

- What does worship mean to you?

Consider these two “duties and responsibilities” set down for the Church Council in the *Regulations* (3.1.13) –

(iv) assisting the Minister(s) in the conduct of worship and in the administration of the sacraments;

(v) determining the time and place of services of public worship.

These two, of course, are to be seen in the light of the first two – our responsibility to share with the Minister/s “*in mission and in the pastoral care and spiritual oversight of the Congregation*” and “*nurturing members and adherents in their growth in grace*”. Our role relates both to the spiritual health of the whole Body (the congregation) and of the individual members. The conduct of worship has to do with leadership, not with “doing it all”. Many members of the Body may well be involved in a variety of aspects of worship, since they have received gifts from the Spirit for building up the entire Body. Too often we have done things “decently and in order” by stifling the gifts God has given!

- How should Elders and Minister/s work together in the conduct of worship?

- In what additional ways should we plan for and encourage the involvement of other members of the Body in worship?

2. Worship

Bible References: Isaiah 1.10-20; John 4.19-24; Philipians 2.5-11; Hebrews 10.19-25.

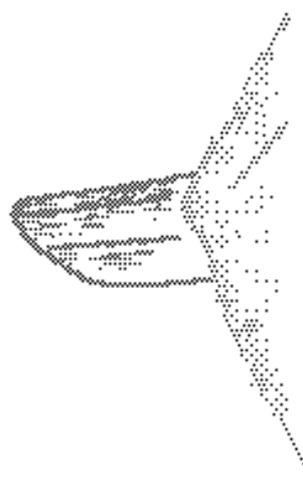
In our first session we noted that “The life of the Body centres on God himself – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So – worship is our central activity.” That is a strong statement, and I can imagine some groups and activities of the church objecting that they exist to fulfil some other purpose. I am not, of course, suggesting that all that we do must be some form of “worship service”, nor denying the different roles of various groups within the Body, nor prescribing the form their activities should take. What I am saying, however, is that any activity in which we do not consciously recognise the presence of God, honour him, seek to know and to do his will... – any such activity is not an activity of the Body, is not a church activity, a Christian activity.

Naturally, in sharing the good news (evangelising), the person with whom we are sharing is not yet a believer, yet the person sharing can only do so out of a conscious and continuing relationship with the Lord. In nurturing and equipping a great deal of teaching, explaining, exploring, discovering and learning-how-to is needed. And in serving we are called to be truly sensitive to the needs of people (as in James 2.15-17). Yet the Lord himself is at the heart of it all – if it is an activity of his Body. That is why worship is central to the life of the Body.

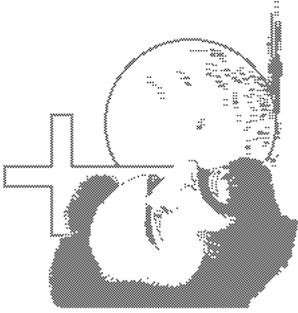
What is Worship?

Our English word “worship” comes from “worth-ship”. It has to do with the highest value we give to something or someone. For many in our society that may well be their goals and ambitions, their talents and skills, their money... For us as Christians, our worship is directed to the God who has revealed himself in history, in Scripture and supremely in his Son. He has in fact revealed himself as one God in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the God we worship. Perhaps it is helpful for us to consider three of the reasons why we worship God.

Firstly, he is the **Creator** of all things. Consider the words of Psalm 19. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands...” By its very existence, the creation gives glory to the Creator. But we are different from the rest of creation – made in the image of God, made capable of appreciating its beauty, its glory, of inventing and devising new things from the material the Creator has placed here,

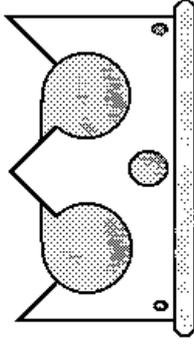


made with the capacity for conscious worship. Notice how the Psalmist goes on to say, *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul...”* Here is a word directed to us. Our worship (and obedience) is not automatic – it is part of our choice, it is a conscious choice to respond to our glorious Creator. Look at what Psalm 8 says about our situation. How should we respond? *“Just look at how great and clever we are!”*? *“O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”*?



Secondly, we worship in response to what God has done for us in **redemption**. Our response as a human race to God as Creator and Lord has been to choose our own independent way of life, our own values – the choice we sum up in the little word “sin”. Without some action from God’s side, there is no way we could venture into God’s presence and survive since *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). Many of the world’s religions express a sense of fear and apprehension – we want to live it our way and then “make it up” as well. But we live in the knowledge that God the Son came into the world, that he died on the cross to bear the penalty of human sin and that he rose from death victorious. What has happened to us in redemption is very much at the heart of our worship – which is why the sacrament of holy communion is a significant part of our worship together.

But when we think about our relationship to God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – it is important to recognise that he is **Lord**. God is not just Creator, but the moral Ruler of the whole creation. That is why we cannot live in a positive relationship with him without redemption. In Jeremiah 7:23-24, we hear the



Lord’s complaint about his people, *“I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts.”* Jesus said to his disciples, *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love...”* Paul states in Romans 14:9, *“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living”,* and in Philippians 2:10-11 paints the glorious picture of the exaltation of Jesus *“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* Our worship is not just the acknowledgment of God as Creator and the acceptance of Christ the Redeemer through whom we can approach God. It reaches into the realm of the Holy Spirit’s

work within us – the submission of our lives to God’s Lordship in all things. If he is Creator, if he is Redeemer, then he rightly must be Lord of all my life. Worship expresses that submission to our Lord.

Thinking about worship –

- To what extent is our worship restricted to what happens in “services of worship” – for ourselves and for other members?
- Why is “the habit of meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25) important for our worship?
- How does our worship together relate to the rest of our lives?

Elders and Worship

In our first study we noted that “The elders (in the early Church) in fact were the key spiritual leaders in the local area in ensuring the spiritual health and vital witness of the local Body of Christ.” So, of course, part of our role is to help ensure that our worship together **meaningfully honours God and leads into lives of obedience to him in the power of his Spirit**.

This brings together a number of very important principles –

- Worship does need to be **meaningful to the worshippers** – not obscure, couched in a language that is not understood. We cannot avoid “heavy” words, though we need to struggle to keep them to a minimum consistent with divine revelation. But worship is not a performance, and the whole congregation needs to be “gathered in” to the worship of God.
- The direction of worship is not ourselves but God! Our worship has to **honour God**. Some people speak of “a wonderful worship experience”. That means it made us “feel good” – but did it make God “feel good”? Reflect on the Lord’s words in Isaiah 1:10-20.
- As those Isaiah words clearly indicate, our acts of worship are worse than pointless if they do not **lead into lives of obedience to God**. It is not a matter of whether we sing hymns or choruses, speak in tongues or in 1611 English, wave our hands above or keep them sedately by our sides... In any or all of these ways we may genuinely worship God – or avoid the call to obey him.
- God is present in our times of worship and in the rest of our lives too – not in the glory of “the great white throne”, nor in the humility of the Lamb who died and rose again (and will return in great glory), but in the unseen, all-pervading yet powerful presence of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worship must be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). We can only obey God in **the power of his Spirit**.