
The Grace of God in New Covenant Worship

Ephesians 1

Russ Kennedy

What does it mean to worship?

We can worship in all of life... we live to please and praise God.

We can worship in our homes... we read the Word and pray.

We can worship at our jobs and schools... we glorify God by how we respond to people and situations.

We can worship in our gatherings as believers... we pray, sing, give, one-another and hear God's Word.

These are the spheres in which we worship. But what is worship about?

Christian's often don't really worship at all. They are not Godward in their lives and sadly, sometimes not even at services.

Christian's often worship in a way that it is about themselves. They are at the center of praying and praising.

Some argue that if we are not singing to God we not worshipping as the Bible says. Paul, in Ephesians and Colossians, counters such a notion.

Jesus set the stage for what worship is about when talking to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. He is asked whether only the Jewish Temple was the authorized place of worship. The Old Testament tended to focus in the outer and set apart sacred places and sacred spaces. Jesus' answer looks forward to the coming age, the New Covenant era, in which there are no more sacred places or sacred spaces. All true worship now is in Spirit and in truth.

Jesus is doing several important things that are woven all through the New Testament and highlighted in Ephesians.

There are no sacred places or spaces for gathered worship. It can be anywhere. This is an auditorium, not a sanctuary.

For true gathered worship to take place, there must be the Spirit and there must be truth. However, the New Testament tells us that the Spirit comes in and through the Word. Without truth there can be no Spirit. Where truth is absent in worship, then the Spirit will be as well.

We are to worship through truth. The truths of the Word of God form, frame and fuel our response to God and to one another.

Ephesians chapter one is pure kindling and split lumber for the fire of worship. I commend to you the *truths* of this chapter to exult in God.

We Worship the Father (v.3-6)

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

We praise and worship God, our Father for these blessings...

God our Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

We exult in God for all the good that He has purposed for us. That good resides in Christ in heaven. Every spiritual blessing we will receive comes from Jesus seated in heaven. There He sits as the resurrected Lord whose redemptive work is completed. The flow of spiritual good to us comes to us from heaven and Christ.

God our Father has chosen us to be His.

We sing praise to God because all these blessings come to those who have been chosen by God. We were chosen in Christ before the world was created. So we praise God in the these truths.

It is God who chooses. This amazing truth is clear. God is the subject of the verb choose and we are the objects.

It is personal - God choose us. He chose us as individuals.

It is eternal. God chose us before the foundation of the world.

It is final. Election is a completed act of God. The results of God's choice unfold in redemptive history.

It is purposeful. God has chosen us and has made us holy and blameless. We rejoice to know that we are holy and blameless before God and we are being transformed into who He has already declared us to be.

God's choice of us to be His people, to receive all His blessing, to be holy and blameless should cause our hearts to be humbled and to be amazed. Does it? Do you worship God in the truth of election?

God our Father has predestined us to sonship.

The truth of our being destined for sonship is a theme for worship and for singing. The word *predestined* simply means that God is working to complete His eternal purpose and plan. It means that God will accomplish what he has purposed. This is not just theory, but a reality being lived out in each passing moment of time. So, in love for us, God has destined that each of those chosen will reach the full standing as sons (adoption).

God has shown us how to worship. He takes pleasure in the praising and prizing the bright glory of His grace. Freely giving this grace magnifies the worth of Christ by displaying God's great love for His Son.

We Worship the Son (v.7-12)

From *in Him* (v.7) to *the praise of the glory of His grace* (v.12), God honoring praise focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son.

⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

¹¹ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

We praise and worship Jesus Christ, the beloved Son, for what He has done.

Jesus has brought us our Redemption (v.7-8a)

We will rejoice in the grace lavished upon us which provides a trespass forgiving and blood bought redemption. Worship flows because of the lavishness of God's grace that actually deals with our sin. It is an emphatic statement of our present possession because of the extravagance of God's grace.

Jesus has given us a full and final Revelation (v.8b-10)

We will worship God in the full trajectory of His revelation in the Word and through Christ. We now know what was hidden in the past about His will. We worship Jesus because it pleased God to make Christ the center and sum of His purposes..

This age is shaped by the future; that is, the purpose of God in the fullness of time to make Christ the supreme sum and substance all life. Here is the satisfying supremacy of Christ. And that which God will do in that time shapes the realities and practical living of today.

Jesus shares His inheritance with us (v.11-12)

God is working in time and history to carry out his purpose to give to His people a share in Christ's inheritance. The idea of an inheritance for the saints fills the New Covenant. What an amazing thing this is: God will make sure that Jesus will be praised in those who have hoped in Him, especially those the early Jewish Christians who were the first to hope in Him.

We worship in the Spirit (v.13-14)

From *in Him* (v.13) to *the praise of His glory* (v.14), God honoring praise focuses on work of the Holy Spirit in and for us.

¹³ In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We worship God by **the Holy Spirit** who delivers God's blessings to us.

The Spirit works in us who have received it.

The Spirit applies the work of Christ to those who were chosen and destined to be God's own people. That happened to those who heard and believed. The result of God's choice of us is an active response. It is a great thing when we honor the words of God and work of the Spirit in our conversion.

To be saved, it is necessary to hear the true words of the gospel. There is an objective message that is to be believed. God has ordained both the ends and the means to those ends. We will be saved. But to be saved, we must hear and believe the word of truth.

Those who receive this work of the Spirit are those who have heard and believed the word of truth.

The Spirit seals and secures us to guarantee our final salvation.

The Holy Spirit seals us. This is the promised Holy Spirit. In Paul's theology this is first the promise of blessing to Abraham for all the world. The Spirit is a part of the fulfillment of that truth "that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." But also, it is a reference to Jesus' own promise of the Spirit which is also connected to the Abrahamic promise.

We praise God that the Spirit has placed on us God's mark of ownership. The Spirit Himself marks us being owned by God. The presence of the Spirit in a person who has heard the truth and believed it, is a mark of their having been chosen by God.

We praise God that the Spirit is the down payment guaranteeing that we will receive our inheritance. The living third person of the Godhead indwelling in us guarantees that God will complete the saving work that He started. The Spirit in us absolutely guarantees that God will collect those who belonged to God.

The Spirit causes us to praise the glory of God's grace.

Why was this done this way? It is all *to the praise of God's glory*. We are so used to hearing phrases like this that we sometimes don't really actually look at the words themselves. This is not just a slogan or a line in a worship song. There is something profound in this purpose of God.

Listen to it again. All this is *to the praise of God's glory*. Now stop. What is being praised here? God? Is that what it says? It is more than that. All of this is meant to draw forth the praise of the glory of God. God has chosen us, predestined us, redeemed us, given us an inheritance and guaranteed it by the seal of the Spirit all so that His brightness, His weightiness, His largeness, His Son – Jesus Christ will be praised.

We Worship in Prayer (v. 15-22)

Worship has both a vertical and horizontal aspect. So Paul can turn from the exulting worship of God and immediately worship God in giving thanks and requests for people.

That which we worship God for we express confidence in others being recipients of those blessings.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,

In the Reasons for our Praying (v.15-16)

We are to be motivated by the glory of God's grace that Paul has extolled in the opening paragraph. God's grace to us and God's glory in Himself have been praised. That grace and glory have been effective in the life of these people. They have been blessed, chosen, redeemed, reconciled, predestined, adopted, sealed and united with all of God's people. God's grace in others causes us to worship God with gratitude.

Why should we do this? Because God has granted them faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They have believed the truth. They have believed the word of the gospel and put their hope in Christ. Further, we worship God because of others love for the saints. This love for other

believers is an evidence of God's grace in the believers. It is a love that is not just focused on their friends, or family or even their church community – it is a heart for all the saints.

Love for the saints will fill our prayers with thanksgiving. The grace of God we see in the lives of others stirs up gratitude in our own. Paul was simply thankful to God for the believers in the church there.

In the Requests in our Praying (v.17-20)

Prayers often flow from theology, from the truths that have gripped our souls.

¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

Paul asks the Father that we might know God better. The request that Paul makes is to God, the Father. He is the one being addressed, being spoken to. The Father will be the One who answers and grants the request. The very truths that have fueled our praise frame our prayers.

In our praying, we affirm how God will answer our request. To know God better, the Father gives the Spirit to make the truths real to people. Our requests for one another also ask the Father for the result, the end, for what it attains. Here, Paul wants them through the work of the Spirit to know God better. This is not merely an ability to recite doctrine or wax eloquent on the attributes of God. It is a right knowledge of God in the soul that motivates us to exulting worship of God and intimate fellowship with Him.

"[Some] can devote thousands of hours to the diligent study of Scripture and yet still somehow display an extraordinarily shallow knowledge of God. Biblical knowledge can be merely academic and rigorous, but somehow not edifying, not life-giving, not devout, not guileless." D.A. Carson¹

The effect of the Spirit is to give light to our inner eyes, our heart, so that we can see God's truth. All of us have had the "Oh, I see" experience with something we already knew. This is what the Spirit's work does in us. Listen to me! I fear for us as Christians that just because we can talk about truth that we think have experienced the truth. So the answer to this prayer, this petition, will be evident in worship of the One so known.

What we believe will direct our hope. One of our requests is that others will be know their true hope. This fills the heart with Biblical hope, assurance that then causes us to praise even during the most dreadful times.

John Stott put it this way, "More simply, it was a call to an altogether new life in which we know, love, obey and serve Christ, enjoy fellowship with him and with each other, and look beyond our present suffering to the glory which will one day be revealed. This is *the hope to which he has called you*. Paul prays that our eyes may be opened to know it."

We can praise and pray that you will really grasp that you, yourself, are God's rich inheritance given to Christ. Therefore, we are called to, in the words of O'Brien, "...live consistently with this high calling and accept with gratitude and true humility the grace and glory that he has lavished on us."²

Paul prays that we may know how great God's power is for us.

[To know] what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

Do you see it? We are to know how immeasurably great God's power is. How do we know how great it is? By the resurrection. The power God exercised in raising Christ from the dead is the power that is for us. That same in breaking of eternal life into the old creation breaks into our deadness in sin and brings us to life. So, we must have an eternity-based, Christ-focused view of ourselves in which God's power brings life out of death.

In What Makes Such Praying Possible (v.20-23)

Why does Paul pray like this? What could push us to ask these kinds of things for each other?

²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

We will pray like this when we come to be transformed by **the expression of God's power**. The more we know and understand what God has done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the more we will understand what He has done in our redemption. We will be so gripped by the stunning power of God that we will want other believers to know it as well.

We will pray like this when we come to exult in **the elevation of Jesus Christ**. The superiority of Christ is a part of His exaltation. His being ascended and seated on the throne sets Him above all things in all places for all time. We will so exult in Jesus that we will pray for others to know Him in this way as well.

We will pray like this when we come to understand **the extent of God's sovereignty** in Christ. Jesus has been giving the full and final authority over all the creation. He has been given headship over all the church. The church, His body, is where He grants His fullness as He indwells the church filling it all.

Reflect and Respond

Truth clearly understand is the foundation, the framework, and the fuel for worship.

It is clear that the Scriptures that God chose people to be saved. Those that God chose to be saved will believe, become holy, receive their inheritance so that Jesus Christ is magnified and the glory of His grace praised.

We will join with God the Father to magnify the satisfying supremacy of Jesus Christ.

¹ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), p.15.

² O'Brien, Peter Thomas. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999., p.136