

The Whole Earth is Full of His Glory: The Recovery of Authentic Worship

Isaiah 6:1-8

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Introduction

This convocation service affords the opportunity to speak from the heart to members of this Seminary community. And as I come before you this morning, I do so burdened with the sense that we evangelical Christians have lost a biblical understanding of worship. Surveying the literature on worship currently being published and listening to the conversations currently taking place among the churches, one can quickly discern that worship is now one of the most controversial issues in the local congregation. As a matter of fact, many current book titles in the evangelical world suggest that what the church faces today is “worship warfare.”¹ The very combination of the words “worship” and “war” should lead us to very sincere and sober biblical reflection. What is worship? And what does God desire that we should do in worship?

The symptomology of the current confusion over worship is seen in the fact that now many believe some modifier or adjective must be appended to the word “worship” in order to indicate what will take place. Traditional worship, liturgical worship, contemporary worship, blended worship, seeker-sensitive worship, praise and worship—worship! But what in the world is *worship*?

Certain developments in evangelicalism should cause grave concern. On both coasts of our nation and in Great Britain there is the emergence of what is

called the “rave mass,” largely given over to the youth culture, and to its most nihilistic strains—the hardest of hard rock music. In Atlanta there is a church that advertises “country music” worship. A church in Phoenix known as the “Community Church of Joy,” a large megachurch, has written its own manifesto under the title “Entertainment Evangelism.”² We see in evangelicalism a parade of innovations—and indeed an entire industry—which has arisen around worship with its publishing houses and services for hire.

It is true that worship has led to some warfare. In local congregations we see not only confusion, but also fighting, controversy and splitting. And what is the meaning of all of this? Jack Hayford, one of the nation’s most eloquent proponents of “renewal worship,” suggests that nothing less than a new reformation is taking place. The reformation of the sixteenth century was a reformation of doctrine. It was a necessary reformation as biblical truth was recovered. But he says we are experiencing in this generation a reformation in worship that is just as necessary and just as historic.³

My concern is that the issue of worship will define not only our church services, but also our theology and our beliefs about God. There is no more important issue for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ than that we worship as God would have us to worship Him.

Geoffrey Wainwright of Duke University reminds us that theology and worship are inextricably linked. Setting the context of missions as primary, he entitled his systematic project *Doxology*.⁴ We should be reminded that the purpose of the theologian is to serve the church so that the people of God worship Him more faithfully. By understanding God's revelation in His Word we know how He would wish to be worshiped. The Lord himself reminded us that God seeks those worshippers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23). But what does it mean to worship God in spirit? What does it mean to worship Him in truth?

Theology is by definition not an ivory tower discipline. It is not merely a form of academic discourse. When rightly conducted, theology is the conversation of the people of God seeking to understand the Lord whom we worship and how He wills to be worshiped. So, we might ask in that light, what are the proper conditions of evangelical worship? What is the pattern for worship among those persons who claim to be established in the gospel and submitted to the Word of God?

We know the history of worship through the ages. We know what took place in the Reformation. We know what transpired in the English reforms. We know what took place as features were stripped away that were considered to be unbiblical—and yet we see these same things returning. What is the condition of evangelical worship? It is not an exaggeration to suggest words such as pandemonium, confusion, and consternation.

In the midst of the upheaval, I find a great deal of encouragement from reading the late A. W. Tozer. This is what he said some decades ago:

We have the breezy, self-confident Christians with little affinity for Christ and His cross. We have the joy-bell boys that can bounce out there and look as much like a game show host as possible. Yet, they are doing it for Jesus' sake?! The hypocrites! They're not doing it for Jesus' sake at all; they are doing it in their own carnal flesh and are using the church as a theater because they haven't yet reached the place where the legitimate theater would take them.

Tozer takes his argument further:

It is now common practice in most evangelical churches to offer the people, especially the young people, a maximum of entertainment and a minimum of serious instruction. It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend the meeting where the only attraction is God. One can only conclude that God's professed children are bored with Him for they must be wooed to meeting with a stick of striped candy in the form of religious movies, games and refreshments.⁵

This has influenced the whole pattern of church life and even brought into being a new type of church architecture designed to house the golden calf. So we have the strange anomaly of orthodoxy in creed and heterodoxy in practice. The striped candy technique has so fully integrated into our present religious thinking that it is simply taken for granted. Its victims never dream that it is not a part of teachings of Christ and His apostles. Any objection to the carryings-on of our present gold calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, "But we are winning them." And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross-carrying? To self-denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To a despising of the world's treasures? To hard self-disci-

pline? To love for God? To total commitment to Christ? Of course, the answer to all of these questions is “no.”⁶

As these words were written several decades ago, Tozer certainly saw the future. But there are contemporary witnesses as well. Kent Hughes, who is Senior Pastor of the College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, has written perceptively on this issue. Hughes put it this way:

The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today’s Christendom is that worship is primarily for us—to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus—preaching to felt needs—man’s conscious agenda instead of God’s. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attender uncomfortable is removed from the service....Taken to the nth degree, this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects man. This terribly corrupts one’s theology.⁷

Hughes is right. Our confused worship corrupts our theology and our weak theology corrupts our worship.

Are these voices alarmist? They do mean to sound an alarm. But there are others who are saying, “Don’t worry—be happy—go worship.” One recent church growth author has written,

Worship is like a car to get us from where we are to where God wants us to be. Transportation and communication are imperative; the mode or vehicle is not imperative. Some worship God in cathedrals with the rich traditional organ tomes of Bach and

Faure from the classics of Europe. They travel in a Mercedes Benz. Some worship God in simple wooden churches with a steeple pointing heavenward. They sing the gospel songs of Charles Wesley or Fanny Cosby. They travel in a Ford or Chevy. Some worship God with the contemporary sounds of praise music with a gentle beat. They travel in a convertible sports coupe. Some worship God to the whine of a guitar and the amplifiers to the max. They travel on a motorcycle, without a muffler.⁸

But surely there is more to worship than the spectrum of taste from a Mercedes Benz to a motorcycle. There must be something weightier here. “Worship is like a car to get us from where we are to where God wants us to be.” Can that be said with a straight face as we listen to the Scripture speak of worship? We know from the onset that there are many different Christian opinions concerning worship. This does not come to us as news. But the real issue for us this morning is whether or not God Himself has an opinion on this issue. Does God care how He is worshiped? Or is He some kind of *laissez-faire* deity who cares not how His people worship Him, but is resting in the hopes that some people in some place will in some way worship him?

Scripture reveals that God does care. Leviticus 10:1-3 serves as a witness to this point.

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what the Lord spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be

treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored.”

These were Aaron’s sons. But they did what God had not commanded them to do in worship. They brought strange fire to the altar and they were consumed. Clearly, God does have an opinion about worship. He is the God whom we have come to know in Jesus Christ, the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. He is a jealous God—a God who loves us and is calling out a people but a God who instructs and commands His people that we should worship Him rightly.

In one sense, I think you can say looking throughout the Bible that there has been worship warfare even in the Scripture itself. As a matter of fact, I think you can look back to the very first murder and see that it had to do with worship as well. What is an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord? Cain and Abel saw this issue differently.

Well, Scripture makes clear that worship is something that we do, not just something we attend. It is not merely an issue for the pastor and other ministers. It is not just an issue for the musicians and those who will plan the service. It is an issue for the entire congregation, for worship is something we do together. It is our corporate and common responsibility to worship God as He desires.

Where shall we turn for instruction on how we ought to worship? There is only one place we can turn, and that is to the Word of God. The norm of our worship must be the Word of God—this Word that He has spoken. As we turn to this Word, we do see a pattern of worship, a pattern that is replicated throughout the fabric of Scripture from beginning to the end.

Scripture is, as the Reformers confessed, *norma normans non normata*, “The

norm of norms which cannot be normed.” *Sola Scriptura*. This is the norm of our worship. There is nothing external to Scripture that can norm or correct it. Scripture sets the terms, and in Isaiah 6:1-8 we see a picture of authentic worship.

In the year of King Uzziah’s death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven. Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

In this well-known “call” passage of Isaiah, the prophet experienced a theophany: a vision of the true and living God. Out of this encounter, Isaiah received his call as a prophet.

Authentic Worship Begins with a True Vision of the Living God

First, as we look to this text, we see that authentic Christian worship always begins with a true vision of the living God. Isaiah tells us this vision took place in the year of King Uzziah’s death. We know a great deal about Uzziah. He began his

reign with great promise and brought great economic and political prosperity to Israel in his early years. Later in Uzziah's reign, however, Israel declined as foreign powers arose in influence around them.

But it was not external forces that led to Uzziah's demise. Second Chronicles 26:16 reads, "But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense." It seems that Uzziah got into trouble precisely over the issue of worship. The passage continues in verses 17-21:

Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the Lord, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the Lord God." But Uzziah with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the Lord, beside the altar of incense. Azariah the chief priests and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the Lord had smitten him. King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord. And Jothan his son was over the king's house judging the people of the land.

In breaking the Lord's command, Uzziah sought to do what he was forbidden to do, even after Azariah reminded him that he was not to burn the incense on the altar. The Lord smote him with

leprosy. Thus he was cut off from the house of the Lord, his people, and ultimately even his own throne. He was still known as king, but he reigned through a regent.

Isaiah recounts that it was in the year of King Uzziah's death that he saw the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. This theophany revealed God, and was the foundation of Isaiah's call. It was the occasion of his worship here. He saw the Lord sitting on a throne.

What does it mean that God sat on a throne? Well, clearly it is a symbol of kingship and sovereignty. The throne indicates that the one who sits upon it is both king and judge. It represents both power and righteousness. And here Isaiah saw the living Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted with the train of his robe filling the temple. The train of his robe—literally his glory as in the kingly robes that had no end—filled and consumed the temple.

But there is more to this high and exalted Lord who revealed himself to Isaiah. The one whose train filled the temple with His glory is not alone. Isaiah is not alone. There are beings here with him. Verse two tells us that "seraphim stood above him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew." Some kind of picture comes to our minds as we think of these winged creatures, but we do not know exactly how they appeared. They were perhaps, as Luther suggested, angels in a special form. Whatever the case may be, we do know that these are angelic beings, special messenger beings.

These seraphim (literally, "burning ones") had six wings, and these six wings convey a great deal of symbolism. "With

two he covered his face.” That must certainly indicate humility. They dared not look at the holiness of God. “And with two he covered his feet.” Surely this represents purity. “And with two he flew.” But these winged creatures are not merely flying. “And one called out to another and said, Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.” This is what took place in Isaiah’s vision of worship.

The uttered words begin with, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.” The seraphim were able to speak in human speech. They were able to speak in moral and doxological categories to Isaiah. Their message is what we know as the “trisagion,” Holy, Holy, Holy. Since in the Hebrew language there is no adequate comparative or superlative form, the pattern of repetition is used in order to make a point. Nowhere in Scripture is there a thrice-repeated pattern as we find here, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” until we get to Revelation 4:8-11:

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the almighty, who was and who is and who is to come. And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”

The early church saw in this thrice-repeated pattern a Trinitarian understand-

ing. As we look back with New Testament eyes we can certainly see that affirmation, but the central point of this construction seems to be that repetitive emphasis such in Genesis 14:10 where we find reference to the construction “pit, pit,” which may be translated “deep and great pit.” It is one thing to fall into a pit. It is another thing to fall into a “pit, pit.” In 2 Kings 25:15 gold is described as gold, gold. Your translation probably renders it pure gold. But here in this trisagion, this thrice-repeated pattern, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” we see God’s essence, identity, and being characterized by the attribute of holiness.

What does the holiness of God mean? It means certainly His separateness from his creation. He is what we are not. We are finite; He is infinite. God is transcendent. God’s separateness certainly reveals the difference, the infinite contrast between His moral nature and ours. Holiness also certainly refers to His majesty and power.

J. Alec Motyer defines holiness as “God’s total and unique moral majesty.”⁹ It is a wonderful expression—God’s total and unique moral majesty. E. J. Young suggests that holiness is the entirety of the divine perfection that separates God from His creation.¹⁰ That which is almost beyond our definition is what makes God, God. Holiness includes all God’s attributes. His holiness is that which defines him, and it is at that point that worship begins in terms of spoken words: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts.”

But there is a second affirmation. “The whole earth is full of His glory.” I believe a part of what it must mean to worship God is to come together, recognizing that the whole earth is full of His glory. The God we serve does not only meet us. Wherever we go, whatever we see, the

whole earth is full of His glory.

I wonder if the vision of the God held by so many who come to worship is anything like what the seraphim are telling us here. Do we worship with the understanding that “the whole earth is full of His glory?” I fear not. I wonder if in our worship we encounter anything like this vision of God. Do those who come to our services of worship come face to face with the reality of God? Or do they go away with a vision of some lesser God, some dehydrated deity? Worship is the people of God gathering together to confess his worthiness, his “worth-ship.” How can we do that if we do not make clear who God is? Our very pattern of worship must testify to the character of God. Psalm 135:5-7 bears similar testimony, “For I know that the Lord is great and that our Lord is above all gods. Whatever the Lord pleases, He does. In Heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps. He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; who makes lightnings for the rain, who brings forth the wind from His treasures.”

Do we really testify to God in our worship? In Isaiah 46:9-10, God speaks about himself to Israel, “Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other: I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, ‘My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.’” Is our worship worthy of God’s character and power?

There is a polarity between the objective and the subjective. There is the subjective in worship. But what Scripture makes clear, as this pattern from Isaiah makes clear, is that the subjective experi-

ence of worship must be predicated on the objective truth of the true and living God, and on an experience of the God who has revealed Himself in Scripture: the one true God, the Father of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Roger Scruton, a well-known British philosopher, has suggested that worship is the most important indicator of what persons or groups really believe about God. These are his words: “God is defined in the act of worship far more precisely than he is defined by any theology.”¹¹

Now that is the word of an outsider. What Scruton is saying is, in essence: “If you want to know what a people really believe about God, don’t spend the time reading their theologians, watch them worship. Listen to what they sing. Listen to what they say. Listen to how they pray. Then you will know what they believe about this God whom they worship.” The philosopher says, “Don’t pay attention to the theologian, watch the people at worship.”

Well, if Scruton is correct—and I fear he certainly is correct—then I would suggest to you that we are in deep trouble. My haunting thought concerning much evangelical worship is that the God of the Bible would never be known by watching us worship, by listening to our words, by listening to us sing, by observing our prayers. Instead what we see in so many churches is “McWorship” of a “McDeity.” In others we see a constantly changing worship menu for the deity *du jour*. But what kind of God is that superficial, that weightless, and that insignificant? Would an observer of our worship have any idea of the God of the Bible from our worship? I wonder at times if this is an accidental development, or if it is an intentional evasion?

George Hunter III suggests that a thriving church must practice “celebrative worship.” He offers two reasons: “1) To provide a celebration to which pre-Christians can relate and find meaning. 2) To remove the cringe factor by providing a service our people would love to invite their friends to, rather than a service they would dread inviting their friends to.”¹² Here is a fascinating reversal. The purpose of celebrative worship, first, is to provide “a celebration in which pre-Christians can relate.” But, second, he suggests removing anything he identifies as “the cringe factor” by providing a service to which our people would love to invite their friends to and not one that they would dread to invite their friends to attend. But, as we read the scripture, I fear to say there is a great deal of the *cringe factor* in there. In fact, if you are going to remove the cringe factor from scripture, then you are going to end up with a very thin book.

Hebrews 10:31 reveals, “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” I wonder if there is anything that could even be remotely suggested as a terrifying reality as we present the God we claim to worship in what we do and what we say. Just look at the decline in our hymnody. The seraphim were singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” We know and sing a hymn written in the early nineteenth century that focuses on those same words:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee. Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty! God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee, Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee, Who wert, and

art, and evermore shall be.

Holy, holy, holy! Tho the darkness hide Thee, Tho the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see; Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee, Perfect in power, in love, and purity!

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea; Holy, holy, holy; merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!¹³

There are those who suggest that we should limit all of our singing to the Psalter. There are those who suggest we limit all of our singing to hymns. There are those who say we should include praise and worship choruses, and there are those who say there is no point to the argument whatsoever—use anything in sight. But Scripture tells us that we should speak “to one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19).

But how are our hymns to be measured? We must measure them by their content first, by the God they reveal, and here we see a decline in evangelical hymnody. We see a surrender of conviction and accommodation to the culture. We see nothing less than a “dumbing down” of its contents. We have gone from “Holy, Holy, Holy” to “God the Swell Fellow.” I would claim Charles Wesley as an ally in this debate. He wrote,

O for a thousand tongues to sing My great Redeemer’s praise, The glories of my God and King, The triumphs of His grace!

My gracious Master and my God, Assist me to proclaim, To spread thro all the earth abroad The honors of Thy name.

Jesus, the name that calms my fears, That bids my sorrows cease; ‘Tis music in the sinner’s ears; ‘Tis life

and health and peace.

He breaks the pow'r of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free; His blood
can make the foulest clean, His
blood availed for me.¹⁴

There is gospel there. But compare that to so much modern hymnody. First, we went through the period of romanticism, where “we walked today where Jesus walked.” At that time hymns featured romanticized lines such as: “I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses.” But we have left that behind us. Many congregations can muster no more in terms of praise to God than something as postmodern as “Shine, Jesus Shine,” a hymn which is not heresy, but actually has little content. I am not suggesting that it should never be sung. I am saying that it is clearly not enough! If that is the height of our doxology, then we should be embarrassed and ashamed.

In her book, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Marva Dawn has suggested that so much of contemporary music is an evacuation of Christian conviction.¹⁵ It is not just a matter of taste and style, it is not just the abandonment of meter and form and hymnody and structure—it is the abandonment of content. We must avoid such an abandonment. But we must be also clear that not all that goes under the label of “praise and worship music” is an abandonment of doctrinal truth. Much of it is richly biblical. Much of it is taken directly out of the Psalter and other biblical passages. But the salient question is “By what standard are we to judge worship?” Is it simply the taste or style of the congregation’s choosing? So much of what passes for music, for praise, in our congregations comes down to endless repetition of choruses which, as one critic has suggested, comes down to this:

“one word, two notes, and three hours.”
We have all been there. What is the result of this accommodated Christianity? I quote Tozer again:

We have simplified until Christianity amounts to this: God is love; Jesus died for you; believe, accept, be jolly, have fun and tell others. And away we go—that is the Christianity of our day. I would not give a plug nickel for the whole business of it. Once in a while God has a poor bleeding sheep that manages to live on that kind of thing and we wonder how.¹⁶

True worship begins with a vision of the God of the Bible—the true and living God.

Authentic Worship Leads to a Confession of Sin

Second, authentic worship leads to a confession of sin, both individual and corporate. We see it directly in this passage: “And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.” What did Isaiah do? He said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.” Isaiah was “undone,” when he had seen the true and living God, when he saw God in his holiness. He came to know the majestic, moral nature of this God, and he came to see God’s righteousness and his holiness. In reflection, Isaiah automatically saw his own utter sinfulness. He could not otherwise understand himself but as a sinner who was, by his own words here, undone, dissolved—silenced. He saw himself doomed to die.

I want to suggest that this must happen in our worship as well, “the cringe

factor” aside. If we do not come face to face with our sin as individuals and as a congregation, I do not believe we have seen God, and we have not worshiped Him. How could it be otherwise than that meeting Him in worship we see ourselves as sinners? Isaiah spoke both individually and corporately. He said of himself, “I am a man of unclean lips.” His confession is tainted. His testimony is impure. Isaiah saw himself to the core, and understanding himself perhaps for the very first time, saw himself as God saw him. As he stands before God, he says, “I am undone.” True worship takes place among the people of God when we come face to face with our sins and confess them, knowing that He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9-10). Psalm 51:1-4 models this kind of confession:

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge.

Any parent knows the difference between a genuine apology and a “get off the hook apology,” a quick “sorry, sorry,” as the child runs off down the hall. There is the contrite broken heart of one who knows he or she has done wrong, has offended a moral standard that is not arbitrary, but fixed, and insulted the one true and living God. That is what Isaiah has done. Yet I fear so much of what we think is confession is not confession at all. It is just a hasty half-apology, not the kind

of brokenness we see in Psalm 51. We must be brought face to face with our sin.

Authentic Worship Leads to a Display of Redemption

Third, authentic worship will lead to a display of redemption. A display of redemption means the proclamation of the gospel. What we see in Isaiah 6:6-7 is a display of redemption:

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with the tongs. He touched with my mouth with it and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

This scene is clearly an anticipation of the work of Christ. It is a unilateral act of God. It is a unilateral propitiatory sacrifice. It is a picture of atonement. Isaiah brought absolutely nothing. Isaiah had been brought face to face with his sin and now realizes redemption is all of grace, and that it is costly. The coal, after all, came from the altar, not from a campfire.

Reflecting on this two-stage movement, Martin Luther said that Isaiah saw himself first as he truly is—a sinner who was undone, and next as one who experienced this redemption. Luther states, “But it turned out for the salvation of the prophet that he was thus thrust down to hell, so that he might be led away and lead others away from that uncleanness of the Law to the purity of Christ, so that he alone might reign. Here now a resurrection from the dead takes place.”¹⁷ That must happen in our worship as well. True worship requires seeing the true and living God and then seeing ourselves as we actually are in our sinfulness. Turning to God through confession, we experience the

display and declaration of redemption.

True worship always proclaims the gospel, the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. It proclaims the work of Christ and it centers in the cross. With the apostle Paul we say, "In the cross of Christ we glory." We proclaim liberty to the captive, grace and pardon to all who believe in His name. If sinners come to Him, He will by no means cast them out.

Authentic Worship Requires a Response

Fourth, given what God has done authentic worship requires a response. Isaiah recounts, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (v. 8) We see in this passage a sending out similar to Matthew 28:18-20, when the Lord commanded his disciples, "All authority is given to me under heaven and earth; therefore, go." He makes very clear in the Great Commission that those disciples were to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that He commanded them.

Worship calls for an ongoing response seen in the proclamation of the gospel, in evangelism, and in missions. If our worship is weakened, our missionary witness will be weakened as well. We will forget the God who has sent us. We will neglect the content of the message of redemption with which he has sent us.

One recent writer on worship has commented, "It is not *how* you worship. It's *who* you worship."¹⁸ I would argue that the *who* determines the *how*. Does that mean that all issues are absolutely simplified and we can turn to scripture and see a specific outline of order for every

week's corporate worship? No. Does it mean that there is no diversity and should be no diversity in worship? No. Does it mean that styles will change? Yes. Does it mean that there will be a diversity of styles in worship? Yes. We must make a distinction, however, between style and form. The biblical form must be constantly followed. The biblical pattern must always be honored. There will be different styles, there will be different languages, there will be a different vernacular for each people, and there will be different contexts, but the essential marks of true Christian worship must always be present.

We must not be satisfied with a *laissez-faire*, cafeteria style worship combination at our pleasure. There is a biblical pattern that must be followed. Will styles change? Yes. But the worship must always be God directed. Will there be a diversity of styles in worship? Yes, but there must be one glorious purpose following this clear biblical pattern: to measure everything by the norm of scripture, in which God has revealed how He wishes to be worshiped. We must learn from each other in this process that as the people of God we must get this right as we stand before God and under scripture.

We were created to worship God. The whole story of our redemption retells how we were created to worship God but by our sin became disqualified from that true and authentic worship. By God's redemption in Jesus Christ, we were set again anew for the purpose of worshiping God. And every glimpse of heaven we have in Scripture indicates that worship will be our eternal occupation. It is for that purpose that we are being prepared even in the present. In Revelation 22:7-9, John wrote these words:

And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the Words of the prophecy of this book. I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things, and when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angels who showed me these things. But he said to me, "Do not do that, I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."

Together, let us heed the words of this book. Let us worship God.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Elmer Towns, *Putting An End to the Worship Wars* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1997).
- ² Walter Kallestad, *Entertainment Evangelism: Taking the Church Public* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).
- ³ Jack Hayford, *Worship His Majesty* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987) 88.
- ⁴ Geoffery Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980).
- ⁵ A.W. Tozer, *Tozer on Worship and Entertainment: Selected Excerpts* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1997) 104-105.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-121.
- ⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991) 106.
- ⁸ Towns, 3.
- ⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) 77.
- ¹⁰ Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Vol. 1* (1965; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 242.
- ¹¹ Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy* (New York: Penguin, 1995) 453.
- ¹² George G. Hunter III, *Church for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 77.
- ¹³ "Holy, Holy, Holy." Words by Reginald Heber. Music by John B. Dykes.
- ¹⁴ "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing." Words by Charles Wesley. Music by Carl E. Gläser.
- ¹⁵ Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).
- ¹⁶ A.W. Tozer, *Rut, Rot, Or Revival?* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1992) 172-173.
- ¹⁷ Martin Luther, "Lectures on Isaiah: Chapters 1-39," in *Luther's Works. Vol 16*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1969) 73.
- ¹⁸ Towns, 23.