

WORSHIP: THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY & PLANNING

By Rich Hawkins

A Theology and Philosophy of Worship

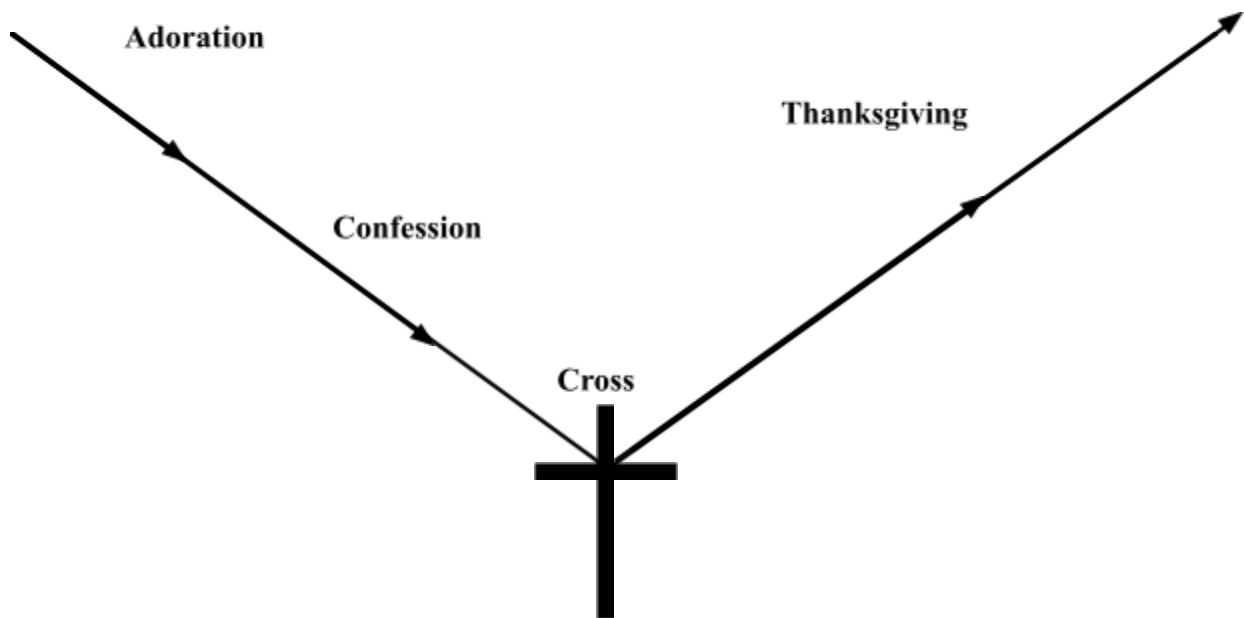
Mankind was created to worship. With every beat of our heart and every breath that we breathe, we are worshipers. In the broad sense, worship encompasses all of life (1 Cor. 10:31). The Latin phrase *Coram Deo* (“before the face of God”) holds tightly this notion that everything we do is in the presence of God, and our very lives are acts of worship before Him. I agree whole-heartedly with John Piper when he says, “All of life is the outshining of what you truly value and cherish and treasure. Therefore, all of life is worship. Either of God, or something else.” One of our distinctives as worshipers of God is that we are called to come together regularly in worship as the Body of Christ.

(For the remainder of this article, the term ‘worship’ will refer narrowly in scope to the segment of the corporate church gathering that typically precedes the preaching of the Word.)

Corporate worship in the church should engage both the **head** and the **heart**. As God’s people, we should not be interested only in learning *about* God on Sunday mornings, but also in *experiencing* His all-surpassing love and grace as well. God works powerfully through both the intellect and the emotion; we would surely miss an essential part of the Gospel if we did not seek to connect with Him through each of these faculties. From ancient hymnody to modern praise, corporate creeds to silent confessions, classical liturgy to grass roots themes; the church should seek to keep its face toward the future while holding on to the time-tested elements of orthodox historical Christian worship that engage both the head and the heart of every person with the truth of God's Word.

The Nuts and Bolts of Worship

On the surface of any given Sunday morning, it may seem as though we’ve just picked out our favorite five or six songs, added a couple prayers, a few scripture readings or quotes, and sprinkled in a special song for good measure. Although the liturgy may take this form, there is so much more that goes into worship planning than this. The goal of worship at Christ Presbyterian Church, is to take people on a journey every Sunday morning from the adoration of a transcendent Most High God, to an intimate experience of grace with a Savior who is “God with us”. The way we attempt to accomplish this is by using a four-step process of *Adoration, Confession, the Cross, and Thanksgiving*.



Each worship service begins with the **ADORATION** of our Creator. He sits enthroned in majesty, holiness, power, and splendor, high above all things. In His transcendence, He is worthy of all our praise because (if for no other reason) He is God and we are His creation. When we catch even a glimpse of His holiness in this time of looking upward in adoration, we cannot help but look downward into our own hearts and see how woefully short we fall in regard to His expectations of holiness for us. How can a perfectly righteous God have anything to do with a wretched people like us?

So next, we turn to a time of **CONFESSION**; pouring out our hearts to the very Redeemer of our souls. Whether it is a responsive reading, a time of silent meditation, prayer of corporate confession, or a song of contemplation; this is a sweet and invaluable part of our time of worship. When we see how great God is, we automatically are made aware of how sinful we are. This time of confession begins our pilgrimage back to the place where we can see our sinful hearts made pure and new once more by the blood of the Son.

At the foot of the **CROSS**, we find true forgiveness, complete renewal, and genuine change! When we are cleansed by Christ's blood we are saved once and for all; but over time we grow numb to how awesome and life-changing this salvation really is. By returning to the Cross of Jesus every week, we are not being *re-saved*, but rather *reminded* of how incredible it is that God would save us at all. The Cross is the climactic place where our sinful condition meets God's justice and grace in the sacrifice of his Son. To forget the Cross in our time of worship, is to forget the very foundation in which our joy is rooted. The Cross changes EVERYTHING!

Finally, when we have revisited the place where redemption was purchased once and for all, we end with our expression of **THANKSGIVING**. When we see how marvelous God is, and how awful we are, and how amazing the love of God is through Christ's finished work on the Cross...we cannot help but give thanks to him through our praises. Jesus says, "Those who have been forgiven much, love much." And a true understanding of this divine forgiveness will manifest itself in worship.

When we realign ourselves with this story of redemption each week, our hope is that your head will be reminded, and your heart will be engaged, to worship with a fresh sense of Gospel wonder. Every song, every prayer, every reading serves a specific purpose in the journey that we take during every worship service. My hope is that even if people cannot specifically articulate what took place on Sunday morning, they will still know they have met with God, seen their sin, revisited the Cross, and truly worshiped.