

# Foundations Of Worship

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## OUTLINE

- I. A CREDO of Worship according to the Scriptures
- II. Scripture References that Highlight the Foundations of Worship
- III. Formal Worship
  - A. Transition from Christian Life as Worship to formal Worship
  - B. Application of the Foundations of Worship to Formal Worship
  - C. Conclusion

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I believe that God our Lord and Father in heaven has made me the crown of His creation. He preserves me and gives me every good thing, that I may live before Him in peace and Joy. And I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's only Son from eternity, who became a man for us sinners, who redeemed us from Satan's power with His holy precious blood, rose from death, and made us His own to live with Him now and forever. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who draws us to our Savior by the Gospel, who keeps us united in the true faith, forgives our sins, and at the end of the world will raise us from death to life eternal.

This is the message of our precious Gospel. God made me: He gave me everything I need for my life, and He gave it in great abundance. Before He made the world, He planned to bring me into His family so that I could enjoy every gift from His treasury. He planned this because I am a rebel. I came into this world a rebel. I inherited my rebellion from my parents, from their parents, from the first parents, Adam and Eve. Beside this, I consciously and willfully rebel against God my Father day after day. I say that His good gifts are worthless and useless. I despise and reject the life in His family, the life of cheerful service to Him and to my brothers and sisters. I chart my own course, become a slave to my own pleasures, and I say No to the Father's kind invitation to become a member of His family. And I do this day after day. For this I am guilty before God. I have no right to live one more minute. And unless someone rescues me from the searching, penetrating eye of God's justice I shall suffer an eternity of terror after I breath my last. But God, who made me and gave me everything I need, saw my hopeless predicament. He literally spent Himself on my behalf. He planned my deliverance. He took counsel with Himself before the world was formed and decided to rescue me by letting His only-begotten Son, who was with Him from eternity, become my Brother, live on this earth, keep the Father's law perfectly, suffer in obedience, die, and rise again on the third day.

It is finished, once and for all. My guilt is gone, shoveled into the earth, for it went with Jesus to the grave. There is no doubt about it, because my Lord Jesus rose from the grave to prove His power over Satan, the Accuser, who wants to point the finger at me day and night and remind me of past sins, present sins, and suggest sins to come. Let Satan point his finger at me. God, in completing His rescue operations, taught me to point my finger not back at the devil, but to the cross on which Jesus hung. I would never have thought of doing it, but God sent His Holy Spirit to me. I was baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. God awakened faith in my heart before I could perceive, know, or say anything at all. And by the power of that faith I as an infant point to Jesus, my Savior, renounced the devil and all his wicked ways, and took for myself the garment of righteousness and purity prepared by my Lord Jesus. God's appointed servants, my parents, teachers and pastors, helped the seed of faith to sprout and to grow into a plant, at least strong enough in the strength of God to withstand the blizzard fury of the devil's attacks. So Jesus has led me into the home of His Father. I know the Father: He made me, created this world for my good, and has preserved it. He planned and carried out my deliverance by His son Jesus. He sends me the Holy Spirit in the Word of God to keep me in His home forever.

How can I answer for such kindness? How can I respond to such goodness? My Father has shown me the way. By revealing His kindness He gave me strength I never had before, the strength of faith to *walk* the way of life. In love toward me He has also shown me how to walk the way of life. Therefore, because of God's great mercy to me, I will offer my life as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. Since I offer my whole body and life, my worship is a total commitment 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, for as many years as God gives me life and breath. My worship also anticipates the world to come, for I will not pattern my life according to the electronic oracle or Delphi in my home. I will say NO to pronouncements concerning the good life and pray to God: May your will be done in me. I will ask God to continue to correct my course when sin blurs the path. And He will answer me faithfully, accurately, kindly and persuasively, in His book of life. the Bible. So I am happy and free. I am happy and free to thank and praise my Father for His kindness. I am happy and free to look to the needs of any other person, to help him whenever there is opportunity. This is the joy and freedom of life, This is the joy and freedom of living in my Father's house. I can sing praise to the Lord God, for He will show me the way of love peace, patience, kindness, or goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control: to my brother and sister in the faith, to my superiors whoever they may be, to fellow believers who are weak in their worship, as well as the proud who rise against my fellow believers in Christ.

This is worship according to the Scriptures. This is worship in the deepest sense; this is the real worship, the spiritual worship that God wants. And I am fully convinced that nothing in all creation can stifle my worship of the Father who called me before the world was formed in Jesus Christ, my Brother, my God, and my Lord. Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is - to God the Father be glory forever.

My life is my worship. It was planned by God, made possible by the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and awakened by the Holy Spirit in His appointed means. If we understand that the Scripture speaks of worship as our life, then we can also understand how other selections from the Bible relate to worship. Paul's letter to the Ephesians strengthens our understanding of

worship. I refer you especially to the first chapter, the opening doxology. Paul praises God as the author of our worship: *God* chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world; *God* predestined us in Christ; our salvation was *God's* will and pleasure; *God* lavished the riches of His grace upon us; *God* made known the mystery of our deliverance; *God* planned our deliverance. To God alone be honor and praise as the founder of our worship.

The Ephesian doxology reveals furthermore that the work of God was carried out through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God predestined us *in Christ*. God lavished His grace upon us *in Jesus our Lord*. He made known His plan *in Jesus Christ*. God's purpose was revealed in Jesus Christ. This section also reveals the purpose of God's deliverance in Jesus Christ; that we should be holy and blameless before Him. We should live for the praise of His glory. Living a holy life before God for the praise of His glory is the real worship, as we spoke of it before. To recapitulate – this Scripture proclaims God as the founder of our worship. It asserts that God has made our worship possible through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And, like Paul's letter to the Romans, it reveals the purpose of God's saving work in Jesus: the real, spiritual worship - body and life dedicated to God, holy and blameless.

St. John says the same thing in the prologue to His Gospel. God was in the beginning. Jesus the Word was with the Father. Our Lord came to bring light into darkness. And to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. We come to the same understanding of worship: God brings life to us dead men through Jesus our Lord. Since He has brought us to life, we are His children, and John's first letter points out that as His children we live in fullness of joy: "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make your joy complete. Fullness of joy is another way of describing the true worship of God. The joyful worship is not always manifest in ecstasy but often in calm contentment, because we know that God is our Father; He gives us everything we need for our life; we lack nothing.

Finally we shall hear Peter say the same thing: God is the author of our worship; He accomplished it through Jesus Christ. Peter describes our worship as an inheritance that cannot perish. It becomes evident in enduring trust and inexpressible joy.

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have suffered grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."  
1 Pet 1:3-9

Our life is the real worship. God planned to bring us from death to life. He accomplished it through the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that we might live holy and blameless before Him to His glory and the welfare of our fellowman.

We have laid the foundation for our life, the real worship, worship in the broad sense. We have also laid the foundation for worship in the narrow sense, that is, formal worship. I make the transfer from worship as life to formal worship on the basis of the prophets and of Jesus. The four prophets, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah pierce fake worship. Time and again they touch the very heart of the matter -- the way in which men behave toward each other and the way in which they worship God; and all of these prophets can see that these two things are inseparable. The prophets will not permit religion to exist in a vacuum. Unless man's formal worship of God is matched by his just and fair treatment of his neighbor, then ceremonies, rituals, observances and sacrifices are nauseating to God. And they are highly dangerous to the worshiper because he is attempting to stifle his moral and social conscience by all the "business" of religion. They declare the usages and customs of religion to be null and void unless men are treating their fellow men with mercy and justice. Let us hear them speak to us 20th Century Christians. Amos would say to us (ch. 6):

"I loathe and despise your communion services; Your Matins and Vespers give me no pleasure. You may bring me the paltry percentage of your income, and I shall not so much as look at it. I don't want to hear the songs of your liturgies; My ears are closed to your organ music. Instead, let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream."

Hosea would say to us (ch. 8):

"You Christians are thinking about your services all the time. Some of you insist on no change. Some of you insist they must have variety and elaboration. But do you live your life according to my word? Do you so much as read my word, not to mention pondering it in your heart. I take no pleasure in this kind of life. So I must remember your guilt and punish you for your sins. I will rain fire upon your cities and annihilate your lavish housing developments."

I shall omit the first chapter of Isaiah which you know so well and let Micah speak one final pronouncement (ch. 6):

"How shall I present myself before the Lord? Shall I wear a dress or pantsuit? Will it be a tie or turtleneck? Should I address God as "Thee" or "you"? I wonder what the synodical percentage of giving is so that I can make the proper contribution. You know well enough, Man, what is good! For what does the Lord require from you. But to be just, to have mercy and to walk humbly with your God!

Finally, our Lord Jesus came to earth and fulfilled the role of the prophets in His indictment of the Pharisees:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices - mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law justice, mercy and faithfulness. You ought to have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." (Mt 23:23-24)

From these utterances I conclude that both have the same foundation. Both live by the same principles. We live because God planned our rebirth and brought us to life in Jesus Christ. In formal worship the most important events take place when God speaks to us in His Word and when He nourishes our faith in the Lord's Supper. God's gracious and undeserved coming to us in Word and Sacrament is the most important part of worship. Let every faithful pastor rededicate himself to preaching and the preparation for it. Let him follow the path of John the Baptist. Let him call His flock to turn from their 20<sup>th</sup> Century idolatry to trust in Jesus as God's appointed Deliverer from all sin, from the power of Satan, and from everlasting Death. Let every hearer vow to listen with disciplined heart and mind to receive the life-giving Word that will graft itself to the heart and produce a rich harvest. The proclamation of what God has done for us in our Lord Jesus Christ is the first foundation stone to be laid in worship. None can be laid beneath it.

The Lord's Supper also requires some comment. In the Supper God also comes to us; He nourishes us; He communicates to me individually and to us corporately in the Body and Blood of our Lord the forgiveness of our sins and assures us again and again of the complete and perfect cancellation of our debt of sin through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It will become increasingly important to emphasize sacrament as sacrament: God's gracious gift to us. For new Lutheran liturgies are placing strong emphasis on the believer's role in the Lord's Supper. Thus in one order of worship, the Lord's Supper is described as follows (in paraphrase): the worshipers present the bread and wine; the pastor blesses it; he breaks it; the believers share it. First of all, a description or outline of the Lord's Supper should clearly show two directions: God comes with a gift: the believer answers with prayer, praise, and thanks. Furthermore, the presenting of the bread and wine at the altar beclouds the nature of the sacrament. The breaking of the bread may also be unwise, since it gives further emphasis to what believers are doing. Let the Lord's Supper remain sacrament: God's undeserved gift to us undeserving sinners.

In our daily life God's gracious coming to us kindles the spark of faith and produces the rich fruits of faith. The prophets spoke them: justice, mercy, and compassion. So also in corporate worship, God's coming to us in Word and Sacrament stimulates the congregation to prayer, praise and thanks. Let no one stifle the response. The loud Hosannas and Hallelujahs will never drown the clear and constant word of our Lord, My son, my daughter, your sins are forgiven. What can we sing to such announcement of life and health but a polychoral setting with all instruments at our disposal:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was and is and is to come! Hallelujah! Amen!

I have chosen to summarize my thoughts with several statements based upon the opening articles of the Augsburg Confession.

- A. We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Creator and Preserver of man and the universe he inhabits, Author of man's salvation and sanctification. For this He is to be worshipped, that is, thanked and praised, feared, loved, and trusted, forever. (Eph. 1:3-14)
- B. We believe that all mankind and every man in particular is born into this world a sinner, condemned to eternal damnation. He is incapable of fear, love and trust in God. He is separated from God and therefore cannot worship Him. (Ro. 3:10-20)
- C. We believe that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, true man, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified, died, and arose again from the dead. He reconciled the Father to mankind by offering his life as payment for all the sins of every man. This perfect worship (Philippians 2) made possible a new worship for man (thanks and praise, fear, love and trust)
- D. We believe that man, who cannot live before God by his own merit or doing, is reconciled or justified before God for Christ's sake through faith, when he believes that He is a son of God through the work of His Savior Jesus Christ. He is now alive to worship God in thought, word and deed. (11 Co. 5:17-21; Ro.6)
- E. We believe that faith, the gift of God, produces fruits in the Christian life; good works. This life may be called a life of worship. It is directed toward God in thanks and praise, fear, love, and trust. At the same time it moves out toward his neighbor in love and self-effacing service. (Ro. 12f.)
- F. We Christians celebrate this life of worship when we assemble to meet God. In such corporate worship God initiates the worship of His believers by coming to them in His Word, in His Holy Supper, and in Holy Baptism. The Christian congregation in turn responds with worship: thanks and praise, expressions of fear, love, and trust, to the glory of God and the strengthening of the congregation.

If we keep these fundamentals before us at all times, if we use the Scriptures diligently to strengthen us and to focus our hearts upon these fundamentals, then I am fully convinced that liturgical questions, Old English or modern English, old orders of worship or new, traditional music or new music, black vestments or white - these problems will resolve themselves in a way that will heap honor upon God and build the faith of the Church. That is, in our life of worship we shall not deny God the accomplishment of His blessed purpose among us: to nourish us with the life-giving Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, it is in place to couple this hope with a warning. We live in a culture that can do anything with a board of directors, an executive, and a computer. Other countries on this planet have seen us do it, and solicit American aid in this area: management, control, production.

But let us be on full alert! This approach does not work in worship or in the life of faith, call it what you will. Worship *techniques* in and of themselves do not constitute the foundations of worship. Variety will not solve lethargic worship, nor will modern English, nor will old

English, neither will new liturgies nor old liturgies; neither new hymns or old hymns: faster hymn playing or slower hymn playing. The idea that there is any kind of lasting solution to problems in worship in these techniques is a grand delusion that we must fight with all our strength. Techniques, programs, machinery, methods will never enliven faith. Let the call to repentance be heard among us. Let the soothing oil of the Gospel of forgiveness be poured into the wounds of sin. And a generation will-arise before us who will present their lives to God as a living sacrifice. And they will go to the house of the Lord willingly to hear the Word and to answer with prayer, thanks and Praise: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever. Amen.