



Worship

&

Worship

Services

Gregg Strawbridge

Biblical Studies in Worship & Worship Services

by Gregg Strawbridge

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About the Author

Rev. Gregg Strawbridge (Ph.D., University of Southern Mississippi) completed his undergraduate work in music (classical guitar), seminary training at Columbia Biblical Seminary, doctoral work in education and philosophy, and post-graduate theological studies at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) in Reformation history and cultural apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He has served as a pastor since 1990 and since 2001 has been the pastor of All Saints' Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He is the creator and director of WordMp3.com - an online library of Christian worldview teaching resources. His teaching experience includes college level instruction in guitar, music, philosophy, theology, education, and secondary teaching in literature, logic, writing, Greek, and Hebrew. He and his wife Sharon are the blessed parents of Joy, Jenna, and Julie.

His other related publications include *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, *The Case for Paedocommunion* (forthcoming, summer 2005), *Music in the Bible and Music on the Radio* (forewords by John Frame, Bob Kauflin, & Judy Rogers), *Classical and Christian Education: Recapturing the Educational Approach of the Past* (Veritas Press 2002 [1997]). He has contributed a number of articles for relating to worship, such as: "How Sweet and Awful is the Place: Zion and Congregational Worship" (Reformation & Revival), "Congregational Worship as Covenant Remembrance: An Exegetical Basis from 1 Corinthians 11:25" (ETS 2002), as well as reviews such as a review of *The Worship of the English Puritans* by Horton Davies, and critical reviews of *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* by Paul K. Jewett, *A String of Pearls Unstrung* by Fred Malone, and *Abraham's Four Seeds* by John G. Reisinger. These and more are available at www.WordMp3.com/gs (*Reformation Resources*).

Among other liturgical and worship related experience, he has consistently written, recorded and arranged music for congregational use, such as *Family Worship: Songbook* (with recording Audubon Press), several Christmas musicals and children's musicals, "Night Visions: Three Sketches from the First Christmas," "The St. John Passion," "The Messiah of the Psalms," "The Wisdom of God," and "Of the Father's Love Begotten," and "Go to the Ant" — as well as recordings such as "Sounds of Sanibel" (an instrumental guitar CD) and selected pieces on the "City of Peace Instrumentals" recording (released by Galilee of the Nations/Provident Distributors), and "Make Your Great Name Known."

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Introduction

Introduction

“Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed,” said the ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus. The subject of worship commands the attention of many today just because of the endless *changes*. If there were ever days when the Church worshiped with one voice in a unison cadence, those days are gone, for now. After the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the tapestry of Christian worship disintegrated. The seventeenth century became the fountain head for Protestant thought with such creedal masterpieces as the Westminster Confession and the systematic works of Turretin and Brakel, though no clear unity of worship practice had been reached. Then, riding the waves of revival and revivalism, eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelicals followed many threads of the tapestry of Christian worship. The culmination of this has apexes in a quite sermon-centered, evangelism-centered worship service. Songs and a few necessary items, like offerings are to give way to the pastor’s “message.” Such revivalistic worship is at its apex, a “harvest of souls.” In the twentieth century, the high churches have seen a renewed emphasis on liturgical worship, while the low churches have been empowered by the new phenomenon of praise and worship music. Now we see variations so far removed from each other that the tapestry is like a selection from an *avant guard* artist. We hear a universe of liturgical voices in the fray—or is it a *multiverse*?

In this century, the impact of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement alone accounts for a full facelift of traditional worship. While liturgical patterns drone on, “world without end,” the ecstatic expressions of “praise and worship” have revitalized the worship of virtually every church, in every communion. Technology, too, has changed the face of worship with its overhead, slide, and even video projectors. One cannot overlook the last fifty years of media resources. Just think of it, could the contemporary worship service exist without audio recordings, making a wealth of new music accessible for worship?

There are deeper influences which contribute to an often unhealthy diversity in worship: the emphasis on individualism and the increased role of the psychology of self. We live in a frightfully unique time in the history of the church where the concept of sin is publicly repudiated (even from some pulpits). It is a sin to talk of sin. Salvation is dangerously connected to self-esteem. It seems that all the factors that make up the American mind significantly contribute to the modern kaleidoscope of American worship. With the diversity of church traditions, modern technological influences, and fundamental theological and psychological perspectives intersecting on Sunday morning, there is no end to the array of contemporary approaches to worship.

In spite of so many manifestations of worship (or perhaps because of it), it is still true that many believers are unaware of what the Scripture teaches concerning worship. Many have little motivation to go “*ad fontes*” (*to the sources*) and see what the Word declares. In addressing questions such as music, the role of Scripture, fixed forms (prayers and pronouncements), many are simply “out to lunch” regarding the Biblically relevant material. Either they are droned to sleep in traditionalism or they are doing aerobics with anti-traditionalists or defining worship with TV variety-show techniques.

A clue to the confusion is seen when individuals are asked about worship. We do not hesitate to answer questions about the worship of the Self-revealed Triune God in purely subjective terms of our own feelings. Worship convictions are put in terms of preference, rather than theological commitments. Often, the issues peripheral to the heart of Biblical worship capture center stage in worship talk. Rarely does one actually hear a discussion of worship in *Biblical terms*, where questions are focused on obedience and applications to the Biblical directives or in dialogue with the historical church’s life and practice. To

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observe our modern worship conversations, it could just as well be concluded that the Bible has nothing at all to say about the matter and the church has only recently begun to engage in it (!). (“Don’t they have seminars on that now?”)

This book aims to be more than another voice in the cacophony of calls to worship. It is a challenge to apply Biblical truth to a changing world, to a “post-Christian world.”¹ I will have utterly failed if people read this book and say, “this is his position.” It is my aim for every reader to know *why* much more than know *what*. I want readers to be able to reflectively consider the issues from a thoroughly Biblical point of view.

Of course, I am very conscious of cultural, technological, and ideological influences on my theology of worship. Nevertheless, I seek to know and grow in a Biblical understanding of worship. Worship which honors the God of Scripture, which is historically conscious and which is congregationally meaningful. I truly desire to call the reader to a pursuit of the Scriptures as the basis for anointed leadership in corporate worship, as the blueprint for refining our services of worship, and as the theological backbone of our approach to God.

We must be vigilant for the precepts and relevant applications of Scripture to worship. But might we also engage in this discussion as observers of a historical church? Shall we *tabula rasa*? We cannot be *blank slates* with respect to tradition. If we do this we will probably imitate the least theologically rich tradition, that of the evangelical church over the last few decades. Rather, we must be careful not to hastily “move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set” (Pro 22:28). Must we forever embrace, as C.S. Lewis called it, a chronological snobbery? After all is “new” really better?

A purely Biblical view with a clear appraisal of historical practices, is an aim one should not be too confident in claiming to attain. No present writer has stepped out of a time-capsule, having escaped the myriad of influences in the present. We are not cultural zombies. Neither must we be cultural slaves. We have the sure Word of the living God. While we are prisoners of our culture to some extent, no doubt, we have that which we need to “renew our minds” (Rom 12:2). Granting that one should not be dogmatic on matters which are to be reserved for adaptation, still whatever is unchanging truth, *is unchanging*. The reminder of this book’s thesis is the Word of God must be applied to congregational worship—to the priority, philosophy, structure, current issues, as well as the content of worship. Let us pursue the road map of *Sola Scriptura* (the Scripture alone is the final authority) to the celestial city and let us give our marvelous triune God His praise as we travel. *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God alone be the glory).

¹I believe, more truly though, this is a pre-Christian world, since Christ will put all His enemies under His feet (1Co 15:25).