

Christocentric Theology Series

III

THEO-DEVOTION



James A. Fowler

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Christocentric Prayer

Christocentric Worship

James A. Fowler

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Christocentric Theology Series

Vol. III

Theo-Devotion

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Christocentric Prayer	1
• Christ: The Basis of Christian Prayer	2
• Christ: The Prayer of Christian Prayer	7
• Christ: The Answer to Christian Prayer	13
• Inadequate Forms of Christian Prayer	27
Christocentric Worship	37
• Words for “Worship”	40
• General Concept of “Worship”	45
• Religious Concepts of “Worship”	48
• Christian Concept of “Worship”	60
Endnotes	77

DEDICATION

This volume is dedicated to my Christian brothers of the Adams Avenue reading group in San Diego, California. It has been my privilege to meet with these colleagues every other week for approximately twelve years.

Thank you Brian Lucas for taking the initiative to invite us to gather together at the Adams Avenue Book Store so many years ago. The group has included Ivor Kraft, Andrew Welch, Richard Vevia, Christopher Carstens, Robert Smith, Craig Maxwell, Frank Lazarus, Michael Smythe, and Jim Fowler.

The readings selected by the other participants forced me to read outside of my usual theological genre, to become more grounded in the history of the Christian faith, and to consider the Christocentric underpinning of Christian prayer and worship as addressed in this volume.

Christocentric Prayer

Christian people have long struggled to understand prayer and to participate in prayer in a meaningful way. Many have viewed prayer as if it were an exercise consisting of

"some poor earth denizens reaching up to some distant Father in some remote heaven, very uncertain about the answers they will get, taking many a shot in the dark, not even always sure that their prayers reach above the ceiling."¹

Much of the misunderstanding of prayer stems from legalistic, mystical and superstitious misconceptions fostered by religion. There is a dire need among Christians to establish a Christocentric theology of prayer that will serve as a foundation for

practical participation therein. The objective of this study is to briefly and concisely articulate a Biblical and Christocentric understanding of prayer that will then serve to provide the denial of the religious concepts of prayer that are so prevalent. In order to do so we must commence with a theology that is Christ-centered or Christocentric.

Christ: The Basis of Christian Prayer

Christian prayer, as distinguished from general and religious concepts of prayer, is necessarily predicated upon and connected to the life and work of Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ's historical work and the continuing function of the risen Lord Jesus there is no such reality as Christian prayer.

Jesus Christ lived the perfect life as God intended for man here on earth by deriving all that He did from God the Father. "I do nothing of My own initiative" (John 5:30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10), Jesus said, "but the Father abiding in Me does His works" (John 14:10). Jesus lived the life of the Perfect Man² for every moment in time for thirty-three years by constantly living in the prayer of faith. He chose to be receptive to the activity of God the Father in all that He did and said. Karl Barth explains,

"He became the first One properly to take and receive the divine gift. He takes up towards God the position of One who has nothing, who has to receive everything from God. He trusts in God that He will in fact receive it from Him. He entrusts everything to Him. This is how He lives...a life controlled and upheld by the grace of God. In all His life as a man Jesus was only and altogether a Suppliant. As the Son of God He is Himself altogether the divine gift and answer. God triumphed in this man. He did it because this man actually asked, and asking took and received; because this man sought, and seeking found; because this man knocked, and as He knocked, it was opened to Him. In this way God triumphed in the asking. This man prayed. He prayed to God for His unspeakable gift."³

Living in faith and praying in faith Jesus expressed the character of God in all that He did. In so doing He was "obedient unto death" (Phil. 2:8) on behalf of all mankind. His perfect life of faithful prayer was not for the purpose of providing a matchless example, but that He might become the spotless sacrifice, vicariously taking the death consequences of men's sin in order that He might provide mankind with His limitless life.

By His redemptive payment He became "a merciful and faithful high priest...to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb. 2:17). He was the High Priest who offered the ultimate offering for all sin in the sinless sacrifice of Himself, and has now "taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1). He is "the one mediator between God and man...who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:5,6). On the basis of His High Priestly mediation,

Christians who receive Him and His work by faith are "reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:18). Such a reconciled relationship between God and man allows the Christian to approach God directly and immediately in prayer. "We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19), "drawing near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22). In the most intimate of personal relationships, we can address God "as sons, by which we cry out 'Abba! Father!'" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

The redemptive payment not only allowed for a reconciled personal relationship with God through Christ, but served as the basis for the restorational provision of God's life restored to man, so that man could function as God intended. Jesus came not only "to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28), but "that we might have life, and have it

more abundantly" (John 10:10). That life is His life, for He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). The Christian life is the life of Jesus Christ; "Christ is our life" (Col. 3:4). The living Lord Jesus is to be the basis of all that we are and all that we do as Christians. He has "granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness" (II Peter 1:3). "All things belong to us" (I Cor. 3:20,21) in Jesus Christ. "Every spiritual blessing in heavenly places" is ours "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). God has orchestrated the "summing up of all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). All that Christians do in their Christian lives is to be the functional expression of the indwelling Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus prompts and empowers our Christian behavior and Christian ministry; our worship, our intercession and our prayer.

Christ: The Prayer of Christian Prayer

The Christian life is not what we do, but what He does in and through us. Everything in the Christian life is Jesus Christ in action as we derive all that we are and all that we do from God in Christ by His Spirit. Since Christian prayer is an essential part of Christian life, it must be concluded that the living Lord Jesus is functioning in our prayers. Norman Grubb indicates that "prayer is the product of our union with Christ. He in us is the Prayer."⁴ T.F. Torrance explains,

"Through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father because He has sent His own Holy Spirit to dwell in us, the same Spirit by whom He lived and prayed in our nature and through whom He offered Himself without spot to the Father, not for His own sake but for our sake. Thus the presence of His Spirit in us means that Christ's prayer and worship of the Father are made to echo in us and issue out of our life to the Father as our own prayer and worship. While it is we who pray, we pray not in our own name but in the name of Christ, and yet it is not we but He who prays in us, so that the prayer which we pray in the flesh we pray in the faith of

the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20)." ⁵

Somewhat more philosophically and with less Christocentric emphasis, C.S. Lewis writes,

"Our act, when we pray, must not, any more than all our other acts, be separated from the continuous act of God Himself, in which alone all finite causes operate."⁶

"He is the ground of our being. He is always both within us and over against us. Our reality is so much from His reality as He, moment by moment, projects into us. The deeper the level within ourselves from which our prayer, or any other act, wells up, the more it is His, but not at all the less ours. Rather, most ours when most His."⁷

Only when Christians recognize their spiritual identity in Jesus Christ, that "Christ is their life" (Col. 3:4) and that as "Christ lives in them" (Gal. 2:20) He must of necessity "pray in them," will they begin to develop an effective Christocentric theology of Christian prayer. Otherwise their orientation to prayer will always have a somewhat deistic, separated concept which over-emphasizes the transcendent distance between God and man,

failing to recognize the immanence of Christ's indwelling and the Christian's spiritual union with the Spirit of Christ.

When Jesus Christ serves as the Pray-er of Christian prayer, we allow Him to express adoration and praise to God the Father through us. We have "been filled with the fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11) "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15).

Since Jesus is "the High Priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1), He continues to serve as the Confessor who prompts our confession in Christian prayer. As He is one with the Father He agrees and concurs with God to "say the same thing" (*homologeō*) about our sin and His sufficiency. "Through Him...our lips are confessing to His name" (Heb. 13:15).

Likewise, the Spirit of Christ expresses thanksgiving to God in the prayers of our lives. Christians "thank God through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:8; 7:25), recognizing the "good grace" (*eucharistia*) of God in all that He does.

Christ in the Christian also serves as our Supplicant in prayer. Martha was quite convinced that if Jesus asked for us, God would undoubtedly hear and grant such requests. "I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (John 11:22). Karl Barth was also convinced of such:

"In His Son God has become man, and therefore He has actually taken our side and become our Brother. And in His Son we are actually raised as His brethren to the side of God. Now if the Son asks Him, how can the Father possibly fail to hear Him? How, then, can the Father fail to hear and answer those whom His Son calls His own, who are together with His Son His children, who ask Him in company with His Son, with whom and for whom the Son asks? How can there be even the smallest interval between asking and hearing? As Jesus Christ asks, and we with Him, God has already made Himself the Guarantor that our requests will be heard."⁸

Not only as our Supplicant in personal petition, but also in intercession for others Jesus serves as Intercessor in our Christian prayer. "The Spirit helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom. 8:26,27).

The indwelling Lord Jesus Christ who is the basis of our Christian lives is the Pray-er of Christian prayer. Jesus is both the subject and the object of Christian prayer. Christian prayer is not an activity that we initiate by human effort, but is prompted by the One who lives in us as our Life in response to the personal invitations of God to avail ourselves of His grace.

With this Christocentric understanding of prayer in mind we can better understand what Jesus meant when He said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7). As we remain, reside and settle-in to the reality of Christ being our life, then our supplications will be His supplications through us and certain to be enacted as His will. This also explains other comments in the Upper Room Discourse when Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do" (John 14:13,14; 15:16), for we are praying in His Person, as the expression of His Being in Christian prayer, and He is certain to act consistent with His character and desires. This is also the best interpretation of "praying in the Holy Spirit" (Eph. 6:18; Jude 20), for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and in Christian prayer we are praying by means of the Spirit of Christ operative within us. When James refers to praying "according

to His will" (James 5:14), we can be assured that the expression of Jesus Christ is always the will of God, and when Jesus Christ functions as Pray-er in our Christian prayers He will prompt only that which is consistent with Who He is.

Christ: The Answer to Christian Prayer

Jesus is not only the subject and the object of Christian prayer, but the answer to such prayer as well. God answers all prayer with the activity of His Son Jesus Christ, who always serves as the expressive agency of God. The answers to our prayers will be but the manner in which God wants to apply the life of Jesus Christ in our particular circumstances.

The complete provision of God for man is in Jesus Christ. God has nothing more to give than what He has given and is giving in Jesus Christ. If God had more to give than Jesus Christ, then Jesus Christ is insufficient. If God could express Himself other than by Jesus Christ, then Jesus "died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). If God had any answer other than Jesus Christ, then Jesus is superfluous. God forbid that we should think that there is anything to be added to the work of Jesus Christ. This was the basis of the great Reformation plea for *sola Christus*; Christ only and Christ alone as our "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). We are "complete in Christ" (Col. 2:10).

"Of all the things that are needed by man, and needed in such a way that he can receive them only from God,...there is one great gift,...there is one great answer. This one divine gift and answer is Jesus Christ." 9

The gift of God is in Jesus Christ (John 4:10; Rom. 5:15; 6:23; Eph. 2:8;). The love of God is in Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 5:5; II Tim. 1:13). All the blessings of God are in Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:3). The grace of God is realized through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The will of God is Jesus Christ. The answer of God to all prayer is Jesus Christ.

When Christians pray for wisdom, as they are instructed to do (James 1:5), they are praying for what they already have in Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:24,30). When Christians pray for discernment, they pray for what they already have by the Spirit of Christ (I Cor. 12:10; I John 4:1). When Christians pray for patience, gentleness, kindness or love, they are praying for what they already have in the character fruit of the Spirit of Christ (Gal. 5:22,23). When Christians pray personal petitions for perceived needs in their lives, the supply for such is already promised in Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:19).

"What does the Christian not have, what can he possibly lack, when he can have Him? What can disturb or hinder or confuse or devastate him in life as a Christian when he can live with Him, in communion with Him? What need is not already met in Him, what difficulty is not already removed in Him, what help is not already present in Him, what word of comfort that he needs is not already spoken in Him, what direction that he awaits is not already given in Him? In Him, the Christian has already attained, he is already at the goal, and he can look back and down upon all his distress as already alleviated.¹⁰

(but the) Christian has not yet realized in what fullness the divine gift and answer is already present and near to hand, and with what joy he can avail himself of it, and in what thankfulness he can acknowledge the fact."¹¹

Using the familiar acrostic of A.C.T.S.

representing prayer as

A doration

C onfession

T hanksgiving

S upplication,

we can further explain how Christ is the answer of all Christian prayer.

In our prayers of adoration and praise we recognize and affirm, "I am not righteous, good and holy; only You are righteous, good, holy, perfect, pure, etc. We express our appreciation of God's nature and character, and the activity that derives out of that character in Jesus Christ. Both verbally and behaviorally we are concerned about expressing the "worth-ship" of God's Being, Person, character and Name in the worship of Christian prayer, as Christ functions through us.

Our prayers of confession recognize that "I can't be or do what I am designed to be or do; only You can manifest Your character in me. I can't glorify You God for I am inadequate, insufficient and sinful; only You can cause me to be what You designed me to be, allowing Jesus Christ to be my sufficiency (II Cor. 3:5) in order to manifest Your character unto Your glory." Thus we "say the same thing" (*homologeō*) as God about our sinfulness (I

John 1:9), and about our identity and sufficiency in Jesus Christ.

Prayers of thanksgiving are those in which we recognize that "I do not take credit for what has taken place; it is only what You have done by Your "good grace" (*eucharistia*) in Jesus Christ. I have not worked or performed meritoriously; only You have done and are doing what is of any value in my life, for Jesus said, 'Apart from Me, you can do nothing.'" (John 15:5). Therefore we seek to "give thanks for all things" (Eph. 5:20) and "in everything" (I Thess. 5:18).

Christian prayers of supplication take the form of both personal petitions and intercession for others. In these prayers we are saying, "I seek, ask and request about these particular needs and wants, both for myself and for others; You have "supplied all of our needs...in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19)." We

"draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16), recognizing that such mercy and grace are realized in Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

In all of the forms of prayer the Christian recognizes that Christ is the answer to all Christian prayer. We see our inadequacy and His sufficiency. We recognize and affirm that our only response can be the prayer of faith that responds to God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Adoration - "I am not...; only You are..."

Confession - "I cannot...; only You can..."

Thanks giving - "I do not...; only You do..."

Supplication - "I seek...; You have supplied..."

It is not that there is any inherent power in the ACTS of prayer, or that prayer ACTS, but prayer causes us to continue to recognize and assent to God's ACTS in Jesus Christ. Over and over again, moment-by-moment, "without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17) we remember and recognize the grace/faith relationship in which we function as Christians.

We are encouraged to persistence and perseverance in prayer because God wants Christians to ever remain in the context of that grace/faith position, wherein the dynamic of God's grace in Jesus Christ is applied to everything. Nothing is impossible in God's responses to our prayers of faith (Matt. 17:20), when we allow the divine dynamic of God's activity in Jesus Christ to be applied to such. On the other hand, "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Heb. 11:6), for we disallow the activity of Jesus Christ both in us and in the situation.

Since so many of the Biblical statements and admonitions represent prayer as supplicatory asking, requesting or petitioning (Matt. 7:7; 18:19; Mk. 11:24; Luke 11:9,10; John 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:24,26; Rom. 1:10; Phil. 4:6; I Tim. 2:1; James 1:6; 4:2; I John 3:22; 5:14,15), Karl Barth and others have regarded such as central to the understanding of Christian prayer.

"Prayer is petition, ...asking, a seeking and a knocking directed towards God; a wishing, a desiring and a requesting presented to God." ¹²

"The most intimate thing in Christian prayer is the fact that the Christian both may ask and actually does ask. The Christian is able to ask and to take because God gives him Himself and all that He possesses. He freely gives us all things (Rom. 8:32). The true worship of God is that man is ready to take and actually does take where God Himself gives, that he seeks and knocks in order that he may really receive. This receiving is Christian prayer in all its centrality as petition. It does not derive from the self-will of the Christian himself, ..it derives from what the Christian receives from God." ¹³

"If man simply lays his need before Him and therefore comes to Him as a suppliant, he thereby renounces all arbitrariness towards God, confessing that there can be no question either of representing himself as worthy or of presenting anything worthy to God. When he comes to God

simply with his request, he comes with empty hands. But empty hands are necessary when human hands are to be spread out before God and filled by Him. It is these empty hands that God in His goodness wills of us when He bids us pray to Him. The Christian understands God as the unique source of all good and himself as absolutely needy in relation to Him. He has nothing either to represent or to present to God except himself as the one who has to receive all things from Him." ¹⁴

The supplication of our personal petitions and intercessions for others constantly keeps us in the faith frame of mind, wherein we repeatedly recognize that it is not what we do, but what God does, that comprises the Christian life.

Christian prayer provides the connectivity of obedience and faith in the entirety of the Christian life. That can only be understood, though, when we have a correct understanding of both obedience and faith. Jacques Ellul explains,

"Our intellect, always defective in the things of the Spirit, will trick us into thinking that if there is obedience then there must be an obligation, a compulsion, a duty to pray. Then we fall back into the confusion between law and commandment. Obedience in Christ is the opposite to a duty or an

obligation. There is no compulsion. There is the hearing of a word which I receive and which commands me, before which it is mine to obey without pressure or penalty. There is not a duty to pray. Duty sterilizes prayer; it kills the possibility of pray, for duty is impersonal and sterilizing." ¹⁵

"We are summoned, invited by God, with the possibility always open of refusing the invitation, yet knowing that this commandment offers something which previously we had thought impossible." ¹⁶

Obedience in the Christian life is not to be understood in the context of a legal and juridical framework. We are not obeying an externalized Law that demands that we are to love or to pray. Such a conception casts prayer back into a self-effort to please God, for which we are most inadequate. Christ is the end of the forensic law (Rom. 10:4), for the law and character of God is placed within our hearts (Heb. 8:10; 10:16). The primary Greek word for "obedience" in the new covenant literature of the New Testament is *hupakouo*, meaning "to listen under." We obey when we listen to God's direction in our lives, expressed by the Spirit of

Christ, and respond in faith, the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5: 16:26). Thus "keeping His commandments, we ask and receive from Him" (I John 3:22).

Likewise, faith must be redefined from its popular misperception of "mental assent to the veracity of propositional truth." The "prayer offered in faith" (James 5:15) is the prayer in which we respond to God in "our receptivity of His activity" having obediently "listened under" His personal and individualized commandment to us. When we pray "believing" (Matt. 21:22), and "ask in faith" (James 1:6), we are receptive to God's activity in Jesus Christ and "believe that we have received" (Mk. 11:24) for we understand that God truly wants to give us everything in the Christian life. Barth notes that when

"the Christian prays, he asks, with a strong assurance that he will be heard even as he asks. He does not need a great faith

to do this. He needs only real faith. Without faith the Christian cannot pray, just as without faith he cannot be a Christian at all." ¹⁷

Prayer is the breath of the Christian life. "The prayer of the Christian to God is the basic act of the obedience engendered in faith."¹⁸ Christians engage in prayer because it is the only way to live the Christian life constantly aware of our receptivity of His activity in faith and obedience. Ellul cautions,

"If, for the Christian, prayer becomes impossible, dead, troublesome, uncertain, ... the sole basic problem is that we do not make the decision to obey, since we do not take the commandment seriously, and if that is the case it is because we are not living the faith which has its foundation in Jesus Christ." ¹⁹

"The absence of prayer and the difficulty of praying are the evidence for the absence of faith." ²⁰

"Since it is a real encounter with God, the lack of prayer forces us to consider the lack of reality in our faith." ²¹

Prayer is the continual process whereby we live in faith and obedience. It need not even be expressed in the verbalization of words, for it becomes a lifestyle of prayer.

"While we do not know how to pray or what to pray as we ought, the ascended High Priest sends us His own Spirit who helps us in our weakness by making the prayers and intercessions of Christ inaudibly to echo in our stammering in such a way that our prayers and intercessions become a participation in His before the throne of the Father in heaven."²²

Some have objected that such a view of Christian prayer can lead to passivism. If we are living in the awareness of our grace/faith relationship with God, and affirming the Lordship of Jesus Christ by saying, "Yes Lord; not my will, but Thine be done" (Matt. 26:39), does this cause people to cease to pray? On the contrary, it should cause them to "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17), for we need constantly to recognize that it is not what we do, but what God does, that constitutes and enacts the abundance of life (John 10:10). It should be noted, though, that an appeal to a perennial attitude of receptivity in a lifestyle of prayer should not be used as an excuse to refrain and abstain from particular occasions of prayerful intercourse with God. In

both our specific times of prayer and in the general receptivity of a constant lifestyle of prayer, we continue to recognize that the Person and activity of Jesus Christ is God's answer to all Christian prayer.

Inadequate Forms of Prayer

The foregoing explanation of Christocentric prayer necessarily forms a denial of the general or religious forms and ideas of prayer that are so prevalent today. A brief listing must suffice to explain that:

Christian prayer is NOT an activity in which we engage in order to please and appease God. God is pleased and appeased by the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and what He has accomplished in His "finished work" (John 19:30).

Christian prayer is NOT a meritorious performance or "work" that God expects of us. Christ's performance and work on our behalf is the sole basis of our being credited, imputed and imparted with righteousness.

Christian prayer is NOT something that we do for God or offer to God. God needs nothing done for Him. He "lacks nothing."

"Prayer consists less in man offering something to God and doing something for Him than in turning to Him, seeking, asking and accepting from Him something he needs. It is our longing for Him and for what He alone can give."²³

Christian prayer is NOT a duty or an obligation based upon a legal concept of obedience, wherein our self-effort proves our sincerity or "earns points" before God.

Christian prayer is NOT an exercise designed to make us better, stronger, more knowledgeable, or

more "spiritual." Jesus Christ is the basis of our strength, knowledge and spiritual maturity.

Christian prayer is NOT for personal interest and pleasure (James 4:3), or for the self-aggrandizement that makes us "look good" before God and others. God knows our hearts!

Christian prayer is NOT for the purpose of developing subjective "good feelings" and emotions that prove cathartic or therapeutic in psychological adjustment.

Christian prayer is NOT a process of psychological gymnastics whereby we work ourselves into a subjective state that we might think is "faith" which will insure the granting of our prayers.

Christian prayer is NOT self-instruction whereby we gain knowledge of ourselves and God's will.

Such is anthropocentric prayer, rather than Christocentric prayer.

Christian prayer is NOT a means of eliciting or soliciting more "blessings" or "benefits" from God. "God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:3).

Christian prayer is NOT a means of presenting God with information. We must not deny the omniscience of God, for "your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him" (Matt. 6:32).

Christian prayer is NOT asking God to "engineer" a situation to the particular plan that we desire to see enacted.

Christian prayer is NOT an evasion of the problems and anxieties of contemporary existence here on earth. We want to see how Christ is working in the midst of such.

Christian prayer is NOT a superstitious, mystical or magical trance, wherein we seek to enter into a spiritual fusion of oneness and unity with God.

Christian prayer is NOT a "power tool" that always works when we push the button of the inexorable "law of prayer" or employ the "power of prayer."

Christian prayer is NOT a "discipline" or devotional exercise that will in and of itself lead us into godliness.

Christian prayer is NOT a method, program or system, the techniques and procedures of which will guarantee results.

Christian prayer is NOT an instrument that we use, such as a "heavenly telephone" with a "hot line" to God.

Christian prayer is NOT man "laying hold of God" and demanding of Him or commanding Him to act.

Christian prayer is NOT a persistent and "shameless" (Luke 11:8) haranguing of God until we get we want.

Christian prayer is NOT an expression of undue care or anxiety for oneself or others. We are to "cast all our cares and concerns upon Christ."

Christian prayer is NOT external actions that are pretentious and ostentatious "in order to be seen by men" (Matt. 6:5,6).

Christian prayer is NOT the verbosity of "meaningless repetition" (Matt. 6:7) in the saying of "long prayers" (Matt. 23:14; Mk. 12:40).

Christian prayer is NOT the mechanical ritual of repeating rote formulas, somewhat like spinning

the Tibetan "prayer wheel." C.S. Lewis noted that "simply to say prayers is not to pray; otherwise a team of properly trained parrots would serve as well." ²⁴

Christian prayer is NOT an activity that can be executed "on command," as a form of social convention in litanies, rosaries, invocations and the like.

Christian prayer is NOT event-centered in a prescribed place, at a prescribed time, utilizing a prescribed procedure.

Christian prayer is NOT a communicational language or discourse that can be analyzed by the content of the words. It does not depend on our ability to speak the language (Romans 8:26).

Christian prayer is NOT pedagogical, polemic or proclamatory. It is not prayer if it is addressed to anyone other than God.

Christian prayer is NOT passivism, acquiescence or inertia that concludes that "God is going to do what He's going to do anyway; Thy will be done!"

Christian prayer is NOT resignation, avoidance or indifference which says, "Go your way; I will pray for you" (James 2:15,16).

Christian prayer is NOT limited to a punctiliar "point in time" or an existential "affair of the moment." It can be the constancy of a lifestyle wherein we "pray without ceasing" (I Thess. 5:17).

These denials should serve to refocus our understanding of Christian prayer as Christocentric prayer. The dynamic reality of the life of Jesus Christ makes Christian prayer radically different

from all forms of religious prayer. Christ is the basis for the divine/human intimacy of Christian prayer. He is the Pray-er of Christian prayer as the Spirit of Christ activates and empowers all that we do as Christians. He is the answer to all Christian prayer, for all that God does He does through Jesus Christ.

The words of Jacques Ellul serve as a fitting conclusion to such a study on Christocentric prayer.

"Theology can tell us what prayer is, can enlighten us on the meaning of the revelation concerning prayer and on the place which prayer occupies in the revelation. It can describe for us accurately 'what man does when he prays.' But all this comes to nothing when man does not pray."²⁵

Joining with the disciples, our petition might be, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1).

Christocentric Worship

For many years voices have been decrying the decline of a proper sense of worship in the Western churches. Several decades ago A.W. Tozer wrote,

"The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men."¹

"We have lost our spirit of worship and our ability to withdraw inwardly to meet God in adoring silence."²

"I wonder if there was ever a time when true spiritual worship was at a lower ebb. To great sections of the Church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the 'program.' This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us."³

"The shallowness of our inner experience, the hollowness of our worship, and that servile imitation of the world which marks our promotional methods all testify that we, in this

day, know God only imperfectly, and the peace of God scarcely at all."⁴

"If Bible Christianity is to survive the present world upheaval, we shall need to recapture the spirit of worship."⁵

More recently Leslie Flynn has lamented that,

"In many churches the art of worship has markedly declined. The so-called hour of worship has become a time when mind and emotions are anesthetized into neutral. Out of habit, church obligation, affection for the minister, peer pressure, family togetherness, patriotism, or community expectation, people sink into their usual pews."⁶

In similar manner John MacArthur Jr. explains,

"The Church has slipped into a philosophy of 'Christian humanism' that is flawed with self-love, self-esteem, self-fulfillment, and self-glory. There appears to be scant concern about worshipping our glorious God on His terms. So-called worship seems little more than some liturgy (high or low) equated with stained-glass windows, organ music, or emotion-filled songs and prayers. If the bulletin didn't say 'Worship Service,' maybe we wouldn't know what we were supposed to be doing."⁷

The suggested solutions to this perceived decline of worship range from encouraging a renaissance of ritual and liturgy to the repudiation of all structure. Perhaps the most prevalent emphasis is that which advocates "contemporary worship" styles that

supposedly relate better to our modern culture. These are usually patterned after the worship styles of the "charismatic movement" which has flourished since the 1960s in the United States and around the world. These public worship assemblies feature an energetic, enthusiastic and exciting spontaneity that is alleged to be the free-working of the Holy Spirit, but can also be an emotional and subjective experientialism. The attendees at these "services of worship" are often physically involved by the raising and clapping of hands, as well as touching and hugging one another. The music features modern instrumentation of guitars, drums, keyboards, and large electronic amplifiers. Such a "renewal of worship" is used as a drawing-card to involve more and more people in the church. We must question whether the variety of styles and forms employed in public assemblies actually constitutes Christian worship. Has there not been too much emphasis on

the activities and their psychological effects upon people, rather than upon the reality that is the essence of Christianity?

Our starting point must be to define worship within a Biblical theology that is Christocentric.

Words for "Worship"

The Hebrew language of the old covenant literature had several words that indicated worship.

The most prevalent Hebrew word was *shachah* which referred to "bowing down before an object of honor." When Ezra read the Law after their return to Jerusalem, the Israelites "bowed low and worshiped the Lord" (Neh. 8:6). The Psalmist implores, "Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Ps. 95:6).

A second Hebrew word, *abad*, indicated "service or work for God." Moses told the Israelites, "You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him" (Deut. 6:13). The Psalmist encourages rulers to "Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11).

A third Hebrew word, *segid*, is used in Daniel to indicate "showing respect" or "doing homage" to the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar had constructed (cf. Dan. 3:5-18).

In the new covenant literature of the New Testament, several Greek words are employed to refer to worship:

The Greek words *gonu* and *gonupeteo* refer to "bending the knee." From these we get the English word "genuflect." Paul refers to his willingness to "bow my knees before the Father" (Eph. 3:14), and

the recognition that "every knee should bow at the name of Jesus" (Phil. 2:10).

The Greek word *sebo* is derived from *sebas*, the word for "fear" or "reverence." The Jews tried to convince Gallio that Paul was persuading men "to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). The composite Greek word *eusebeo*, combining *eu*, meaning "good," and *sebo*, is used by Paul when he refers to the idolatrous "unknown god" which the Athenians "worshipped in ignorance" (Acts 17:23).

Proskuneo, which combines *pros*, "toward," and *kuneo*, "to kiss," is used by Jesus during His temptation when He responded to the devil, saying, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matt. 4:10). Jesus also used this word when He told the Samaritan woman, "God is Spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). This is the predominant

Greek word used for "worship" in the New Testament.

Another word, *latreuo*, is derived from the word *latris*, referring to "a servant." To thus "serve in worship" is the word Paul uses of our "spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1) and for "worship in the Spirit of God" (Phil. 3:3).

The Greek word *leitourgeo* is the word from which we get the English word "liturgy." It is a combination of the word *laos*, "people," and *ergeo*, "to work." It refers to the work of the people in priestly service or temple worship. The Christians of Antioch were "ministering to the Lord" (Acts 13:2) in worship, and Christian giving can be a "ministry of service" (II Cor. 9:12).

One other word, *therapeuo*, meaning "to heal," is translated as "worship" in the King James Version of

Acts 17:25, where Paul indicated that God is "not worshipped" by human hands.

Our English word "worship" is derived from the old Anglo-Saxon term, *weorthscipe*, meaning "worth-ship," which gradually evolved into the word "worship." It refers to the attribution or expression of worth or value toward any object.

Word-studies, of themselves, do not bring us to a clear definition of worship. Such can only be derived from a comprehensive understanding of the New Testament and the new covenant awareness of the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Beginning then with the inadequate general and religious concepts of worship, we will proceed to differentiate "Christian worship" from all other concepts of worship.

General Concept of "Worship"

In its most general sense worship has reference to regarding an object with honor, respect, devotion, reverence, veneration, adoration or admiration. An object regarded as having value, worth, honor or esteem is accorded recognition or worship.

Many have indicated that human beings in general have a fundamental need, drive or desire to worship, since they were created with a spiritual life-function. Unlike the animal kingdom that does not have spiritual function, all men have this basic need and human desire to worship, and therefore all men are worshipping creatures. Anthropologists and sociologists seem to confirm this phenomenon.

The object of this spiritual desire to worship is often sought in something beyond ourselves. Men have often projected spiritual worth and value to

metaphysical, mystical and magical ideals and techniques, such as New Age "energy sources." Throughout history men have found more tangible objects to worship such as the sun, moon, stars, mountains, waters, storms, etc. In order to objectify the object of their veneration, men have often constructed tangible images or idols to represent what they worship. Paul explains the spiritual factor of idolatry as having "respect for demons" (Acts 17:22) and being "sharers in demons" (I Cor. 10:20).

Mankind can also revert to worshipping himself and his own abilities. Humanism ascribes ultimate worth to man and his intelligence, creativity and productivity. Writing to the Romans, Paul referred to those who "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25). In so doing, man often becomes a slave to his own passions for power, possessions, relationships, sexuality, etc.

Anything that man becomes mentally and emotionally preoccupied with can become an object accorded with honor, value and worth. The materialistic orientation of modern society affords innumerable objects for worship. Real estate, automobiles, clothes, stocks, bonds and countless other objects are regarded as having great worth and value among men, and therefore qualify for the ascription of "worth-ship" in worship. Other people, such as athletes, musicians, and politicians (even pastors), are often idolized in hero worship. Associations with other people in such social groupings as fraternities, sororities, and special interest societies (even denominations and local churches) are often considered as having great worth that becomes "worth-ship."

All of these above mentioned objects of man's attention and desire have been formulated into collective religious expressions of worship.

Religious Concepts of "Worship"

By its etymological definition, religion (derived from the Latin *religio* or *religare*) involves being "bound" or "tied" in devotion to a particular object. In the process of such, religious worship, as differentiated from Christian worship, tends to develop certain traits and patterns. Whereas worship in general is object-centered, religious forms of worship are usually anthropocentric, focusing on the human worshipper's actions, experiences and benefits from such worship, as well as event-centered, focusing on the time, place and procedures involved in such worship.

Religious worship operates on the fallacious premise of human activated and generated activity. It fails to recognize that man is always spiritually derivative, deriving activity either from God or

Satan. Such religious attempts at worship inevitably involve the imperative of human effort. Worship is defined as what we do. In order to worship we gather together and we sing, we pray, we listen, we give, and we serve God with our talents and skills. We "do our thing" in the parameters of prescribed programs and productions. It is "do-it-yourself" worship!

The reasoning behind such in the worship of Christian religion is usually that Jesus told His followers to do this, and gave us an example of such for us to follow. Even when couched in the explanation that "we do it because of Christ, in response to what He has done for us," it does not escape the reasoning that "we do it." Popular evangelical writers blatantly state that "real worship is something you do."⁸ "Because of what God has done for us, we are to be occupied with offering up acceptable spiritual sacrifices of worship."⁹

"Worship involves aligning ourselves with God's will for us."¹⁰

In contrast to such we shall note that Christian worship is not what we do anymore than anything in the Christian life is what we do! The explanation of worship as the self-generated activities of man is a failure to understand God's grace. "God is not served (KJV-worshipped) with human hands, as though He needed anything" (Acts. 17:25).

Religious worship also focuses on man's emotions and experiences. How does the worship experience make us feel? Do we feel good? Do we feel better for having thus engaged ourselves in worship? When worship is defined by how we feel, it is relegated to a mood-altering psychological experience. Our physical senses may be stirred by the architecture of the building, the beauty of the stained-glass windows, the sounds of the organ, the

voices of a well-trained choir, the oratorical ability of the speaker, or the comfort of the pews. The lighting in the sanctuary, the musical variations, the sequence of the events, can and are orchestrated to manipulate people psychologically. They may be employed to create a pietistic and sentimental sense of peace and security. They may incite enthusiasm and excitement. They may draw tears of remorse, or impel the participant to a particular course of action. These subjective machinations are nothing more than playing upon the natural personal aspirations, gratifications and reputations of the participants, via "the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life" (I John 2:16).

In response to such experientialism, Ralph Martin writes,

"The centrality of God-in-Christ in Christian worship emphasizes the function of the Spirit's ministry to enable us

to emerge from the straitjacket of our emotional introspections and oversensitive preoccupations with our 'feelings' at any given time."¹¹

R.J. Neuhaus also indicates that,

"the celebration that we call worship has less to do with the satisfaction of the pursuit of happiness than with the abandonment of the pursuit of happiness."¹²

In addition to emphasizing what we do and how we feel, religious worship endeavors tend to fixate on how we think and the extent to which we think that we have the object of our worship all figured out. By the repetition of creeds and the recitation of "statements of faith" people's ideological belief-systems are conformed and confirmed. Worship is often regarded as a time to gain knowledge and understanding through the teaching of doctrine and theology. This is particularly true among fundamentalistic religious groups wherein epistemological constructs of thought become the objects of their worship, amounting to ideological idolatry.

Religious worship is also anthropocentric in its emphasis on the benefit that accrues to the worshipper by the activity of worship. By worshipping it is alleged that we get strength, patience, "energy," and blessings. "Blessing comes from God in response to worship,"¹³ writes an evangelical author. What then did Paul mean when he wrote that "God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3)? The objective of Christian worship is not to "get blessed," but "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6).

Alongside of being man-centered, religious worship is also event-centered. It is limited by particular times, places and procedures, outside of which the worship experience is not considered legitimate or allowed to take place.

In his book entitled *Worship*, A.P. Gibbs declares that,

"Much of the so-called 'public worship' in Christendom, is merely a form of Christianized Judaism, and, in some cases, thinly veiled paganism. In Judaism there was a separate priestly caste who alone could conduct the worship of Israel. In Christendom a man-made priesthood called 'the clergy,' is essential to its worship, in spite of the plain teaching of the New Testament that all believers are priests. These priests of Judaism wore a distinctive dress, as also does the clergy. Judaism emphasized an earthly sanctuary, or building. In like manner, Christendom makes much of its consecrated 'places of worship,' and miscalls the edifice 'a church,' and refers to it as 'the house of God.' Jewish priests had an altar on which were offered sacrifices to God. Christendom has erected 'altars' in these ornate buildings, before which candles burn and incense is offered, and, in many cases, on which a wafer is kept, which is looked upon as the body of Christ! It is hardly necessary to say that all this copying of Judaism is absolutely foreign to the teaching of the New Testament.

Thus Christendom has initiated its own specially educated and ordained priesthood, whose presence is indispensable to 'administer the sacraments.' These men, robed in gorgeous vestments, from within a roped off 'sanctuary,' stand before a bloodless 'altar,' with a background of burning candles, crosses and smoking incense, and 'conduct the worship' for the laity. With the use of an elaborate prepared ritual, with stereotyped prayers, and responses from the audience, the whole service proceeds smoothly and with mechanical precision. It is a marvel of human invention and ingenuity, with an undoubted appeal to the esthetic; but a tragic and sorry substitute for the spiritual worship which our Lord

declared that His Father sought from His redeemed children."¹⁴

The Judaic religion had carefully prescribed Sabbath regulations for worshipping from sundown on Friday evening to sundown on Saturday evening. Voluminous legalistic accretions were added throughout the centuries. The Jews of the old covenant, for the most part, missed the intent of God in pre-figuring the privilege of God's people resting in the enjoyment of what God has done and is doing. Jesus Christ came as the substance of which the weekly Judaic Sabbaths were but a symbolic shadow. Aware that He was "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:8), Jesus violated the religious regulations of the Sabbath, for He knew that the "Sabbath rest" (Heb. 4:9) wherein God's people could cease from their labors of striving to please God by their prescribed worship procedures, was to

be found in the dynamic of His own life through Christocentric worship.

Yet the worship of Christian religion continues to emphasize the "Christian Sabbath" on Sunday, complete with legalistic expectations galore. The event of worship is considered to take place during the "Sunday Morning Worship Hour."

Whereas Judaism regarded the place of worship to be the "earthly sanctuary" (Heb. 9:1) of the tabernacle and the temple, Christian religion regards the "church building" as "God's House." This despite the fact that Stephen indicated that "the Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands" (Acts 7:48), and Paul told the Athenians the same thing (Acts 17:24). Those who "go to worship" at "the house of worship" each week are limiting the worship that God intends in His people.

Since religion is often based on a law paradigm that prescribes precise procedures and patterns for life and worship, so religious worship is often shackled by these forms, techniques, rituals, and "regulations of worship" (Heb. 9:1). Worship is perceived as a "program" or a "production," wherein different "styles" and "art forms" of "pomp and circumstance" are employed. The spontaneity of the Spirit of God is quenched. One religious author declared, "acceptable worship does not happen spontaneously. Preparation is essential."¹⁵ The author once overheard a pastor refer to his manipulation of "the worship service" using the oxymoron of "planned spontaneity."

Judson Cornwall writes,

"Whenever the method of worship becomes more important than the Person of worship, we have already prostituted our worship. There are entire congregations who worship praise and praise worship but who have not yet learned to praise and worship God in Jesus Christ."¹⁶

God is not pleased with such religious worship.
Through Isaiah, God says to the Israelites concerning their religious worship,

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me? I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer; their incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen." (Isaiah 1:11-15)

"This people draws near with their words, and honors Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote." (Isaiah 29:13)

This latter verse from Isaiah is quoted by Jesus as an indictment upon the scribes and Pharisees of first-century Judaism (Matt. 15:8,9).

The prophet Amos also states God's perspective on their religious worship.

"I hate, I reject your festivals. Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; and I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs. I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:21-24)

Writing to the new Christians in Galatia who were in danger of reverting back to religious worship, Paul exclaims, "You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear that perhaps I have labored over you in vain" (Gal. 4:10). To the Colossians who were being bombarded by religionists, Paul declares, "Let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Col. 2:16,17).

Religious worship is not only inadequate, it is an abomination to God. The "good news" of the gospel

is that God has provided in His Son, Jesus Christ, an entirely new basis of life and worship.

Christian Concept of "Worship"

Christian worship is radically different from all the forms of religious worship. That is because Christianity is not a religion, but the dynamic spiritual reality of God in action through His Son, Jesus Christ in His people.

Judaism stresses God's Law and His activity that is to be gratefully praised. Islam emphasizes submission to the will of Allah. Hinduism advocates the good works of "karma" to please the gods. Buddhism promotes self-control for inner-peace to transcend the cycle of rebirth into "nirvana." Jesus did not come to bring another

religious worship pattern. Despite his theological deficiencies, the early Christian thinker, Marcion, is reported to have said, "the new thing that Jesus Christ brought into the world was Himself."

Christianity is Christ. Everything that is Christian is His Being in action, the dynamic reality of the ontological presence and activity of the risen Lord Jesus. Ralph Martin correctly states, "Christian worship is established on the premise that the risen Lord is present with His believing Church."¹⁷

Christian worship is not man-centered or event-centered, as is all religious worship, but it is Christ-centered. Such Christocentric worship was established by Jesus Christ in His redemptive work which reconciled God and man in order to restore the spiritual presence and dynamic of God to man.

"Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, entering through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own

blood He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve (or worship - *latreuein*) the living God?" (Heb. 9:11-14)

As the "High Priest" (Heb. 2:17) and "the one mediator between God and man" (I Tim. 2:5), Jesus led us into reconciled relationship with God with the privilege of His divine presence in us. Jesus continues to be the priest that leads us in our worship of God. "No man comes to the Father," either in reconciliation or in worship, "but through Him" (John 14:6). "Through Christ we are enabled to come to God."¹⁸ John MacArthur Jr. notes that "the objective of redemption is making worshippers."¹⁹ The primary purpose of redemption is not how to get a man out of hell and into heaven, but to restore man to God's intent by the imputation and impartation of Christ's life in the receptive believer in order to live and worship to the glory of God.

In Christian worship the Christian participates in what Christ continues to do as the living Lord in our lives. We participate in His life, His ministry, His intercession and worship. C.E.B. Cranfield states, "the efficacy of our worship as our action lies in His action on our behalf, His continual intercession."²⁰ Christian worship is prompted, evoked, activated and generated by Jesus Christ. This is the basis on which J.B. Torrance asserts that "Jesus Christ is the one true worshipper,"²¹ for everything that is "Christian" is the activity of Jesus Christ. "Worship is controlled by its object who is also subject,"²² writes G.W. Bromiley. Jesus is both the subject and the object of Christian worship, which is thus completely Christocentric.

"Jesus and worship are inseparable," writes Judson Cornwall: "He is the route to worship, the reason for worship, and the reality of worship."²³ J.B. Torrance explains that "worship...is evoked by

Christ, through the Spirit, in such a way that He is the One who acts in us and through us, so that our worship becomes real worship in Spirit and in Truth. It is not we who represent Christ, but Christ who re-presents Himself through the Spirit."²⁴ "By Him (Jesus Christ) is our Amen (our worship) to the glory of God through us" (II Cor. 1:20).

"The main point," states the writer to the Hebrews, is that "we have a High Priest" who is "a minister in the sanctuary, in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man" (Heb. 8:1,2). He identifies Jesus as the *leitourgos*, the "leader of worship," in the Holy Place of God's presence. The Christocentric reality of Christian worship could be expressed no clearer.

True Christian worship is the consistent response and activity of Jesus Christ within us toward God the Father, in order to glorify God by

the expression of the "worth-ship" of His character in the behavior of man. Jesus is, and has always been, the only expresser of God. He is the expressive "Word" which "became flesh" (John 1:1,14). He is the expressive "image of God" (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 4:4), whereby the invisible character of God is made visible in human behavior.

As with everything in the Christian life, worship is enacted only by the grace of God. "Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). The dynamic activity of God expressing the reality of God's character is only realized as expressed by Jesus Christ. Christian worship is always activated by God's grace. He is the dynamic of His own demands.

"We can expect God to provide everything necessary to make worship possible. We children of God must ever be dependent upon God, for we have no resources of our own. We are as impoverished in worship times as a baby unable to provide its own bottle at feeding time. God, the object of our worship, also becomes the inspiration of that worship. He has

imparted His own Spirit into our hearts to energize that worship. All that is due Him comes from Him. His glorious Person evokes admiration for and honor of Him, as He imparts His nature into me." ²⁵

"The Father is the originator of worship. The formation of life is not the responsibility of the children. God is not a divorced parent who has visiting rights only on Sundays." ²⁶

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit prompt and activate Christian worship to express the "worth-ship" of His divine character, and are also the recipients of the glory of the expression of that all-glorious character. Christian worship can only be understood in this Trinitarian expression. All attempts to divide the triune God into varying economic roles is fraught with misinterpretation. The three Persons as one God function as the essence of Christian worship.

To the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus said, "God is Spirit; worship Him in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4:24). Despite the absence of a definite article, Jesus was not saying that "God is a spirit,"

one among many nebulous noumena. Rather, He was indicating that God is the essence by which all things "spiritual" are to be measured and determined. We are to worship God in (or by) the activity of His Spirit operative within our spirit. Every Christian has the Spirit of Christ dwelling in and operative in their spirit, or they are not Christians. "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9), and "the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16). We worship as Christians by the energizing activity of the Spirit of Christ operative within us. Christ is the spiritual Reality of God, the Truth (John 14:6), and the only One capable of expressing the reality of God's character through us. Christian worship transpires only as the Spirit of Christ who is the Reality of God expresses the character of God in the behavior of man to the glory of God. Those who do not understand the

basis of Christian worship will inevitably interpret Jesus' words of worshipping "in Spirit and in Truth" with religious concepts of worshipping with emotion and mind, with feeling and doctrine, with experientialism and epistemology, with "enthusiasm and orthodoxy,"²⁷ with "sincerity and Scriptural consistency",²⁸ with "whole-hearted genuineness and true concepts."²⁹ They have missed the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ in Christian worship.

To the Philippians Paul explained that "we (Christians) are the true (the spiritual reality that God intended, in contrast to the physical pre-figuring of such among the Jews) circumcision (in that our sins have been cut off by the work of Jesus Christ, rather than just male foreskins), who worship in (or by) the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3). Christians worship by means of the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Christ (Rom.

8:9), expressing the "worth-ship" of God's character in our behavior, thereby counteracting "the confidence in the flesh," comprised of those selfish and sinful behavioral patterns expressed apart from Christ.

"Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1), urges Paul. Make yourselves available by faith to God's activity, in order to participate in a "spiritual service of worship." The intense practicality of such worship is evidenced by the following context in Romans 12-16. Christian worship is everything Christians do individually and corporately as Christ functions as their life (Col. 3:4). John Calvin noted that "the only lawful worship of God is the observation of righteousness, holiness and purity."³⁰

What is the one condition of human responsibility for Christian worship? Faith is always the singular response of man in the Christian life, as the Reformation theme of *sola fide* (faith alone) indicated. Faith is much more than belief or mental assent. It is our receptivity of God's activity, which activity will always express the "worth-ship" of His character. God cannot act out of character. He does what He does, because He is who He is. In Christian worship we allow for our availability to His ability to express Himself unto His own glory. The message of Grace in the Christian gospel reveals that Christianity is not what we do, but what He does for us, in us, as us, and through us.

Christ's activity in the Christian is not prescribed with stereotyped patterns of behavior. Jesus Christ wants to be uniquely Himself in and through us. Whereas the old covenant had prescribed forms of worship as a pictorial pre-figuring to point to Jesus

Christ, the new covenant is the Person of Jesus Christ functioning as the Reality of our lives, expressed in whatever form He directs and projects. The external rituals are replaced with internal spiritual Reality. Worship is not prescribed by the written words of the Law, but by the indwelling Spirit of Christ who serves as "the law written in our hearts" (Heb. 8:10; 10:16).

The free expression of a divinely indwelt human being allowing for the expression God's character in his behavior is the glorious purpose for which we were created (Isa. 43:7). That is why Jesus declared that "you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Such truth is not the propositional truth of doctrinal orthodoxy, but is the Personal Truth of the Reality of Jesus Christ who said, "I am the Truth" (John 14:6). Jesus went on to explain that the Truth of which He spoke was Himself, for He said, "If therefore the Son shall

make you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). By the presence of the Reality of the Life of Jesus Christ we are liberated from the prescribed forms and patterned procedures of religious worship styles. We are free to allow for the spontaneous, unique and novel expression of the "worth-ship" of God's character in our behavior all the time, everywhere, and in whatever manner He desires to manifest Himself. We are not limited to specific times, places and procedures in our Christian worship.

Geographical location is not a relevant issue in Christian worship, as Jesus made clear to the Samaritan woman who was questioning the proper location (John 4:20-24). Christians are both individually and collectively the "house of the Lord" (Eph. 2:19; I Peter 2:5) and the "temple" wherein God's presence is active (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19; II Cor. 6:16).

The time of our worship is not limited to a specific hour in a "service of worship." Worship is a lifestyle. Ernst Kasemann refers to "worship in everyday life,"³¹ for it is the moment-by-moment privilege of "practicing His presence," as Brother Lawrence phrased it,³² and allowing the glorious life of Jesus Christ to be expressed in our everyday behavior to the glory of God.

This is not to imply that there is not a place for the collective expression of Christian worship in the Body of Christ, the Church. We are "not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25). We have a functional responsibility in the "sharing of the Body of Christ" (I Cor. 10:16). J.B. Torrance correctly notes that "worship is the very life and essence of the Church,"³³ but we must be careful to remember that the Church is not an institutional organization that exists to plan and promote public assemblies, the traditions and rituals of which are

often regarded as constituting or producing worship. The Church is the collective expression of individual Christians who are allowing the life of Jesus Christ to function in their inter-relationships. John MacArthur Jr. correctly explains that "a Sunday service is to be only a corporate overflow of a worshipping life."³⁴

Every facet of the Christian life is to be an expression of worship. Every Scriptural reference to the life and function of Jesus Christ in our lives can be viewed as being inclusive of the activity of Christ in our Christian worship. A few examples will suffice to document such:

"The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, ...is Christ in you, the hope (confident expectation) of glory (of manifesting the "worth-ship" of the all-glorious character of God, unto God's glory). (Col. 1:26,27).

"It is no longer I who live (or worship), but Christ lives (and worships) in me: and the life that I live (and the worship I engage in) I do so by faith (our receptivity of His activity) in

the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"For me to live (and worship) is Christ" (Phil. 1:21)

"His divine power has granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness (expressing the "worth-ship" of the character of God), through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence (to express such glorious and excellent character within His creation). (II Peter 1:4).

"Apart from Me you can do nothing (including the bearing of the fruit of His character in worship). (John 15:5).

"God is at work in you both to will and to work (and to worship) for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

"Not that we are adequate to consider anything (including worship) as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is of God (derived out of God through Christ). (II Cor. 3:5).

"May the God of peace sanctify you (set you apart to function as He intended in the expression of His Holy character)... Faithful is He who calls you and He will bring it to pass (expressing the "worth-ship" of His character in Jesus Christ). (I Thess. 5:23).

These and many other Scriptures attest to Christian worship being the total expression of the life of Jesus Christ in our behavior. May we cease to generalize worship as object-centered human preoccupation with objects "which by nature are no

gods" (Gal. 4:8). May we cease to engage in the man-centered worship of religion which falsely supposes that worship is what we do, how we feel and we think, the extent to which we are committed, and evaluated by the benefits and "blessings" we receive. May we cease to limit worship to the prescribed times, places and procedures of religious tradition. Christian worship is Christ-centered, being established by His redemptive and restorative work and continuously generated and activated by the risen Lord Jesus within the Christian.

Christian worship is Christocentric. Jesus worships the Father by the Spirit through the Christian. Every action of the Christian life is intended to be an act of worship wherein God manifests His own character to His own glory.

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