself. Do you know that God sings? Here's what we read in Zephaniah 3:17

SLIDE #25 "The LORD your God is with you,

the Mighty Warrior who saves.

He will take great delight in you;

in his love he will no longer rebuke you,

but will rejoice over you with singing." [Zephaniah 3:17, NIV]

But Christian worship is more than singing.

SLIDE #26 **Worship involves giving.**

Throughout the Bible, one major way that people worship God was they brought their sacrifices to the temple. They gave. We see that the Bible commands various ways to give. It mentions firstfruits and tithes and sacrifices. And giving was commanded not just to the wealthy, but to the poor; not just men, but to women; not just to the married, but singles. Not just the old, but the young. Everyone joined in giving a part of their wealth to God. Worshiping God involves sacrificial giving. I think to some degree, we've lost something in the contemporary church regarding the way we conduct our financial offerings to God because of technology. Most of us these days give online and it could be like paying another bill. I did that for decades, giving online. I signed up at the beginning of the year. The amount is deducted from my account and I don't even think about it. Or we text a number that's on the screen. Some of this technology, I fear, may have broken the connection in our minds between giving and worship.

In some of the traditional Baptist churches and other more traditional churches, after the offering plate has passed through the congregation, the deacons take the offering plates from the back of the room, and they walk down the middle of the aisle, and they put those plates on the altar. It's clear to the congregation that giving is a part of our worship, not just singing, but also giving gifts to God.

So let me get personal here. If you're a follower of Jesus, do you regularly give financially to the Lord? Do you see that your giving is an act of worship? Do you tithe to God? Do you have a plan to try to tithe, that is, to give 10% of your income to the Lord? Can you start to give regularly to God? Or restart if you used to give and then you

stopped for some reason. Do you need to restart giving to the Lord? You are not worshiping the Lord unless you also give a portion of your income to him.

The Apostle Paul mentions in this text. Here's what we read in verses 25 and 26:

SLIDE #27 ²⁵ Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, ²⁶ but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all the Gentiles might come to the obedience that comes from faith—
[Romans 16:25-26, NIV]

I think what Paul is saying here is that worship is not just the musical part of our service. Worship includes the scripture. It includes preaching. It includes prayer. It includes communion. It includes silence. It includes singing. It includes a corporate response. The sermon is worship. Communion is worship. Prayer is worship. Giving is worship. Singing is worship.

Last question.

SLIDE #28 Why do we worship?

We asked, when do we worship? Who do we worship? How do we worship, and now why do we worship? The word worship comes from the old English word “worthship.”

What we're doing in worship is giving Jesus the worth, the value that is due him. So first of all,

SLIDE #29 We worship because of who Jesus is.

Let's read Romans 16, verse 25 again.

SLIDE #30 Now to him who is able to establish you in accordance with my gospel, the message I proclaim about Jesus Christ, in keeping with the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past [Romans 16:25, NIV]

Friends, do you understand that the New Testament constantly personalizes what we make impersonal? Christianity is not a religion. It's a relationship with Jesus who makes God known to us. Christianity is not about concepts; it's not about theories; it's not about clever ideas; it's not a philosophy. So often, Christians are confronted online, or in a university setting, or in a workplace, and people ask the question, "What makes you Christians think that your ideas, your concepts about reality, your philosophy of life, is better than thousands of other concepts or whatever everyone else around you believes?" And we Christians often engage in debating ideas and philosophies of life, as if we're attempting to show that the Christian philosophy is superior to other philosophies.

What we Christians offer to people, the reason we gather in worship each week, is because we're not inviting people to embrace a superior philosophy of life. What we offer is Jesus - simply Jesus. Bishop Stephen Neil, who was a scholarly missionary, said that

our task is to go on saying to the Muslim, with infinite patience, “Sir, consider Jesus. We have no other message.”

Christian worship is directed to a person named Jesus Christ. Christian worship is not about ideas. It's not about theories. Our worship is directed to a person. Impersonal ideas won't change anyone's life. The New Testament presents us, not with an idea, but it presents us with an all-loving, all-powerful, all-glorious person, Jesus Christ. Again, the basic motivation for worship is that it is essentially “worthship.” In other words, you can have the whole world - great health, fame, successful children, beautiful vacations in 5-star hotels, but if you don't have Jesus, you have nothing. And on the other hand, you can have nothing - bad health, not much money, struggling kids, a terrible job, but if you have Jesus, you have everything. Christian worship is an acknowledgment of the infinite worth of Jesus. Say this with me:

SLIDE #31 “I may have nothing, but if I have Jesus, I have everything.

I may have everything, but if I don't have Jesus, I have nothing.”

And we worship not only because of who Jesus is - we worship because of who the triune God is.

SLIDE #32 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

[Romans 16:27, NIV]

The Greek for “only” is “*mono*.” The Greek for “God” is “*theo*.”

SLIDE #33 Only = *mono*

God = *theo*

Mono-theo is where we get the word “monotheist,” which describes religions that believe in only one god. Now, the claim that you should worship only the true God, the Christian God, is perhaps one of the most objectionable features of Christianity for contemporary Americans. It is the case that we Christians proclaim that there's only one true God that we should worship. We can't shrink from that. That is our message. There's one God who made the world - one God to whom we owe our life - one God who is the giver of everything good, and one God before whom we will stand on the day of judgment.

So yes, we do say there's one true God, but we must immediately add right after that that this one true God is available to everyone in the world. A relationship with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a Caucasian deal - it's for black and brown people. It's not a Gentile deal - it's for Jews, as well. A relationship with God through Jesus is not just a deal for winners - it's also a deal for losers. It's not just for people who have their lives together. It's for people whose lives have fallen apart. A relationship with God through Jesus is not just for children or for the immature, it's for adults. It's not just for the ignorant, it's for the educated. It's for everyone. This thought that the God we find in Jesus is for everyone makes me want to fall on my knees and worship.

Let me close with a story. Back in college, I was friends with a young man who got involved in Eastern religions, especially some esoteric philosophies and meditation techniques. He actually left college for six months and went to California to be part of some Buddhist monastery where they were practicing some form of Zen Buddhism. The guy was into all of it. He was really intelligent, very bright. I used to talk with him about

Jesus and what Jesus did for us, and why Jesus is the way to God. He would try to convince me of his meditation techniques and how much better and more satisfying his view of the world was than my simple Jesus.

Well, this young guy was a really kind and compassionate person. He worked as an aide in a nursing home while he was in college. One day he met a woman who was elderly. She was hooked up to machines and was in a deep depression. Nobody visited her. Eventually, all she wanted to do was die. And so my friend decided he was going to talk with her. He began to try to explain to her this really involved philosophy that he was into, and what he discovered at his monastery. He said after a few paragraphs, she looked blankly at him.

It was obvious she had no idea what he was talking about. What he was saying had no relevance to her. After he left the room, he realized that the only people that his particular philosophy worked for were wealthy, academically advanced people like himself, and that his philosophy of life had absolutely no application to people in a nursing home. He was so embarrassed about how inadequate his message was and what he had given his life to. He was so embarrassed that he had nothing to meet the needs of this dying old woman. He told me that, after leaving that room in the nursing home, he decided, "I need to become a follower of Jesus." He said, "Rich, I need to believe in something and someone who will make a difference, not just in my life, but in the life of any person I ever meet."

That's why we worship - because this Jesus is the Savior of our entire world. Let's pray.

It's Not About You: What is Christian Worship All About?

10/25/2026

Via Community Church

Romans 16:25-27

I. _____ **do we worship?**

II. _____ **do we worship?**

III. _____ **do we worship?**

IV. _____ **do we worship?**