



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

Worship!

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“Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life.” ~ Karl Barth

“In its purest and most exalted sense [worship] refers to the soul’s preoccupation with the Almighty in the attitude of adoration.” ~ Everett Harrison

Whether you agree with Karl Barth’s assessment depends on what you think of Everett Harrison’s definition. For if we are truly preoccupied with God in all his glory, then nothing can be more urgent than to praise him, communicate with him, and meditate on his holy nature and works. Furthermore, it is only when we are so preoccupied that we will make the commitment to allow him to shape us more completely into his image.

The idea of worship as a preoccupation with the Almighty may explain why the New Testament assumes the church will worship, but never explicitly commands it to do so.* In John 4.24, where Jesus used the word “must” with worship, the emphasis is on its *manner*, not whether it will be done. Correctly understood, then, we might as well try to command breathing as worship. As we grow in our knowledge of God’s nature and deeds, worship is our natural reaction to his glory, the response in which we “ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Ps 96.8).

Whatever else we might say about the ramifications of this truth, it is clear that the true meaning of worship is not adequately expressed in phrases like “going to church.” Failure to appreciate this point probably explains why the experience of some when the saints gather is the religious equivalent of a support group, civic club meeting, or gathering of a neighborhood association to discuss community concerns or plan the next block party.

So, how can we improve/get more out of worship? God’s word answers, “Exalt the LORD our God ... for the LORD our God is holy!” (Ps 99.9).

* In the ESV, the word “worship” appears 52 times in the New Testament, translating multiple Greek words. It translates a Greek imperative verb just four times, once in a command given to angels and three times in Revelation texts where a different realm and time are under consideration (Heb 1.6; Rev 14.7; 19.10; 22.9). One other text warns God’s people against not assembling (Heb 10:25).

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