

Worship

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to tackle the thorny subject of “Christian Worship”. Perhaps no other subject has been the cause of such controversy and division within evangelical churches in the last three quarters of a century. Maybe you think it best to leave the subject well alone, rather than risk causing further upset. Perhaps those who differ from us should be left to get on and worship God in the way that they choose. Is it a sign of a lack of Christian charity to criticize those who differ from us in the way that they worship? After all, does it really matter as long as people are happy? Perhaps you have been in a church where the “worship wars” have wreaked havoc, and you still bear the scars of battle, and now you’ve had enough, and you just want to live out the rest of your days quietly taking a back seat in your church, or, perhaps, not attending any church at all and make do with listening to online services.

But, if the worship of Almighty God is the highest activity that those who have been made in the image of God are privileged to engage in, then it behoves us to ensure that the worship we are engaged in is the sort of worship that God is well-pleased with (remember Cain and Abel: Genesis 4:1-5, cf. Hebrews 11:4). Has the Lord not given us, in the person of His well-beloved Son, the best, the most precious thing He could ever give us (John 3:16; Romans 8:32), in order that we might be brought back into fellowship with Himself and fulfil that highest of human activities: worship? Is our God not worthy to be worshipped in the way that will give **Him** the greatest pleasure; worship that He Himself has instituted and revealed?

If this article helps you to take a fresh look at what worship is; Who it is that we worship and why; and what God-honouring worship should look like; and if it challenges you to look at the worship that you are engaged in and ask yourself, “Is what I am doing truly worship?”; then it will be well worth the time that has been spent in writing it.

That above all else, you may be stirred up by the Spirit of God to render unto the LORD the worship that is due to His great and glorious name, is the prayer of the author of this article.

What is Worship?

There is a sense in which the whole Christian life is an act of worship. King David said, “I have set the LORD always before me” (Psalm 16:8); and the apostle Paul said, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). In other words, our whole life is to be lived as in the presence of God, and our whole life is to be lived with a view to His glory.

Nevertheless, Scripture is equally plain that God has set apart for Himself one day in seven as a special day to be kept holy unto Himself. On this day, we are to gather together for the corporate worship of Almighty God, spend time considering Him and His works, and rest from worldly employments and recreations which are perfectly legitimate on the other six days. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work... for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11). Under the Old Covenant this holy day

was the seventh day, Saturday, but under the New Covenant we see, as one writer has put it, “the day changed but the sabbath preserved” (A. A. Hodge); Christians now meet together on Sunday, which we call the Lord’s Day, following the example of the New Testament Christians and in honour of our Lord Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week (e.g. Acts 20:7, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them”).

So, what is worship? A simple, and scriptural, definition of worship is given to us in Psalm 96:7-8: “Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. **Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name**”. Worship is ascribing to God all that He is in Himself and in the works that He has done. God “is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; working all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, and withal most just and terrible in His judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty” (Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, chapter 2, “Of God and of the Holy Trinity”, paragraph 1). This glorious God “is worthy to be praised” (Psalm 18:3). The worship due to God is not to be carried out in a merely formal way, by simply reciting the truth about God, but is to come from hearts that are full of love for God, and lives that are characterized by holiness: “Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5), “O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 96:9).

Who should Worship and Why?

God is worthy of the worship of **all His creatures**. Worship is not an optional extra, to be engaged in by people who are very religious; it is the duty of every one of His creatures. God made mankind for Himself and in His image in order that we might live for His glory. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism question 1 puts it, “Q: What is the chief end of man. A: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever” (1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God”, and Romans 11:36, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever”).

We owe God our worship both as our Creator: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:6), and as our Provider: “he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45) . We also owe Him our worship because when mankind fell in Adam, in the Garden of Eden, God revealed His plan to redeem a people to Himself (Genesis 3:15), and, “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5); this redemption was purchased by Christ upon the cross and is offered to all who will come to Him for the forgiveness of their sins: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31); so we also worship God for the salvation He has graciously provided in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

How Should we Worship?

Here we come to the most controversial question in the churches today. How is God to be worshipped? Are we free to make it up ourselves? Are we free to worship God in the way that suits us best? Is it simply a matter of individual taste? Such questions as these were rarely heard in the churches until some 75 years ago. Before then it was generally agreed among evangelical churches, as to how God was to be worshipped, and, whichever evangelical church you entered, the worship would be basically along the same lines. Not so today. What has changed? Certainly God hasn't changed; but, to a large extent, our conception of God, and therefore our conception of worship, has changed.

"The acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures": so reads the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, chapter 22, "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day", paragraph 1. The Confession backs up this statement by quoting Deuteronomy 12:32, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it", and Exodus 20:4-6, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth". In addressing the Corinthians, Paul says, "let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). "It is not for the creature to say how the Creator is to be worshipped" (A. W Pink: "An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount").

So, what should the worship which God has instituted look like? Worship, as instituted by God, will have the following characteristics:

1) The Centrality of the Word of God in Worship

If "the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will", then the revealed will of God, as it is found in the Holy Scriptures, must have a central role in our worship. Have you ever wondered why the pulpit is in such a central and exalted position in Reformed churches? Our Reformation forefathers rescued the pulpit from its obscurity in the Roman Catholic churches and set it purposefully in full view of the congregation, so that it became the focal point of the worship service. They thus emphasized the centrality of the Word of God in everything done in the worship of God, and the position of the congregation as under the authority of the Word of God. The pulpit has good Scriptural authority: Ezra preached from a pulpit, or tower, when addressing the people in Nehemiah 8:4-8: "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebia, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading". Our Lord Himself would have spoken from a similar position (the "bima", literally "raised area") when he spoke in the synagogues (e. g. Luke 4:16f). The

centrality of the Word of God in worship is the reason why Reformed churches have a pulpit from which the Word of God is preached, rather than a platform from which people perform.

2) Worship In Spirit and in Truth

The worship of God under the Old Covenant was largely by way of types and shadows, which prefigured the salvation which Jesus Christ would accomplish. This suited a people who are described as children under a schoolmaster: Galatians 3:23-25, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith that should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster". Similarly Colossians 2:16-17: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ"; and Hebrews 10:1-7: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? Because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God".

When Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria, in John chapter 4, He told her, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24). Worship under the Old Covenant was largely of an outward form, suitable to the fact that the allegiance to Jehovah of the majority of the Jewish people was purely outward due to their uncircumcised hearts (as we read in Romans 9:27, quoting Isaiah 22, "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved", and in Romans 10:21, quoting Isaiah 65:2, "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hand unto a disobedient and gainsaying people"). Worship under the New Covenant is characterized by its inner spirituality: it is a worship of the heart, because all true Christians have been given new hearts which beat with love for Christ (Hebrews 8:10, quoting Jeremiah 31:33, "For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people", and Philippians 3:3, "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh"); and whereas the worship of the Old Covenant was largely in types and shadows, now that Christ has come, these shadowy, typical forms of worship have been replaced by the true reality which we have in Christ (see Colossians 2:16-17 quoted above, and Hebrews 9:1-15). John 1:17 says, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"; in Matthew 5:17 we read that Christ came "to fulfil the law", and in Romans 10:4, "For Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believeth".

3) Worship in the Spirit

There is no substitute for the presence of the Holy Spirit in our worship. He alone can make our worship acceptable to God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:18, quoted below). Under the Old Covenant, the people went to the tabernacle in the wilderness, and then the temple in the Promised Land, because God was pleased to presence Himself there in a special way. This “shekinah” glory of God was manifested between the cherubim, on the mercy seat, in the Most Holy Place: “And I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Exodus 25:22). But under the New Covenant, every one of God’s people is a temple of God where the Holy Spirit dwells: “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?” (1 Corinthians 6:19), and collectively, as a body, believers are a temple of God, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:9). This is why, strictly speaking, it is not the building where we meet which is the church, but it is God’s people themselves who are the church. When Christians meet together for worship they bring God’s presence, by His Spirit, with them.

The means of grace “ultimately depend for their efficacy on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit accompanies the preaching of the Word. The Spirit enables the spiritual presence of Christ in the Sacraments. And the Spirit prays with us, translating our groanings into words pleasing to God and edifying to us” (D. G. Hart and John R. Muether: “With Reverence and Awe”). Paul told the Thessalonians that his gospel preaching came to them “(not) in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and he told the Roman Christians, “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26-27).

4) Worship with the Understanding

In many churches we are told that we must leave our minds at the church door and let ourselves be led by our feelings; this is a fatal error with no basis in Scripture. Our feelings should be stirred as our minds meditate upon the great truths of Scripture; it is as our minds understand and grasp the truth regarding God: what He is like and what He has done; and the truth about man and his sin, and the truth about Jesus Christ and what He has done for sinners in suffering and dying upon the cross as their substitute, that we are enabled to truly worship God from hearts which are overflowing with love, joy and gratitude. Psalm 47:6-7 says, “Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: **sing ye praises with understanding**”. When Paul sought to correct the worship of the Corinthians, he said, “I will pray with the spirit, and **I will pray with the understanding** also: I will sing with the spirit, and **I will sing with the understanding** also” (1 Corinthians 14:15).

We need to take heed to what Augustine said, “As oft as the song delights me more than that which is sung, so oft I confess I sin grievously” (as quoted by David Fountain in “John Wycliffe: The Dawn of the Reformation”). If we find ourselves taken up by the mere sounds of enjoyable music (remember, worship is “(giving) unto the LORD the glory due unto his name”, i.e. worship involves the meaningful

expression of the truth about God to God; music is but an aid to our verbal, intelligent expression of worship) and find that we have little if any idea of what we are actually singing, then we need to confess to God that we are not worshipping Him as we ought, lest we find ourselves guilty of breaking the third commandment and taking His name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

Paul tells the Corinthian believers, “in understanding (“the mind”) be men (or, “mature”)", 1 Corinthians 14:20. So when we enter through the door of our church building, we should most definitely make sure that our minds are switched on, so that we can fully engage in the right and acceptable worship of God.

5) Trinitarian Worship

Our God is a Trinity of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; each one is fully God, each person was involved in the work of creation, each one is involved in our redemption, and each one is worthy of our highest praise. Paul gives a description of Trinitarian worship in Eph. 2:18: “For through him (Christ) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access by one Spirit unto the Father”. Jesus Christ, by His once for all offering for sin, has given access to all His believing people to His Heavenly Father. Because all men are sinners, we have no right of access to God in and of ourselves: “your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). Christ alone has provided access for sinful men to a holy God by His atoning death upon the cross where He paid the penalty for all who trust in Him alone for their salvation: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). All true worship must therefore be on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work, “By him (Jesus) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Hebrews 13:15). And it is the Holy Spirit, Who the risen and ascended Christ gave to His church (Luke 24:49, fulfilled in Acts 2:1-4), Who alone can take our acts of worship, in Christ’s name, and present them to God the Father so that they are acceptable to Him: see Romans 8:26-27 as quoted above.

“We worship the Father, whence every mercy has its rise; we adore the Son, through whom every blessing flows... (we worship) the Holy Spirit, *by whom* every blessing is actually communicated and applied” (A. W. Pink: “The Holy Spirit”).

6) Worship that is Pleasing to God, not Men

Our worship should be God-centred, not man-centred, and our worship should be done in a way that pleases Him, not ourselves. Sadly, the way that many churches choose to worship today is guided by pragmatism rather than Biblical faithfulness: what will get the (ungodly) people in; what sort of music do worldly people like to listen to today? let’s bring it into the church; let’s get rid of those stuffy old hymns that are full of doctrine, and give the (ungodly) people what they want; let’s make our worship entertaining, so that people are made to feel comfortable and happy. In other words, it’s all about Me: which is exactly the spirit of this ungodly age. But, rather than being influenced by the spirit of the age, we should do what Paul tells us in Romans 12:1-2: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And **be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”. When we allow our worship to be dictated by the opinions and tastes of this fallen world,

then our worship will be more appropriate to the worship of Baal than the worship of Jehovah our God (see 1 Kings 18:21-40).

God would have us worship Him in the way that pleases Him and which He reveals; to listen to the wisdom of this fallen world, and copy its ideas, and do that which will win the favour of men, is to dishonour God and provoke His wrath; remember what happened to Uzzah when the Israelites sought to transport the Ark of the Covenant by copying the method used by the Philistines, using a cart pulled by oxen, rather than follow the method God had prescribed: compare 1 Samuel 6:7-8 (the Philistines transporting the Ark) with 2 Samuel 6:3-7 (the Israelites copy the method of transport used by the Philistines). King David eventually realized the mistake he and the people had made and said, "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: **for them hath the LORD chosen to carry the ark of God**, and to minister unto him for ever... sanctify yourselves, both ye and your brethren, that ye may bring up the Ark of the LORD God of Israel unto the place that I have prepared for it. **For because ye did it not at the first, the LORD our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order**" (1 Chronicles 15:2, 12-13). As a result the Ark of God was brought to Jerusalem safely, with great rejoicing, because it was done in the way which pleased God, because it was done in accordance with the instructions that He had ordained (see Numbers 4:15).

Paul told the Galatians, "For do I now persuade (or, "seek to win the favour of"[K. S. Wuest: "Word Studies"]) men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

7) Worship with Reverence and Godly Fear

Finally, a sense of awe in the presence of Almighty God is, sadly, often missing from our worship today. This is not to say that our worship should be sombre and joyless; Psalm 97 begins, "The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice", and Psalm 99 begins, "The LORD reigneth; let the people tremble": in other words, both of these attitudes are appropriate when we come before the sovereign Jehovah. Psalm 2:11 says, "Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling"; our worship should be characterised by both humility and awe, and gladness and rejoicing.

An attitude of reverence and godly fear is what Isaiah experienced when he saw Jehovah in a vision: "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet ("This bespeaks their great humility and reverence in their attendance upon God", to quote Matthew Henry), and with twain he did fly (swift to carry out God's commands). And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:1-5). The sight of the glory of God filled Isaiah with a sense of his own unworthiness. The apostle John had a similar experience on the isle of Patmos in Revelation 1:13-17: "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks (I saw) one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps ("breasts") with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his

right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead”.

Surely we have need to cry to God for “grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Worship on Earth, a Foretaste of the Worship of Heaven

Hebrews 12:22-24 says, “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel”. This is “a description of the whole (Christian) economy – an economy which extends both to earth and to heaven, and which, beginning in time, will continue throughout eternity” (John Brown in his commentary on Hebrews). There is a connection between Christians, here on earth, and those beings who are currently dwelling in heaven: the holy angels, God the Judge of all the earth, all true believers whose bodies have died but whose spirits have gone to be with Christ in heaven, and a union with Christ our mediator. Ephesians 2:6 states that Christians living now on earth are, in fact, already dwelling, spiritually, “in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”. Christians, worshipping on earth, in the way that God has prescribed, are joining with the worship of the heavenly beings around the throne of God; what an awesome thought, and what a privilege is ours when we gather together to worship the Lord; it is, indeed, a foretaste of heaven.

So, what does the worship of heaven look like. The book of Revelation gives us an insight into the worship of heaven, and, although much of the book is symbolic in its teaching, we see the same characteristics which have been noted regarding our worship on earth. The book of Revelation was given to John on the Lord’s Day (Revelation 1:4). The worshippers in heaven are the saints of God, all true believers whose bodies have died but whose spirits live in the presence of God, from both the Old and New Testaments (represented by the 24 elders, Revelation 4:4), four “beasts” (better, “living creatures”, Revelation 4:6: these living creatures are also found in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 10 where they are identified as cherubim [a very high order of angels]: see Ezekiel 10:20), the holy angels (Revelation 5:1), and every created being (Revelation 5:13). The object of worship is the Triune God; God the Father is seated upon the throne (Revelation 4:2), God the Holy Spirit is before the throne (Revelation 4:5), and God the Son is in the midst of the throne (Revelation 5:6); see also Revelation 1:4-5. The worship of heaven is with reverence and godly fear: the living creatures cry “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 4:8: remember the cry of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3); on hearing this, the “four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne” (Revelation 4:10). The worship of heaven is full of revealed truth regarding the character of God and His works of creation and redemption: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11), “Thou (the Lamb, Christ) art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9), “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made

manifest” (Revelation 15:3-4). Further examples could be multiplied, but these should suffice to give us an idea of the glory of the worship of heaven.

Conclusion

If the worship of the local church is being practiced in accordance with the principles laid down for us in the Scriptures, then attendance at the Lord’s Day worship services (morning and evening) should be the delight of every true believer; it should be the highlight of the believer’s week and the day we look forward to more than any other. If we find such worship less than our supreme joy; if we find it boring and can’t wait for it to end; if such worship is something we can only put up with once on the Lord’s Day, and then spend the rest of the day doing our own thing: then, if our worship on earth is a foretaste of the worship of heaven, we must surely ask ourselves whether heaven is somewhere that we are truly looking forward to going to, or whether we would feel very much out of place there; if this is the case, then we need to engage in some serious heart-searching, lest we find ourselves missing out on heaven altogether.

Isaiah describes the right attitude we should have to the sabbath day (Old Testament or New) and its worship: “If thou turn away thy foot from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Our worship on earth should make us long for the worship of heaven, where we will be able to worship God in a far more excellent way, in perfect holiness, and in perfect love. Our God “is worthy to be praised” (Psalm 18:3); so, “O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great king above all gods... O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand... Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth: break forth in song, and rejoice, and sing praise... Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring and offering, and come into his courts. O worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth” (Psalm 95:1-3, 6-7; 98:4 [margin]; 96:7-9). Amen.