

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

CHAPTER 12

Worship and Service

The words worship and serve appear together in the same context 29 times in the NAS Bible: 26 times in the OT and 3 times in the NT. In 27 of these instances, the two words converge in reference to idols or false gods. For example, Moses warned Israel, *“Beware that your hearts are not deceived, and that you do not turn away and **serve** [ʿabad] other gods and **worship** [shachah] them”* (Deuteronomy 11:16 NAS).

In the remaining two instances, Jesus made an exception to this trend when He rebuked Satan in the wilderness.¹ Jesus said in both Matthew and Luke, *“It is written, ‘you [Satan] shall **worship** [proskuneo] the Lord your God and **serve** [latreuo] Him only.’”* While Jesus commands Satan to worship and serve God alone, the Bible does not make this association for humans.

As Jesus rebuked Satan, He most likely quoted from one of the following two passages in Deuteronomy. Notice how the NAS Bible translates ʿabad inconsistently; first as worship and then as serve.

*“You shall **fear** [yare'] only the Lord your God; and you shall **worship** [from ʿabad, which the NKJ, ESV, and NIV all render as **serve**] Him and swear by His name.”* (Deuteronomy 6:13 NAS)

¹ Matthew 4:10 NAS and Luke 4:8 NAS

*“You shall **fear** [yare'] the Lord your God; you shall **serve** [from `abad, which is the same Hebrew word used in Deut. 6:13 but translated here as **serve**] Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name.” (Deuteronomy 10:20 NAS)*

According to Brown, Driver, Briggs, and Gesenius Hebrew Lexicons, the word *yare'* means: to fear, terrify, be afraid of, stand in awe of, be awed, revere, honor, or respect. While *yare'* appears 382 times in the Bible, the NAS and others avoid translating it as worship. Though *yare'* indicates strong feelings of reverence, it lacks an expression that conveys those feeling through bowing or prostration.

Bow Down and Serve

Seven other times, the NAS renders the same two Hebrew words for worship (*shachah*) and serve (*`abad*) as “bow down” and “serve”. Again, all references refer to other gods, except in Genesis 27:29 when Isaac prays that people serve his son Jacob and nations bow to him. Psalm 72:11 refers to foreign kings bowing before King Solomon and nations serving him. In addition, Psalm 97:7 uses the word serve in reference to graven images while worship refers to other gods or angels [*'elohiym*] worshiping the Lord.

The pagan King Nebuchadnezzar blessed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because they *“yielded up their bodies so as not to **serve** [pelach] or **worship** [cegid] any god except their own God”*.² Pelach and cegid are Aramaic words used by Daniel in Babylon.

When it comes to our relationship with God, the Bible avoids associating worship and service together—except when addressing Satan or in reference to other gods. Both Old and New Testaments exclude this association concerning God and His people. Nonetheless, several contemporary versions of the Bible make this association in English.

² Daniel 3:28 NAS

Just as in praise, a wall of partition does not stand between worshipers and their service to God. A distinction remains however, for clarity's sake. While some acts of service may share overtones of reverence, most differ fundamentally from a deliberate response of worship. In fact, biblical descriptions of worship avoid emphasizing service as an expression thereof. Despite important benefits, works of service add neither merit nor substance to our worship.

In God's kingdom we are more than servants—we are fellow workers laboring at His side. As kings and priests, we bless others and benefit ourselves by co-laboring with Him.³ James points out indirectly that good works add utility or life to our faith. He asserts, “*faith apart from works is dead*”.⁴ According to the NAS, NIV, and ESV, faith apart from works is “*useless*”. Paul adds that spiritual leaders are God-given gifts sent to equip the saints for service, so they can build up the body of Christ.⁵

Stop before you Worship

Throughout the Bible, worshipers of God generally stopped whatever they were doing to worship Him. N. T. Wright puts it this way, “...when we turn from worship to work, we turn from thinking about God to thinking about ourselves.”⁶ Performance-based worship quickly becomes human-centered because it diverts the focus of our attention from God to self or to others.

Bowing is an ideal posture for saying little and doing nothing. With face on the floor, most functional activities cease. Lying prostrate does not facilitate voice projection, animating thoughts and feelings, or playing musical instruments. The downward motion of a bow deprives most

³ 1 Corinthians 3:9 NAS and NIV

⁴ James 2:20, 26 NAS

⁵ Ephesians 4:12 NAS

⁶ N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 14.

senses of their intended use. Seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling are suddenly restricted to the floor.

An awkward tension occurs when fixed in the prone position. Blood flow favors the head, which elevates sinus pressure. Bowing facedown, especially with knees bent, deprives legs of normal blood circulation. Upon standing, blood rushes from the head to replenish these oxygen-deprived extremities. This momentary brain drain may trigger an acute blackout, especially when standing abruptly.

Worship Warning

I learned this lesson the hard way. The morning of my daughter's college graduation, I spent time waiting on the Lord and worshiping Him. Kneeling on the floor in our hotel room, I bowed my head to the floor. Ten minutes later, I jumped up to check the time and immediately fainted. Smashing my nose against the doorframe, my face slid down the wall. Following a visit to the emergency room, I attended her graduation decorated in stitches and abrasions. The cost for this lesson was expensive but the memory was priceless.

Worshiping God in spirit and truth does not require a marathon effort, especially not one that endangers face and skull. Whether brief or prolonged, worshipers convey their response to God's immeasurable worth. They venerate Him through momentary bows and periods of sustained concentration.

Our Heavenly Father does not demand perfection in our methodology or in the duration of our effort and attention span. On the contrary, God wants us to appreciate His perfection and the attention that He pays to us. As worshipers become increasingly conscious of God's presence, focusing on His worth will become more natural—indeed unavoidable.

Strictly speaking, worship is more about what we stop doing rather than anything we do. Bowing facedown accommodates waiting not working. It facilitates listening, meditating, and contemplating rather

than serving. Because worshipers recognize God for who He is, they are quick to hear and slow to speak.⁷ Awestruck by His majesty, worshipers devote their attention to His presence with postures of considerate homage, honor, and respect.

Worshipers are not performers doing worship for God to watch. They worship God for His performance. They take a bow for who He is, rather than for what they might do. When our Heavenly Father connects with worshipers, His presence, performance, and promises spotlight center stage. Falling facedown, worshipers become God's audience. Instead of trying to enhance their own spiritual experience, they respond appropriately to the one who evokes extreme reverence.

Service Construed as Worship in the Old Testament

NAS translators construe service as worship six times in the Old Testament and six times in the New Testament.

Two hundred times NAS translators render the Hebrew word *`abad* (ä-văd') using variations of the word *serve*. Another 77 times, it translates this verb with words like labor, work, slave or enslave, bondage, perform, do, cultivate, and till. Of the twelve times that NAS translators render this word *worship*, only six refer to God, i.e., six out of 290 times. These six occasions appear in the chart below. In all six verses, translators for the NKJ use the word *serve* or *make sacrifice* instead of *worship*. In four of these verses, translators for the ESV use *serve* and twice, translators for the NIV use the word *serve*.

The Hebrew word, *`abad* derived its meaning from at least three Semitic roots. According to the "Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament", its old Aramaic root word means to do or make, its Arabic root however, means to worship and obey, and its intensive stem means to enslave or reduce to servitude.⁸ Gesenius' "Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon of

⁷ James 1:19

⁸ Harris, Archer, Waltke, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1980, p. 639.

the Old Testament” agrees with this etymology. Apparently, *`abad* acquired its notion of worship from Arabian rather than Aramaic influences.⁹

Old Testament Service Construed as Worship (6 references)			
Worshippers	Times	Association	NAS Verse
Moses	1	God told Moses to serve/worship on Sinai after the Exodus	Exo 3:12
Moses, Aaron and Israel	1	Pharaoh commanded Israel to go serve/worship after the Passover	Exo 12:31
Israel	1	God commands service/worship after they enter the Promised Land	Deu 6:13
Kings	1	Exhortation for kings to reverently serve/worship the Lord	Psa 2:11
Egyptians	1	After the Lord reveals Himself to Egypt, they will serve/worship with sacrifice and offering	Isa 19:21
Egyptians and Assyrians	1	Assyrians will come to Egypt on a highway to serve/worship	Isa 19:23

1. *And He [God, 'Elohiym] said, ‘Certainly I will be with you [Moses], and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall **worship** [from `abad, which NKJ and ESV render as serve] God at this mountain.” (Exodus 3:12 NAS)*
2. *Then he [Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, get out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel; and go, **worship** [from `abad, which NKJ and ESV render as serve] the LORD [Jehovah], as you have said. (Exodus 12:31 NAS)*
3. *“You shall fear only the LORD [Jehovah] your God ['Elohiym]; and you shall **worship** [from `abad, which NKJ, ESV, and NIV render as serve] Him and swear by His name. (Deuteronomy 6:13 NAS)*

⁹ Gesenius’ Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 598.

4. **Worship** [from `abad, which NKJ, ESV, and NIV render as serve] *the LORD [Jehovah] with reverence [yir'ah means fear (of the Lord), respect, reverence, piety] And rejoice with trembling.* (Psalm 2:11 NAS)
5. *Thus the LORD will make Himself known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day. They will even **worship** [from `abad, which NKJ renders as sacrifice] with sacrifice and offering, and will make a vow to the LORD and perform it.* (Isaiah 19:21 NAS)
6. *In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians will come into Egypt and the Egyptians into Assyria, and the Egyptians will **worship** [from `abad, which NKJ renders as serve] with the Assyrians.* (Isaiah 19:23 NAS)

New Testament Service Construed as Worship

Similar to the Hebrew word `abad, the NAS translates the Greek verb *latreuo* using variations of *serve* 18 times and *worship* 3 times, i.e., 3 out of 21 times. It renders the noun *latreia* as *service* 2 times, *divine worship* 2 times, and *service of worship* once.

New Testament Service and Worship (6 references)			
Worshippers	Times	Association	NAS Verse
True Circumcision	1	Service/worship performed in the Spirit of God rather than the flesh	Phil 3:3
Brethren in Rome	1	Become a living sacrifice— a spiritual service of worship	Rom 12:1
Old Covenant	1	Regulations of divine service/worship	Heb 9:1
Levites	1	Performing divine service/worship	Heb 9:6
Old Covenant	1	Inferiority of gifts and sacrifices offered for sin according to law	Heb 9:9
Old Covenant	1	Inferiority of animal sacrifices	Heb 10:2

In two cases, Bible translators introduce a nuance of worship into the Greek words, *latreuo* and *latreia*. In Philippians 3:3, the NAS extends the notion of service to worship by stating that we are the circumcision “*who **worship** [latreuo] in the Spirit of God and ... put no con-*

fidence in the flesh". The NIV and ESV use similar wording. Both say, "who worship by the Spirit of God". The NKJ renders Philippians 3:3, "who worship God in the Spirit".

In Romans 12:1, Paul urges his readers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, which NAS translators describe as their spiritual "service of worship". The phrase "service of worship" comes from one Greek noun, *latreia*, which translators normally render as "service" without association to worship. The ESV renders *latreia* as "spiritual worship". The NIV extends *latreia* into a "spiritual act of worship".

Latreia means, "Service rendered for hire; any service or ministrations" including "the service of God; the service and worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law" or "to perform sacred services".¹⁰

In Romans 12:1, the NAS combines the concept of service with worship by describing our sacrifice as a "spiritual service of worship." The word "spiritual" here comes from the Greek word *logikos*, which means: "pertaining to speech or speaking; pertaining to the reason or logic; pertaining to the soul or spiritual, agreeable to reason, following reason, reasonable, logical."¹¹

The New Testament uses *logikos* in one other place, 1 Peter 2:2. Both NAS and NKJ translators render it "word", i.e., the "pure milk of the word". The NIV and ESV translators render it "spiritual", i.e., "pure spiritual milk". Without any association to worship, the NKJ translators render Romans 12:1 most literally as "reasonable [logikos] service [latreia]".

Divine Therapy

During the first century, Paul encountered a "very religious" culture in Athens.¹² Uninformed Athenians served various deities, including a

¹⁰ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek>. (5-5-08)

¹¹ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek>. (9-10-12)

¹² Acts 17:22 NAS

God whom they did not know. In an attempt to educate them, Paul specified various supernatural attributes and activities associated with this God. His message, recorded by Luke the physician, includes a medical term—*therapeuo*. Paul said,

*“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; **nor is He served** [therapeuo] by human hands, **as though He needed anything**, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things (Acts 17:24-25 NAS)*

Forty-two times, translators for the NAS render the Greek word *therapeuo* as “healed” or “cured”. In this case, however, the NAS along with the ESV and NIV translate it as “served”. Curiously enough, the NKJ renders this word “worshiped”. Contemporary versions of the Bible render *therapeuo* as service and/or worship.

In English, *therapeuo* literally means therapy, as if God was broken and needed a therapist to fix Him.

Two philosophies influenced Greece during this time. Epicurean philosophers were especially sensitive to and discriminating in sensual pleasures.¹³ Stoic philosophers on the other hand, believed that a wise person was free from any passion, unmoved by joy or grief, and submissive to natural law.¹⁴

Speaking to both philosophical extremes, Paul said,

*“For while I was passing through and examining the **objects of your worship** [from *sebasma*, which means religiously honored objects], I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘**TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.**’ Therefore what you **worship** [from *eusebeo*, which means to act with piety, dutiful regard, and reverence] **in ignorance**, this I proclaim to you. (Acts 17:23 NAS)*

¹³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

¹⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

Pleasure seeking Epicureans may have rejected this God since He does not manifest Himself according to their audiovisual expectations. Sporting a silent voice and invisible features, this “*Unknown God*” deprives them of a sensory connection. Being exclusive and restrictive, He refuses to behave like one of them.

On the other hand, Stoic thought leaders might dismiss Paul’s God because He comes across with too much ambition. Based on their inclination for resigned passivity, His extravagant power and extreme holiness are symptomatic of a passion-pathology. After diagnosing God with an acute deity disorder, they would prescribe religious treatments to rehabilitate His image. Ignorant practitioners from each camp would refer the Author of Life for therapy (*therapeuo*) to adjust His deviant behavior.

Paul said it best: “*Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man*”.¹⁵ By committing God to a religious institution, prominent philosophers pervert His profile with selective propaganda.

God does not need our Help

“So to whom will you compare me [God], the Incomparable? Can you picture me without reducing me?” (Isaiah 46:5 MSG)

When humanistic philosophers underestimate God, they soon domesticate Him into discrete chunks of marble. In a city noted for being “*full of idols*”, Paul proclaimed the truth about the living God.¹⁶ While artisans devised false images, Paul introduced the Creator of the universe. Isaiah emphasized this point when he prophesied,

“People with a lot of money hire craftsmen to make them gods. The artisan delivers the god, and they kneel and worship it!” (Isaiah 46:6 MSG)

¹⁵ Romans 1:22-23 NAS

¹⁶ Acts 17:16 NAS

Speaking at the Areopagus in Athens, Paul clarified reality for an un-informed school of classical thinkers. He proclaimed the truth about God where ancient civilizations memorialized false deities. Named after the respective Greek and Roman god of war, the word Areopagus literally means Ares Hill or Mars Hill.¹⁷

While the Lord of heaven and earth supplied life and breath to all, Athenian scholars contrived alternative deities to suit their fancy. They framed a pantheon of religious substitutes using intricate props and pious service. By performing sacred rituals, scholars and patrons alike shaped the gods they preferred to serve.

No amount of chiseling by a religious system, ancient or modern, has ever changed God. Paul makes a clear distinction between His divine nature and the fabricated impostors concocted by intellectual sculptors. He said,

*Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an **image formed by the art and thought of man.*** (Acts 17:29 NAS)

Greek and Roman storytellers describe their gods and goddesses as if they were enhanced mortals. In an assortment of perverse tales, they developed mythologies after their own twisted bent. Instead of recognizing how God made men and women in His own image, they pollute the world with legendary impostors. With rampant violence and lush immorality, their mythological traditions betray a tragedy of misrepresentation.

Even today, fable builders invent systems of religion to control their gods and to manipulate the people who serve them. Purporting to be expressions of worship, they offer pious devotion and religious routines. When the truth about God becomes evident, pretentious philosophers will find themselves facedown with the rest of us, in an unassuming posture of reverence.

¹⁷ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ares> (2-20-08)

Regulations for Temple Service

[To the Israelites] *...belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of **the Law** and **the temple service** [latreia] and the promises,* (Romans 9:4 NAS)

Temple service retains an association with worship because some Bible translators intermittently render the Greek word *latreia* as worship. Based on this selective translation, priestly service along with atoning sacrifices and required offerings becomes a form of worship. When translators render *latreia* as worship they are referring to activities performed by priests according to Old Testament regulations.

*Now even the first covenant had **regulations of divine worship** [latreia] and the earthly sanctuary.”* (Hebrews 9:1 NAS)

*Now when these things [the fixtures and furnishings within the sanctuary] have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle, **performing the divine worship** [latreia, which the NIV renders as “to carry on their ministry”],* (Hebrews 9:6 NAS)

*...both **gifts and sacrifices** are offered which cannot make the **worshiper** [latreuo] perfect in conscience,* (Hebrews 9:9 NAS)

*Otherwise, would they [**animal sacrifices**] not have ceased to be offered, because the **worshipers** [latreuo], having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?* (Hebrews 10:2 NAS)

Performing priestly duties based on “*first covenant*” regulations corresponds to a cause and effect system of religion. Slaying sacrifices and giving gifts accrued rewards and benefits, not to God, but to the supplicants and to the priests. They did religion for personal gain not to convey reverence to God.

Converting religious service into gestures of worship deviates from the standard set by heavenly worshipers. Performing an obligatory religious service on earth does not correspond with the voluntary response

of reverent homage offered by individuals and groups throughout the Bible.

The Pharisees and Sadducees produced a hybrid system of religion based on legalistic traditions. Jesus rebuked them by saying, “*But in vain do they **worship** [sebomai] me, **teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.***”¹⁸ Translated elsewhere as “devout” or “God-fearing”, *sebomai* means to venerate or revere. From its primitive root *sebas*, it conveys the notion of fear, which merges with reverence or holding in awe.¹⁹

This open rebuke by Jesus draws upon a prophetic reprimand conveyed by Isaiah.

*Then the Lord said, "Because this people **draw near with their words** And **honor** [kabad] Me with their **lip service**, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their **reverence** [yir'ah] for Me **consists of tradition learned by rote**, (Isaiah 29:13 NAS)*

The Hebrew word *yir'ah* means awesome respect, reverence, piety, fear, or terror. Jesus criticized Israel's religious leaders who drew near to God with words and deeds void of heartfelt reverence and respect. Stretching any religious activity into worship institutionalizes it with formalities. It customizes it, often for good reason, for personal convenience and optimizes it for corporate benefit. Service oriented worship emphasizes performance, based on traditions, sanctioned at designated sites, according to approved conventions. Organizing corporate gatherings for convenience and benefit may be practical and beneficial, but it does not reflect gestures of worship described throughout the Bible.

Legal Worship

Jewish leaders in Corinth accused Paul of persuading others to “**worship** [sebomai] **God contrary to the law**”.²⁰ The first covenant stipulated

¹⁸ Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:7 NAS

¹⁹ Orr, James, General Editor, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1915.
<http://www.studylight.org/enc/isb/view.cgi?number=T9240> (accessed 8-9-2007)

²⁰ Acts 18:13 NAS

*“regulations of divine worship [latreia]”, or per NKJ translators, “ordinances of divine service.”*²¹ Both Jewish and Roman law governed worshipers and their religious activity during the first century. The Jews brought Paul before a Roman proconsul to litigate his case in Corinth. They sought adjudication from a secular authority involving a religious infraction.

Throughout history, governing authorities have tried to regulate where, when, how, and whom people ought to worship and serve God. Violating an established ordinance meant punitive action because how individuals and groups worshiped and served God reflected what they believed. Deviating from an approved, orthodox protocol earned perceived heretics a formal sentence of discipline, excommunication, prison, torture, and sometimes death.

Obsolete Models of Worship

The glory of God no longer dwells behind a fabric veil in the Holy of Holies. His presence does not occupy a piece of furniture perched between two cherubim statues. The Holy Spirit lives within redeemed followers of Christ. Strict mosaic laws, which governed substitutionary sacrifices and obligatory offerings, no longer apply. Jesus satisfied the justice system of heaven by offering His righteous blood on the cross. He paid our debt with arguably the most expensive commodity in the universe. Worshiping our Heavenly Father in spirit and truth now replaces symbolic ceremonies and pre-cross rituals.

The law served as a tutor, demonstrating our inability to fulfill it and thus, our need for Christ. It satisfied an important purpose of the Levitical system by escorting us to Jesus. He is the Lamb of God—His blood takes away the sin of the world.²² Handcrafted props and surrogate priesthoods are no longer necessary. Jesus fulfilled the entire law once

²¹ Hebrews 9:1 NAS

²² John 1:29

for all. Legal codes no longer dictate a compulsory response because Jesus liberated us to worship our Heavenly Father from the inside out.

True worshipers no longer need to conform to fastidious formulas with punctilious rules. They have no need to exercise extreme care in religious etiquette. Their worship is all about relational reverence, not ceremonial conventions. Freedom in Christ accommodates responsive reality without legalistic platitudes or hyper-pious paraphernalia. Our Heavenly Father is seeking worshipers not performers in a law and order script. If the knowledge of the truth about Christ does not evoke a radical response of worship then a personal relationship with Him certainly will.

Specific garments, ointments, incense, prayers, songs, confessions, or gestures may be helpful but are no longer mandatory when connecting with God. Though useful at times, there is no need to approach Him through a standardized sequence, e.g., first with thanksgiving, progressing into praise, and then entering a more spiritual realm of worship. While attitudes of love and gratitude are extremely important, neither sentiment is required to fulfill the primary objective of a worshiper. Knowing the truth about God inspires sufficient awe to justify an extreme response of facedown reverence.

