

Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning - Lesson 1b

by John Piper

Worship is not just about physical actions and bodily presence, but about the heart and spirit, and should be a part of our daily lives and ministry.

Duration: 34:20

Scripture: Acts 10:9

Topics: "Church Order", "Great Commission"

Description

In this sermon by John Piper, he discusses the importance of love as the guiding principle in church form and order. He references John Calvin's teachings on the matter, emphasizing that specific details and practices are not necessary for salvation or building the church. Piper highlights the diversity of personalities and approaches in spreading the gospel, exemplified by figures like Luther and Calvin. He also emphasizes the role of the Puritans in continuing the Reformation and their commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission by spreading the gospel to all nations.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org Why, then, is the central Old Testament word for worship, proskuneo, virtually boycotted by Peter, James, John, and Paul in their letters that they write to the churches? Here's my concluding answer in regard to this. The word did not make clear enough the inward spiritual nature of true worship.

It carried significant connotations of place and form and physical bowing down. The word was associated with bodily bowing down and with the actual presence of a visible manifestation to bow down before. So it is prevalent in the Gospels.

This explains why you get 26 instances in the Gospels, 21 in Revelation, where Jesus is physically present. See, in the Gospels, you have Jesus here, and then in the church, he's not here in any physical form to bow down before. And then the Revelation describes worship in heaven, where he's on the throne with the Father.

There is no physical throne here. There is no physical city here. Christianity is the one religion where there is no geographic center.

Judaism has its Jerusalem. Islam has its Mecca. Buddhism, I don't know.

I don't know my Buddhism well enough. There's a shrine that's typical for Buddhism. Certain places are Christianity.

You know, I wonder about this. I'm not sure why, but I have. I'm 53 years old.

I taught. I taught at Bethel for six years and every every January they taught courses in Palestine. And any of the Bible teachers could take those guys and gals and go and teach there.

And I have never been to the Promised Land and don't want to go. I don't want to go. And I'm not sure why I don't want to go.

My mother was killed in Palestine. But this thing preceded that, that I was feeling. I have no great desire to go.

I may go someday. I don't know. But I think I think it's the same reason.

I just don't want to go to the mall. I hate the mall of America. I've been three times in my life and never care to go again.

I have the feeling that there's a lot of there's a lot of artificiality. There's a lot of marketing. There's a lot of hawking.

And and and there's a lot of dangerous. Esteeming of place. As something where a spiritual thing can happen.

Get baptized in the Jordan or have a prayer meeting at the tomb. There's just something in me that says that there's something wrong with that. I think when Jesus said, don't weep for me.

Weep for yourselves. Because this is coming down. And this whole city is going to be burned to the ground.

And it will be trampled upon until the times of the Gentiles is complete. I think Jesus was saying this city is finished until the Great Commission is done. As far as my cause is concerned.

Well, I'm overstating it. All you who went to Jerusalem and had a great time there. Bless you.

No problem. And I probably will go someday. But I'm trying to understand what's going on inside of me.

And when I when I see things like this, that 26 times you get this word proskuneo used in the Gospels. 21 times you get it used in Revelation. Because they were always bowing down before Jesus.

And here they're bowing down before Jesus. And here where we live, he's not here to bow down. And so you don't use that word anymore.

It's got connotations of place and connotations of physical bowing down before a physical presence. And it's all different now. We're not living in that kind of particular worship atmosphere.

Therefore, the whole tendency of the early church was to deal with worship as primarily inward and spiritual rather than outward and bodily and primarily pervasive rather than localized. God had to work very hard and he used some very drastic measures to get his people out of Jerusalem. It took the persecution of Stephen to get to jumpstart the Great Commission.

These rascals, they had heard him say, go disciple all the nations. And here they are having such successful church growth, you know, in Jerusalem, 3000, 5000. Why would you want to leave this place? You know, Bethlehem is a great place.

Why would anybody want to leave? Well, it's because God says to leave, go outside the camp. And God says, go make disciples up in Antioch and go make them in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Don't you get it? And they didn't get it.

I mean, he had to just spank Peter something awful to get him to go to Cornelius house. And he had to kill Stephen virtually to get a persecution so that they would drive him out and go preaching everywhere. God will do what it takes to get people scattered where he wants them scattered so that they get out of this temple routine.

Now, let's see some confirmations of this in the New Testament. I've developed a thesis here that that as you move from Old to New Testament, there's this radical intensification, internalization, de-localization of worship because of the absence of the word *proskuneo* from the epistles and because of what Jesus did with that word. Now, let's look what Paul does with other Old Testament worship language.

And what he does is remarkable. He does not treat it by and large as something you do in a service, but something you do in life and ministry. He takes all the Old Testament worship language and he turns it into Monday morning marketplace stuff, which is just astonishing.

You know, I'd say I'm a preacher. My livelihood depends on a church existing and services happening. And you go to the New Testament and services are no big deal.

They're just not the main thing. So let's take a few of these. *latruo* in Greek, the next most frequent word for worship in the Old Testament after *proskuneo* is the word *latruo* over 90 times, almost always translating the Hebrew *abad*, which is usually translated to serve, as in Exodus 23, 24, you shall not worship their gods or serve them.

Now, when Paul uses it, this *latruo* language, it's got noun forms and verb forms for Christian worship, he goes out of his way to make sure that we know he means not a localized or outward form for worship practice, but a non localized spiritual experience. In fact, he says he takes it so far as to treat virtually all of life as worship when he when lived in the right spirit. For example, in Romans 1 9, he says, I serve or worship.

It's that it's not the word for slave do low or do low. Oh, it's the word *Latruo*. I serve or worship God in my spirit.

That's very significant in the preaching of the gospel. So even when he says gospel preaching is worship service, he says, in my spirit, I do this. In other words, it wouldn't be real.

It wouldn't be worship if it were being done in my spirit as I preach the gospel. So I'm not worshiping on Sunday morning when I say things truly about God. If something's not going on inside here, spiritually,

morally, emotionally, in regard to the truths that I am announcing.

We'll get to more of that later. Philippians 3:3. Paul says that true Christians worship God in the spirit of God and put no confidence in the flesh. And Romans 12:1. Paul urges Christians to present your bodies as living, holy sacrifices.

This is worship language here. Offer a lamb, offer a dove. Acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

Present your bodies as living sacrifices. And when you do that, you become conformed to Christ and not to the world. Your mind is transformed and you prove what is the will of God, what is good, acceptable and perfect.

And that proving and doing is the presenting of your bodies in daily life as a spiritual act of worship. This is what's radical about Christianity. Christianity is not getting people to come to church seven or one day in seven.

Christianity is not mainly what we do here on Sunday morning. It is mainly what you do with your bodies and your mind seven days a week, all your waking hours and maybe even sleeping hours. I don't doubt that the real true saint who's saturated with God in the Bible has good worship dreams.

And we have other kinds, too, that we have to pray. God will sanctify it only. So Latruo is one example of that other language that Paul is.

Let's take a few more instances of worship language that gets de-institutionalized and made into daily life experience. The language of temple sacrifice, priestly service. The praise and thanks of lips is called a sacrifice to God.

Hebrews 13:15. So that's a wonderful thing when that's happening on Sunday morning and lips are praising God. That is an acceptable sacrifice to God.

And so we shouldn't belittle it or make anything small of it. But so are good works in everyday life called a sacrifice to God. The very next verse in Hebrews 13, Paul calls his own ministry a priestly service of worship.

And he calls the converts themselves acceptable offering in worship to God. Romans 15:16, Philippians 2:17. He even calls the money that the churches send him a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice to God.

And I put the words in worship there in Francis because that's the language here. This is the language of worship. So there were incenses and there were offerings of aroma.

And Philippians 4:18 says, when those Philippians in the hands of Epaphroditus sent Paul what he needed in Rome to meet his practical needs, he looked on that and he said, that is an act of worship. This smells to God like incense in a temple and is pleasing to him because they do it by his power and for his glory. The same thrust is seen in the imagery of the people of God, body of Christ, as the New Testament temple where spiritual sacrifices are offered.

First Peter 2:5 says that we are the temple and we offer spiritual sacrifices in our life together as a church. Where God dwells by his spirit, Ephesians 2:21, he dwells in the church, not a building, but in the people.

And where all the people seen as the holy priesthood are seen as the holy priesthood.

So the people are the priest, not me, John Piper, standing up, doing anything in particular. I don't become a priest to you in a unique way. I am a sheep with other sheep and I am a priest with other priests at that point.

I just happen to be gifted and called and positioned by the elders to do that kind of word ministry while you do other kinds of priestly ministry toward the body of Christ, I hope, during the week. You all should, that's why you have spiritual gifts. Second Corinthians 6, 16 shows that the new covenant hope of God's presence is being fulfilled even now in the church as people, as a people, not in any particular service.

So it says, we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, I will dwell in them and walk among them and I will be their God and they will be my people. So the church gathered is where God walks in a very, very precious way. Worship is being significantly deinstitutionalized, delocalized, de-externalized.

The whole thrust is being taken off of ceremony and seasons and places and forms and is being shifted to what is happening in the heart, not just on Sunday, but every day and all the time in all of life. Two other instances of this kind of language to show that all of life is being interpreted by Paul as worship. All of life to the glory of God.

This is what it means when we read, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. That's Paul's way of saying breakfast should be an act of worship. Orange juice drinking should be an act of worship.

Pizza hut eating should be an act of worship. There is no place. There is no meal.

There is no act that you should feel. Oh, good. I can I can kind of let down and not have to worry about thinking about God here.

It shouldn't feel like a relaxation. You should be at rest in God so that everything you do, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, it's all worship. That's a worship is is magnifying the glory of God.

Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the father. That's another way of saying it. Colossians 3:17.

This is the essence of worship to act in a way that reflects the glory of God, to do a thing in the name of Jesus with thanks to God and then singing and making melody to the Lord. Even when Paul calls us to be filled with the spirit, speaking to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the father. Even there, there's no reference to time or place or service.

In fact, is not the key word always. Where is it? Always. This is not just a service thing.

Sing as a family. Sing in the car. Sing.

Cutting the grass. Sing. Fixing the Thanksgiving meal.

Sing, sing, sing and sing to others. Sing in small groups and sing in worship services and sing. And it's very interesting here.

We'll get to this later, but I'll point it out as long as we're here. It says speaking to one another in Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. So songs are to be sung at least some of the time to one another.

But notice singing and making melody with all your heart to the Lord. So which is it, Paul, to one another or to the Lord? And I think Paul would say yes, as he so often does. That when our songs on Sunday morning are in the second person singular address to God, we should not try to bracket the presence of every other person in the room as though we don't want them to hear.

It's just me and God here. There's something wonderful about knowing that together they're saying it. I'm saying it.

We're saying it to God. And I'm hearing them and they're hearing me. And this conflagration of God wordness is enhanced by the togetherness.

Or many hymns are sung to each other. That would be an example. Our God is an awesome God.

Our God is an awesome God. I'm talking to you when I say that. Right.

Our. Our. Otherwise, I'd say you are an awesome God, which is OK, too.

So a lot of worship songs are you are awesome. And a lot of worship songs is he is awesome. And this text warrants both kinds of songs and shows that neither excludes the other.

But both ought to always include the other. So that if you're saying our God is an awesome God and you look into someone's eyes and your eyes meet and you both know what kind of awesome God you have and you love the electricity caused by your both saying it together. At that moment, you should also be feeling, thinking God word, God word, God word.

God's listening to this. God's enjoying this. This is for God's name's sake that we're saying this.

Always giving thanks for all things in the name of Jesus. This may, in fact, be what we should do in corporate worship service. But it is not Paul's burden to tell us that he doesn't mention anything about a service here.

His burden is to call for a radical inward authenticity of worship and an all encompassing pervasiveness of worship in all of life. Place and form are not of the essence. Spirit and truth are all important.

Two more overheads on this first section. Now, I said this was going to lead to showing you that this was in line with the reformed tradition. And I remember this is this particular unit right here is based on a lecture that I gave about five years ago in Chicago at the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology in Chicago.

And this is this is reformed types. These are Puritan types. These are Calvinists who get together and they love John Calvin.

And they were a little bit fidgety with what I was saying here about all this radical internalization and and boiling the essence of worship down to a being satisfied in God and a stripping away of form and order as part of the essence. So when I quoted this next quote that I'm going to give you from Calvin, they were stunned. They were stunned.

So I've got Calvin on my side. And if you got Calvin on your side in that particular setting, it helps in some settings. That means you're wrong if you've got Calvin on your side.

I don't know what what group I'm in here with all the folks. But let me read you what Calvin said. This is from the Institute's book for paragraph 10 and 30.

The master did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do because he foresaw that this depended on the state of the times. And he did not deem one form suitable for all ages. Because he has taught nothing specifically and because these things are not necessary to salvation and for the building of the church.

Ought to be for the building of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age. It will be fitting as the advantage of the church will require to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly for insufficient cause.

But love will best judge what may hurt or edify. And if we let love be our guide, all will be safe. Now, if you don't like John Calvin, maybe you'll like that one and and feel good.

So those who wonder whether you should use an organ or whether you should do all contemporary music or all hymns or whether you should have pews or chairs, whether you sit in a circle or sit back to back 30 rows deep or all these kinds of things preached for 30 minutes at the end or beginning in the middle or no preaching. What what is up for grabs here? And Calvin says love as it as it meditates upon God and his word will understand here. But there are some amazing statements in here.

He didn't prescribe in detail, taught nothing specifically. That's an amazing statement about church form and order, because these things are not necessary to salvation for the upbuilding. And then it'll be necessary and fitting to change and abrogate traditional practices.

And to establish new ones. Yeah, go ahead. I found that quote when I was preparing that lecture.

So I about five years ago. Yeah, I knew I was going to talk to. So I just I went fishing.

I didn't know I was in there. I didn't know Calvin said this. This really surprised me that he spoke in this much freedom about form.

And it surprised them, too. I had. It wasn't Anthony Herkimer.

I think he had already passed away by then. There was a major reformed theologian who came up to me and said, I really want to know where you got that. Because I had given the quote when I was preaching and just read it.

And so they were they were quite surprised by that quote. Now, I think that quote is fraught with danger because it might cause somebody to say, we do anything we want here. So you'll dance and run and jump and pick up our clothes.

Have a nice nudist worship service. That sort of thing is done. I hope the effect is to free missionaries and missy ologist to take very seriously the forms of the culture that they're in.

And insofar as they're not contradictory to or in any way harmful of the word of God and spirit and so on to adapt and adjust. Seems to me that's part of it. Here's Luther.

I would expect Luther to say this, you know, Luther. He just shoots from the hip and and says all kinds of crazy things and retracts them right and left. I like Luther.

The worship of God should be free at table, in private rooms, downstairs, upstairs, at home abroad, in all places, by all peoples, at all times. Whoever tells you anything else is lying as badly as the pope and the devil himself. Just standard Luther.

He's just great. So it is Calvin and Luther. We're just that it was Calvin Luther that those two men were the key players in the Reformation are like Jesus and John the Baptist.

You know, we tooted our horn and you would not dance. We played a dirge and you would not weep. John came fasting and eating grasshoppers and wearing a leather girdle.

And I came eating and drinking. You say he has a demon. You say I'm a glutton and a Hawaiian bibber.

What can you do? And I think he does the same over and over again. He brings he brings one kind of personality and he brings another kind of personality, puts the same gospel in both their mouths. And then when people reject both of them, you realize this is not a rejection based on a form.

This is a rejection based on substance. So I think the fact that there was a wild mouth Luther and a painfully careful, meticulous Calvin was no accident. The Puritans were the English heirs of the Reformation.

Now, I know the word Puritan in America is not a positive word in my ears. It's a positive word. You have to understand that I overcame my 11th grade English class and all of its prejudices.

And I, every time my sons take an English class or history class, I flop open their book down at South High. And what are they going to say about Jonathan Edwards and about Cotton Mather and about these Puritans? And they rarely say anything good. The last one I looked at was a little bit better because the Puritans, this country was built on the Puritan ethic.

And it still is there. Believe me, big time in this country, as as bent out of shape as it is. You do not build.

An IDS tower or a first bank building without something like a Puritan ethic that says you get here on time and you rivet your steel so that it stays. You lie about this. You're losing job because the building's coming down like they do in Turkey because there wasn't a Puritan ethic.

We the things that drive that that sustain a free market culture and it will not be sustained are a certain kind of ethic and trustworthiness, contract keeping, word keeping. And when that goes, the society will go. Well, just a little tooting horn to help you open your mind to the Puritans.

The Puritans carried through the simplification and freedom of worship in music and liturgy and architecture. Patrick Collinson summarizes the Puritan theory and practice of worship by saying this. The life of the Puritan was, in one sense, a continuous act of worship.

Pursued under an unremitting and lively sense of God's providential purposes and constantly refreshed by religious activity, personal, domestic and public. One of the reasons Puritans called their churches

meeting houses, they never called the building a church. Leith Anderson over at Wooddale will never call his building the church.

He's a real stickler on this. He's absolutely right to be a stickler on it. I'm not a stickler on it just because I'm such a chameleon in my culture.

I say, what's the use? You know, everybody calls this building the church. So I say to Barnabas, did you work at church today? You know, he's got a custodian job. I say that.

And I know that that's not the ideal. But, amen, Leith Anderson. Way to go.

Be a stickler. But the Puritans were sticklers on this. That's a meeting house.

We had a big hubbub ten years ago whether to call it a sanctuary or a worship center. And we put it to a kind of informal vote. And sanctuary just swept the field.

I had misgivings about calling it a sanctuary. It has all kinds of interesting connotations. You know, you can find a sanctuary there when you're running away from.

From the law or it's a safe place to be from the world and sanctity, holy place and worship center seemed and probably was trendy. Ten years ago, I don't know. People are still calling their places of worship worship centers now, but we will just keep calling it sanctuary, I suppose.

But the Puritans call that a meeting house. That was a meeting house. Worship may or may not happen in the meeting house.

And you can do other things in the meeting house. But it wasn't uniquely for worship and it didn't guarantee that worship would happen when you met there. OK, this is the last overhead on this first section.

Conclusion to point one on our outline. In the New Testament, there is a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship. And there is at the same time a radical intensification of worship as an inward spiritual experience that has no bounds and pervades all of life.

These emphases were recaptured in the Reformation and came to clear expression in the Puritan wing of the reformed tradition. Next question. What is the essence of that radical, authentic, inward experience called worship? And how is it that this experience comes to expression in gathered congregations and in everyday life? I think it probably would be good to take a stand up break here, maybe two or three minutes.

Because I'm at a real clear breaking point. So let's take two or three minutes and we'll be back here and try to get going on this second section. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, Pastor for Preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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