

Calvin Symposium on Worship 2009  
**Worship and the Word**

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. The issue

“Why is it that many who would claim to be heirs of the Reformation, or who would at least call themselves ‘Bible-believers,’ have so little of the Bible in their public worship services? . . . Whatever our denomination (or “non-denomination”), if we believe the Bible, we need to intentionally integrate Scripture into the public gathering of God’s people. Most Bible-believing churches will have Scripture read in the sermon or just before it, at the least. But many churches will have no more Scripture than that.” (Douglas Smith)

### 2. What’s at stake

“I looked in vain, last Sunday, as I glanced down the bulletin for any mention of biblical lessons. Finally, when I had just about given up hope of any use of scripture in the service, a couple of verses were read as an introduction to the sermon. . . . If we really believe, as we profess, that scripture is central to the Christian life, then it ought also to be central in our worship life. That Sunday bulletin is an important statement of faith. If the bulletin makes it clear that scripture is an important part of Christian worship, then we can be sure people will get the message that the Bible is crucial in shaping their lives as Christians. But, when the role of scripture in worship is negligible, when scripture is used only to launch a sermon, what is communicated is that the Bible is marginal in Christian life, too. The use we make or fail to make of scripture in our worship says far more about Christian discipleship than we may realize.

“The first step toward making our worship more biblical is in giving the reading of God’s Word a central role in Christian worship on any occasion. . . . Recovering the centrality of scripture in our worship makes it clear that we understand the Bible to be God’s Word to God’s people here and now. Scripture is read, not just for a sermon text, but to hear what word God addresses to the gathered congregation.” (James F. White, “Making Our Worship More Biblical,” *Perkins Journal* 34 [Fall 1980]: 38)

### 3. The command

*“Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture.” (1 Timothy 4:13)*

## I. REVELATION AND RESPONSE (THEOLOGY AND DOXOLOGY)

### A. God’s Pattern of Relating to Us

#### 1. God’s initiative

2. A crucial order

## **B. A Biblical Pattern**

1. Old Covenant

2. New Covenant

3. Worship

- a. Worship as response

“There can be no doxology without theology. It is not possible to worship an unknown god. All true worship is a response to the self-revelation of God in Christ and Scripture, and arises from our reflection on who he is and what he has done.” (John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, 311)

- b. The pattern fulfilled in Christ (Hebrews 2:12; 2 Corinthians 1:20)

- c. Worship as a dialogue

- d. Word/Table  
Bible reading/prayer  
Lessons & Carols

### e. Preaching and Worship

#### 1) Wrong:

- a) Preaching *after* worship
- b) Preaching *vs.* worship

#### 2) Right:

- a) Preaching *as* worship (“Expository Exultation”)

“The all-pervasive, all-important, all-surpassing reality in every text is God. Whether he is commanding or warning or promising or teaching he is there. And where he is, he is always supreme. And where he is supreme he will be worshiped. (John Piper, “Preaching as Worship”)

#### b) Preaching as *part of* worship

“In the modern evangelical church, singing, praying, giving, and other congregational acts of worship are regarded at times as preamble to the sermon. Music, in particular, appears separate from elements of worship that seem to be more spiritual, such as praying and preaching. This worship dichotomy does not exist in Scripture, and our thinking is more biblical when we understand that musicians and preachers actually share in the ministry of the Word.” (Paul S. Jones, *Singing And Making Music: Issues In Church Music Today*, 3)

#### 3) The primacy of the *Word*

“Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. . . Preaching is making known the Name of the Lord, and worship is praising the Name of the Lord made known.” (John Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 31)

#### 4) Completing the cycle

## II. THE WORD IN WORSHIP

### A. The Word and the Prerequisites for Worship

### B. The Word as the Inviter to Worship

### **C. The Word as the Authority for Worship**

“The Bible is not simply read aloud in order to convey information, to teach doctrine or ethics or history, though of course it does that too. It is read aloud as the effective sign that all that we do is done as a response to God’s living and active word, the word which, as Isaiah says, accomplishes God’s purpose in the world, abiding for ever while all flesh withers like the grass. The place of scripture in Christian worship means that both in structure and content God’s initiative remains primary, and all that we do remains a matter of response.” (N. T. Wright, “Freedom and Framework, Spirit and Truth: Recovering Biblical Worship,” [www.ntwrightpage.com](http://www.ntwrightpage.com))

### **D. The Word as Material for Worship**

### **E. The Word as the Regulator of Worship**

### **F. The Word and the Message of Worship**

### **G. The Word and the Goal of Worship**

### III. SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS AND THE WORD

#### A. Christmas

#### B. Easter

### IV. RESOURCES

Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, *The Worship Sourcebook* (Baker)

Gary A. Furr and Milburn Price, *The Dialogue of Worship: Creating Space for Revelation and Response* (Smyth & Helwys)

Ron Man, "Worship and the Word," *Worship Notes* 1.6 (June 2006),  
[www.worr.org/?page\\_id=3](http://www.worr.org/?page_id=3)

Ron Man, "Thematic Worship: A Rich Feast for the People of God" (audio from Calvin symposium 2008), *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 135-156 (available at [www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos/2008/audio.php](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/sympos/2008/audio.php))

John D. Witvliet, "Isaiah in Christian Liturgy: Recovering Textual Contrasts and Correcting Theological Astigmatism,"  
[http://www.calvin.edu/worship/idis/theology/isaiah\\_in\\_liturgy-full.php](http://www.calvin.edu/worship/idis/theology/isaiah_in_liturgy-full.php)

Ron Man  
Worship Resources Intl.  
[www.worr.org](http://www.worr.org)  
[worr.wordpress.com](http://worr.wordpress.com)