

*Introduction for moderator:*

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As we consider the question of *how we should reform our worship*, I have been tasked with presenting two items: a general introduction to worship and an introduction to the elements of Christian worship. I will narrow my introduction [break] to worship in the New Testament, where we find two Greek verbs for worship—προσκυνέω and λατρεύω

*Proskuneo* occurs 60 times, and it generally has the idea of bowing down to pay homage. Examples are the Magi at the birth of Christ, the maniac of Gadara, and the mother of James and John, all who *proskuneo* before Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Here are three uses of *proskuneo* that are pertinent for us:

1. In John 4, where the Father seeks worshipers who will *worship* in the Spirit and truth, we learn that our **worship is not bound to a temple or holy city**.
2. In Revelation 22, the angel refused human worship and said, "Worship God!" On the other hand, in Matthew 28, Jesus did not refuse Peter's worship; thus, we conclude that **we worship Christ as we worship the Father**.
3. 1 Corinthians 14 is the only use of *proskuneo* in reference to the assembly of Christians. More on this later.

While these principles, no doubt, seem elementary to you, these basic principles that establish things like *where* we worship and *who* we worship are not human innovations. **These foundational aspects of worship are part of our received tradition because they are commanded in the Scriptures.** Our forebearers did not invent them.

The second Greek verb, λατρεύω, translated as "worship" and "service," is used 21 times in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> A secular Greek would have described the work of the governor or a servant as *latreuo*. In Christian contexts, *latreuo* is used to describe the service of the priests in the temple.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mat. 2:2, 2:8, 2:11; Mat. 20:20, Mark 5:6

<sup>2</sup> The related and lesser-used verb *leitourgeo* (λειτουργέω), often translated as "minister," is where we get the word "liturgy" or "liturgical."

<sup>3</sup> One example is Zechariah, who doubted Gabriel's prophecy about the birth of John the Baptist. See Luke 2:37 and Heb 9:1, 10, 21; 10:2.

Here are two important principles for Scripture's use of *latreuo*:

1. Paul, in Romans 12, commands Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, which is spiritual *worship* or *service*.<sup>4</sup> ***Latreuo* and its temple context is often used to illustrate a life of worship.**
2. **Worship and Service are inextricably related concepts.** Sometimes, *proskuneo* and *latreuo* occur together. When Jesus was confronted by Satan, he quoted Moses, stating, “*Worship* the Lord your God, and *serve* him only.”<sup>5</sup> In Romans 1, Paul states that sinners “exchanged the truth about God for a lie and *worshiped* and *served* the creature.”<sup>6</sup>

As I close this general introduction, let me offer a practical point. We often call our Lord's Day assembly a “service” or “worship,” or even a “worship service.” These terms are rooted in Scripture's use of these two Greek verbs. This is a sign that our fathers and mothers of the faith employed Scriptural terminology for expressing what they were doing when they gathered.

With a foundation of the meaning of “worship” in the New Testament, let us now consider the elements of worship, or *what Christian worship should be made of, or what it should look like*. As mentioned before, *proskuneo* is used only once in the context of the Christian assembly. Instead, the New Testament more commonly uses phrases like “coming together,” or “the prayers,” or “breaking bread” to refer to Christian worship. That early Christians preferred to refer to their worship by the elements of their worship reinforces the proposition that what we do in worship is to God.

Before we consider the elements of worship, allow me to offer an illustration. Have you ever been to an HOA meeting, you know, the Homeowners Association? Imagine with me that you go to the first HOA meeting for your new neighborhood, and as you enter, a man in a tuxedo with a serving tray offers you *hors d'oeuvres*. You help yourself and then take your seat. An eloquent moderator graces the platform. The body conducts business productively and politely. At the end, someone makes a motion that the neighborhood *pay* to have the grass cut at 1017 Prairie Lane because this family is facing financial hardship. The motion passes unanimously and peacefully. You later tell your spouse, “I have NEVER seen an HOA meeting like that.”

When it comes to HOA meetings, there are certain things we all expect. The complaining. The ranting. The fines. The pettiness.

The same is true for Christian worship. Distinct characteristics, attitudes, and elements comprise the Christian worship service. But, unlike an HOA meeting, what we do in Christian worship is prescribed for us in the Scriptures. Frankly, I don't care what you do at your HOA meeting. I don't care how you go about your YMCA, PTA, NRA, or AA meetings, because God has not

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<sup>4</sup> See also Phil 3:3, Heb 12:28, 2 Tim 1:3.

<sup>5</sup> Mat 4:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> See also Revelation 7 and 22 (7:11, 15; 22:3, 8-9), where we find *proskuneo* and *latreuo* are at the throne of God in eternity.

prescribed elements for these community associations. But He has told us how to go about Christian worship.

In Scripture, when Christians gather, we see them practicing many things:

In Acts 20, when Eutychus fell out of the window, we see the Christians meeting on Sunday, breaking bread, preaching until midnight, meeting in a house, sleeping during the sermon, and resuscitating the dead.

In Acts 2, when the Christians began to gather after Pentecost, we find teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayers, wonders and signs, things in common, benevolence, conversions, baptisms, community meals, and membership.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul states that when the Christians come together, they are to carry out church discipline, and in chapter 14, the Christians are partaking in hymns, lessons, revelations, tongues, and interpretations. In Chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, prayers, prophecies, head coverings for women, partaking of the bread and cup, and confessions are all part of the worship.

In 1 Timothy 2, Christian male leaders are commanded to pray with holy hands and teach the church, while women are commanded to carry out good works and learn quietly. Later in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy, public readings of Scripture, exhortations, and teachings are prescribed.

Time does not allow me to examine every passage in the New Testament where Christians gather, nor can we probe all the rules of biblical interpretation that guide us in determining which of these practices are to be perpetuated by the New Testament Church for liturgical purposes. So, let me summarize all these passages of Scripture with **5 Elements for Worship in the Word—Preach, Pray, Read, Sing, and Show**. These serve as somewhat of a consensus for confessional Churches like our Free Will Baptist Church.

1. **Preach the Word:** Preaching comes in many forms; we proclaim the Gospel, we teach or explain doctrine, we exhort to change minds and behavior, we admonish or warn about sin and judgment, and we encourage as we provide the hope of the Gospel.
2. **Pray the Word:** We pray corporately in several ways: confession of sin, intercessions, supplications, thanksgiving, and prayers of praise and adoration. We offer extemporaneous prayers and the prayers of Scripture in the form of Psalms, the Lord's Prayer, and Benedictions.
3. **Read the Word:** We read the entire Bible—the Law and the Prophets, the Psalms and books of poetry, the Gospels and Epistles. Early Christians read it solo, corporately, responsively, and antiphonally.
4. **Sing the Word:** Scripture prescribes Psalms from the Hebrew Psalter, hymns which are human-composed songs of praise to the Triune God, and spiritual odes which are composed not of worldly concerns but matters pertaining to the godly life.
5. **Show the Word:** In our tradition, we uphold baptism, the Lord's Table, and the washing of the saints' feet as gospel ordinances to be regularly practiced in worship. We also show the Word in other ways—the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, the right hand of fellowship, the collection of offerings, and greeting one another.

In conclusion, I'd like to read an extrabiblical source that was written within a generation, not more than fifty years of the death of John, the last apostle. In this passage, Justin Martyr defends Christian worship to the Roman Emperor and thus provides a detailed description of what an early second-century worship service was like.<sup>7</sup> This is not Scripture, but this is the earliest record of how our primitive brothers and sisters worshiped based on the teachings of Christ and the Apostles.

And on the day called **Sunday**, all who live in cities or in the country **gather together** to one place, and the **memoirs of the apostles** or the **writings of the prophets** are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the minister **verbally instructs and exhorts** to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and **pray**... and when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the minister in like manner offers **prayers and thanksgivings**, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying "**Amen.**" And there is a distribution to each, and a **partaking** of that which has been blessed, and to those who are absent, a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are financially able and willing, **give** what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the minister, who succors the orphans and widows... Sunday is the day on which we hold our **common assembly**, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead...

In these few minutes, we've explored worship verbs in the New Testament, identified the elements of worship, and observed the assembly of an early second-century Christian community. In doing so, I hope you have been challenged to reform your worship, not according to your own innovation, but consistent with the Scriptures. It is my conviction that the life-giving, Spirit-inspired Word of Christ is the only means given to us for worship of the Father.

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<sup>7</sup> Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165), *First Apology* 67.