

# Reformed Worship: A Theology of Worship

## Lesson 3: We Are Being Shaped

**Intro** — What happens when we worship? We're being shaped.

When we practice worship (no matter what the object of that worship may be) we're being shaped—both by the act of worship itself (because habits shape us) and by the thing we're worshipping (because love shapes us). Thus, worship is character-forming; it both reveals and forms our identity as persons.

So we need to recognize how often we've been shaped by the wrong kind of worship, which has formed the wrong kinds of loves and desires, and set a course to correct it. And true, sincere, reverent Christian corporate worship is the place to do just that.

### Chapter 3

I. **We Become Like What We Worship** (cf. GK Beale, *We Become What We Worship, A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*).

- A. It's scary when you consider that there's so much in the world that clamors for our attention and bids us to come and worship.
  1. There's the entertainment culture, which says we need to be occupied and amused every minute of the day—*this* is the good life.
  2. There's the fashion world, which says how you look and dress is ultimate—*this* is the good life.
  3. There's the business world, which tells you that work and money and success and power and influence are all that matter—*this* is the good life.
  4. There's the consumerist culture, which tells you that you need everything, the best, the latest and greatest—*this* is the good life.
- B. And then we start to worship these things. We set our hearts on them; we order our lives around them; we live for them; we work hard to acquire and live *the good life*. And this creates a vicious cycle: the more we order our lives around the things we want, the more we form habits related to that thing, and when these habits take control, the more we crave it.
- C. Thus, we will be changed and transformed and shaped into whatever it is that we find to be of the utmost importance in this life. Our ultimate desire, our vision of the good life, is what shapes us. Whether it's fame, sex and pleasure, family, health, acceptance, or whatever else, if we worship it we will become like it, Ps 135.15-18
  1. In this text the Lord condemns all the idolatrous worship of the nations by basically making one argument: it's foolish (cf. Isa 44.9-20). Why would you worship something you made, submit to something you have ultimate authority over? Why worship and bow down to something that can't speak, hear, or help (Rom 1.25).
  2. Do you want to become deaf, blind, mute, and lame like a piece of wood or stone? Then don't worship such things, because that's exactly what happens, Isa 42.18-20; Ps 135.18. *This is what worship invariably and unavoidably does!* It takes what we love and trains us into how to love it more—by becoming like it, by imitating it (“Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.” “Imitation is the most acceptable part of worship.”). It both reflects what matters to us (our idol) and shapes what matters to us (that we become like it).
- D. Consider two instances in Scripture where we're given contrasting examples of how this plays out.
  1. Ex 32-34—notice how both the Lord and Moses speak of the Israelites in terms fitting for untrained and stubborn cattle when they were worshipping a golden calf, 32.8-9;

32.25-26. They had become like what they worshipped. Conversely, when Moses came down from the mountain with the Law, where he had been worshipping God, he came out of His presence like Him, Ex 34.29. So while the Israelites have become like the calf, Moses has become like God. Both of them were shaped by what they worshipped.

2. Isa 6.5-7—Isaiah’s worship of God resulted in him becoming like God—holy, cleansed of his sin. So while we see a people called out for being deformed by their worship of idols (vv.8-10), Isaiah is graciously conformed to mirror God’s holiness.
3. Thus, we become like what we worship—for good or for bad. Beale: “what people revere they resemble, either for their ruin or their restoration.”

## II. The Power of Liturgy

A. It’s important to recognize that the way a liturgy is shaped will determine how we’re shaped. Worship is a very formative thing. So the question to ask is: *Is the worship we participate in on a regular basis—the worship we habituate—forming us in right ways, for right reasons, into the right people?*

### B. Cultural Liturgies

1. Our world is full of secular or cultural liturgies—orders of worship that are training us to yearn for a certain form of the good life. Everywhere we turn we are confronted with liturgies that are shaping us at an unconscious level: the mall, the university, the stadium, etc. (cf. *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith)
2. Take the mall for an example. It preaches to us the reality of our sin: we don’t have enough; we need the newest and best thing. Learning this makes us broken. But then it presents us with a gospel as well: we can have the newest and best if we’ll just come to the mall and shop. There is the hope of redemption through consumption. So we present our offerings (our merchandise) at the altar (our cart) and the priest (the cashier) gratefully accepts them and send us off with an assurance of pardon, a benediction, and a reminder to come and worship again soon. But... because what we’re worshipping is worthless (not worth the worship) and lifeless (unable ever to lead us to and give us the good life), we’re left empty and unsatisfied. —The same is true even if our mall shopping is done online through Amazon. The same shaping liturgy is present and trying to train and transform us. And the real danger is that liturgies shape us almost entirely at an unconscious level. Without thinking about it, we given in to what the world tells us is ultimate, is happiness, and is necessary for the good life.

## III. A Liturgy for the (Real) Good Life

- A. As Christians, however, we know exactly what the good life is, Ps 1. And yet, there’s a conflict in our lives every week, in almost everything we do, a conflict between worship/idolatry (what the world trains us for) and Worship (what the church is to train us for).
- B. Cranmer said, “What the heart loves, the will chooses, and then the mind justifies.” This is a profoundly insightful—and yet terrifying—statement. It basically says we do what we love, and our brains will catch up later. Our love drives our will and our mind plays catch up. (Just think of how you rationalize and justify sin in your mind once you’ve set your heart on it!)
  1. It’s great to be led by our loves if our heart loves the right things. But what if we’re in love with sinful lusts and passions or ideals of the good life that are ultimately unsatisfying? We need to be retrained. *And this is part of what Lord’s Day worship is all about!!*
- C. Think of it this way. All week long the world tells us what matters most and what we should want. No matter how hard you try (even if you threw all your screens and social media apps in the trash!), you can’t escape it. We’re all swimming in the world’s liturgies everyday.
  1. BUT... Lord’s Day worship is the time when we’re being retrained. Sunday worship is the time when we’re told and trained for the *real* good life. It sets our thinking straight. It reorients our hearts on God, the chief good and only giver of the good life. So that as it

instructs our minds in God, it woos our hearts to love God, and calls upon our wills to pursue God.

2. Now if we decide for ourselves what our worship services should look like, what will happen? They'll inevitably resemble the world, because that's what we're faced with and drinking all week long. That's how the church becomes worldly. Its liturgy gets ordered by a world-trained people whose week-long worship of the world never gets corrected by Worship. And soon the church becomes as deaf, mute, and blind as their idols and the Word of God is squeezed out of the liturgy.
3. It's critical, then, that our Lord's Day worship be shaped by Scripture so that it can shape us into the people we were meant to be. Smith: "Christian worship needs to be intentionally liturgical, formative, and pedagogical [instructive] in order to *counter* [the world's] misinformation and misdirections. While the practices of Christian worship are best understood as the restoration of an original, creational desire for God, practically speaking, Christian worship functions as a counter-formation to the mis-formation of secular liturgies into which we are 'thrown' from an early age...Christian liturgy [Worship] functions as a counter-formation."
  - a) We can't just think our way out of bad habits. If that were true, we'd leave every Sunday an entirely changed people. Because we're not primarily thinking things, but wanting and loving things, we need more than a sermon to shape us; we need a liturgy, we need worship.
  - b) In worship we are reoriented, reformed, reshaped, refined, remade. H. O. Old: "Worship is the workshop where we are transformed into [God's] image." We come to worship in order to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, Rom 13.14, and be transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord, 2Cor 3.18.
    - (1) Even if we can't see the results immediately (like a trip to the gym), our habitual exercise of worship is changing us. We're losing the weight of sin, being toned and sharpened in our understanding of the gospel, and receiving endurance to run the race. Corporate worship is where we are being conformed to maturity, Eph 4.13

#### IV. From Dust to Glory

- A. This is what we're pursuing in our worship services: a liturgy that's rooted in God's story of redemption, because it will simultaneously *form* within us a desire for the true good life and *conform* us to attain it.
  1. It must be a liturgy rooted in the gospel that trains us how to live the gospel-shaped life.
  2. And it must guide us in habits that bring us to know Jesus more intimately so that we can live for Him more imitatingly, because whatever fills our Sundays fills our hearts throughout the week.

Do our services shape us to be like the Creator or the creation?  
Are we being fashioned on the Lord's Day for heaven or earth?  
Do we walk away from worship looking more like dust or glory?

DPW I.A.4.  
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