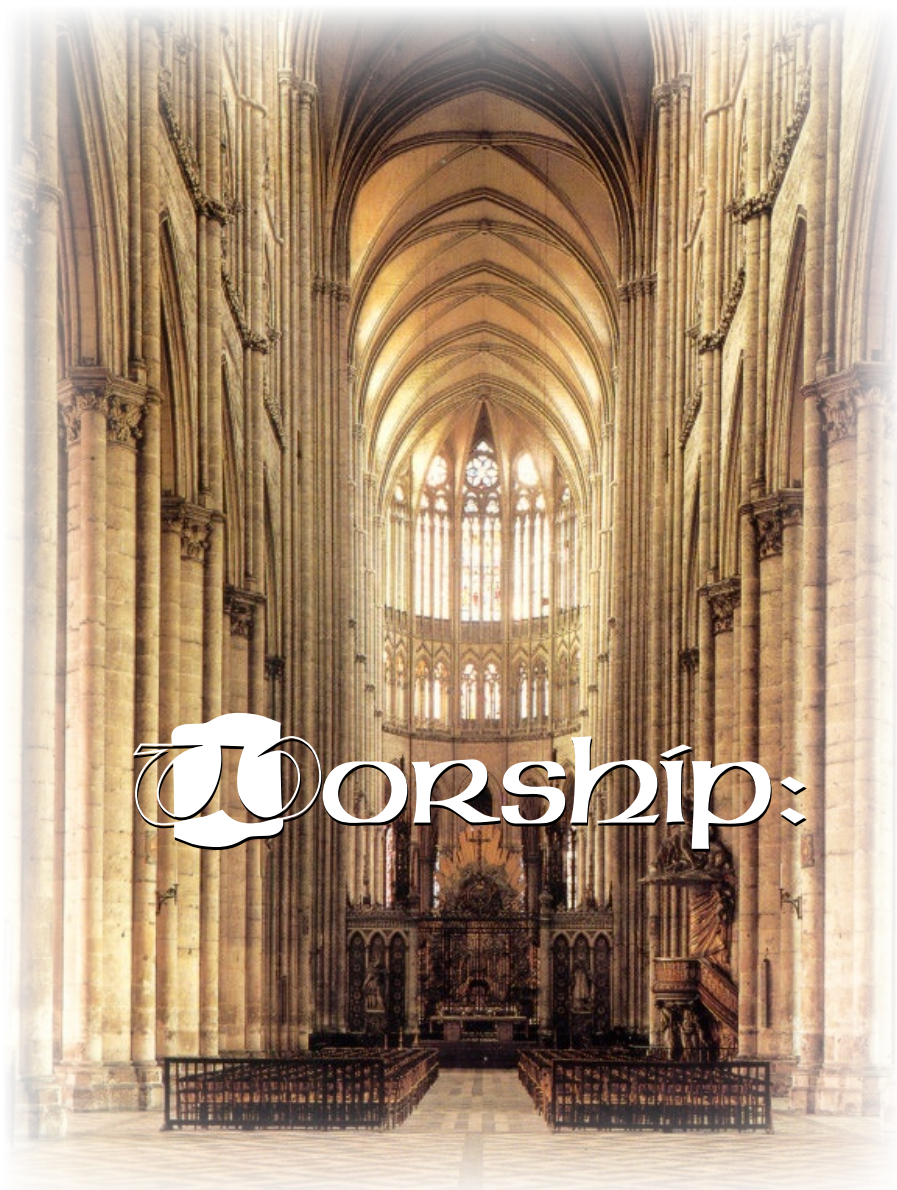


The design of it was timeless. Eternal. For its earthly blueprints were cast after the original in the halls of heaven.

Now the main point in what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices; so it is necessary that this high priest also have something to offer. Now if He were on earth, He would not be a priest at all, since there are those who offer the gifts according to the Law; who serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned by God when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "See," He says, "that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain."

Hebrews 8:1-5



how far in?

THE PATTERN FOR THE MAGNIFICENT STONE TEMPLE built by King Herod between 19 BC and AD 64—as well as the earlier, portable tabernacle tents and the first stone temple built by Solomon—was based on the original built by God for Himself in heaven. It was based on a rather simple, direct concept that God is holy, and the closer one gets to Him, the holier one must be.

At the temple a gentile could pass through one of the gates in the exterior wall to enter the outer courtyard, or Court of the Gentiles. This was a large, open area—a public place, of sorts—and was as close as a non-Jew could get to the presence of God. Situated inside

this vast courtyard was a second enclosure which surrounded the actual temple. The first area inside this second enclosure was called the Treasury, or the Women's Court. This was as far as Jewish women could get. Jewish men could proceed further into the Court of Israel, and during the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) they could enter the Priest's Court, where the altar was located. Only priests could enter the Holy Place, which was a building inside the Court of Priests, and beyond that point, behind a veil, was the Holy of Holies—the inner sanctum—into which only the high priest could enter—and then only once per year to sacrifice for the sins of all of Israel on the Day

of Atonement. Here in the Holy of Holies was where (when it was in Israel's possession) was placed the ark of the covenant crowned by the mercy seat.

Before the once and final atonement of Christ, access to God's presence was strictly controlled—on pain of death; a gentile passing further than permitted could legally be killed. Even a devout, law-abiding Jew could not enter the Holy Place—and certainly not the Holy of Holies. But when Jesus died upon the cross, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from everything and everyone else was rent in two by God Himself, from top to bottom. Now by His shed blood anyone—*anyone*—could worship God directly, without intermediary.

thin gruel

The limitations and specificity of ancient Hebrew worship stand in marked contrast to the broad, homogenized form found in most protestant churches today. As the veil has been removed and the Holy of Holies expanded to hold its many new worshippers, the once-rich feast of that worship has been diluted to a thin gruel.

It is true that the Hebrew and Greek words commonly translated “worship” in the Bible can include a broad spectrum of activities in the church. Any service performed in the name of the Lord can conceivably be termed a form of “worship.” It is possible to show up on a Saturday to help paint the exterior walls of the church and consider it “worship,” if the painter is performing the task with a full heart in the name of the Lord. He or she is doing it as a demonstration of their love for God.

But as we have broadened the definition of worship to include just about anything that transpires within the four walls of the church building, we have lost sight of the wonder and awe of that more *specific* worship—that which is performed on our knees, bowed before the throne. We have settled for an emaciated version of worship, conducted from a distance, in the outer court only, and more often than not we no longer bother to proceed deeper into the Holy of Holies—even though now we may. We remain outside with the “gentiles,” when, as believers, we have been granted access to the most holy place.

a specific worship

Let us consider what a more specific worship—worship that occurs in the “Holy of Holies”—in fact, is. First, however, let us consider what it is not.

- It is not just showing up on a Sunday morning. That is not worship. That is attendance.
- It is not shaking hands and being friendly with each other. That is not worship. That is, at best, fellowship.
- It is not drinking coffee and eating doughnuts. That is not worship. That is a *kaffee klatsch*.
- It is not just singing choruses or hymns. That is not worship. That is singing.
- It is not listening to a teacher or preacher with an open Bible on your lap. That is not worship. That is instruction.
- It is not serving on a committee, painting the bathrooms, or baking a casserole for the potluck. That is not worship. It is service.

- It is not some forms of prayer, for they are not worship, but supplication, entreaty, or intercession.

To be sure, real, specific worship may take place during any of these activities, but they are not in and of themselves a type of *specific* worship.

Today, in this age of the church, we enter the Holy of Holies by way of the heart. We do not pass through heavily gated openings in stone walls. We do not don ornate raiment and headpieces and slaughter innocent livestock. We do not sprinkle blood on a golden mercy seat. Instead, we enter the presence of God with an attitude and thoughts of reverent adoration. In that supernatural joining of our spirit to His, we focus all of our attention and affection on our Maker and Lord.

Specific worship is always—*always*—directed upward. It is the humble, reverent believer directing his or her thoughts to and on God. It is not singing *about* God (that is testimony), nor is it singing about the benefits of salvation (that is evangelism). It is not even singing *about* worship (that is a *call* to worship, but not the worship itself).

Specific worship is adoration. It is one person, or a single-minded group of people, telling God, *and meaning it in the heart*, “I love You.” Specific worship is also *exaltation*. That is, it is one person, or a single-minded group of people, declaring that God's eternal and supernatural attributes raise Him higher than anything else in our lives:

“You, O God, are holy!”

“O Lord, You are pure and righteous!”

a moment of worship

Next week, in part two of this series, we will go deeper into the Holy of Holies, understanding what it is about specific worship that sets it apart from everything else. For now, however, let us kneel down before our God and worship Him.

First, permit me to use God's words to *call* us to worship:

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.

Psalm 95:6-7a

Now, with open and truthful hearts, let us fall down and worship the Lord:

Bless the Lord, O my soul!
O Lord my God, You are very great;
You are clothed with splendor and majesty,
Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,
Stretching out heaven like a tent curtain...
O Lord, how many are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all;
The earth is full of Your possessions...
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 104:1-2,24,35a