
Worldview and worship essay

The overstatement of grace. We live in a world and time where people can get away with evil. What used to be shocking is now of entertainment value; what used to be evil and harmful must in some cases be tolerated, and tolerance is a must these days. We see in the media how an innocent word or comment can offend certain people groups when taken out of context; we see how everybody seems to be making an effort to be nice in the name of political correctness. People learn that it's not just right to offend anyone, and it's not a good feeling to be offended. This as well, has an effect on the way people worship God. People will find it easy and right to love and worship a God who is gracious and merciful to them: a God who does not offend with moral standards and a God who is nice to sinners. And when there is an unbalanced focus on God's grace, many find it hard to reconcile how a benevolent God can send people to hell. A gracious and kind God is easy to worship, easy to love, and easy to take in. He is people-friendly and inoffensive. This is also a kind of idolatry since it causes people to create a false image of God in their minds: a God that they want for themselves. When the songs speak of the comfort, forgiveness, and unconditional love of God, people tend to be more engaged in singing than when songs speak of His sovereignty, justice, and holiness. It is also easy to worship Him when things are going well, but He still is worthy of worship when He withholds something or allows suffering to come for growth. He is worthy of worship even when we feel the pains of His discipline because of our sin. The problem with the overstatement of grace is that it is a contradiction to the very nature of grace. Michael McClymond puts it perfectly when he says, "the effort to extend grace to all persons ends up undermining grace to any persons." The culture of living for the here and now. Thrill seekers know the acronym "YOLO" (You only live once) very well, and many make it a slogan to live by. Life should be lived with passion, and because time progresses quickly, it's important to enjoy and not miss life's precious moments.

However, it is dangerous to be focused only on the present and not have an eternal perspective. God placed eternity in the hearts of men; there is a natural longing for the idea of forever, that there has to be more to life and even after it. Sadly, people can be so caught in either the excitement of the good things going on in their life that they no longer look forward to an unimaginably better life in heaven. On the other extreme, people can feel stuck in a moment of despair or depression that there is no longer any hope for tomorrow. Both extremes will affect worship because it can drive a person adopt a naturalist worldview. For a naturalist, life is focused only on the present, only on the natural. Though many church-going people will profess to be believers, the sad truth is that these same people may be living like naturalists. Modern times have taught people to enjoy the conveniences of the world that has been brought by advances in science and technology. If unguarded, this can lead to a lack of need for God. In the same way, the hardships and evil in this present age may also cause a person to question

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the existence of God. Who needs God when everything is at your reach? How can one look forward to heaven when this world is made more and more appealing and comfortable? How can you say God is real when there is so much evil and suffering in the world? It is scary how the times have shown how Christians turn to atheists just because of not having an eternal perspective. In Albert Mohler's discussion about the natural mind, he uses Charles three conditions of belief: from an age where disbelief in God was impossible, to an age where there is a possibility of disbelief, to an age where there is an impossibility of belief.

We seem to be living in the third condition, and for the worship ministry, it will always be a challenge how to move people to worship when there is a threat of unbelief. The culture of consumerism. As the worship of self has increased through the recent past, so has the culture of consumerism. In an attempt to be relevant and improve attendance, churches may tend to undergo changes and these changes are seen in the way worship is done in church. To maximize the worship experience -- many churches think of what people want, treating the congregation as consumers with particular interests in the goods they offer. Some churches have adapted changes to the way of doing worship in the Sunday service. Now, lights, stage design, choreography, and many other gimmicks are part of planning and executing a worship experience, all aimed to appeal to the interests of the congregation and people they are trying to reach. This has also led people to look at church as a store, and the decision on which church to attend and commit can be based on where they can get the best "deals." Which church is more attractive, livelier, has more programs, and has better looking staff? And with these things in people's minds, it can be possible for churches to act like competing stores in the same mall. Because of their number and influence, mega churches lead in setting standards for stage design and presentation. Sunday services as seen in videos look more and more like concerts and dance clubs rather than a church. Churches used to be a place for family and people of all ages and backgrounds. But who can see that with all the dim lights and fantastic light shows? Nowadays people seem to judge the success of a worship experience based on the audience appeal and the use of modern technology to enhance the experience. I believe that churches can and must do their best in offering the best worship to the Most High God, whether with the use of musical instruments, lights, dance, etc. But there must be caution in using these things to ensure that they do not take the attention away from the main point of worship: giving God the glory. In the end, what leaves the most impact to the congregation? Is it an encounter with God's character or the truth of His word? Or is the congregation left in awe of all the technical presentation? Aside from flawed cultural worldviews, problems on dualism also challenge the worship ministry.

There is a strong divide between the secular and sacred among some people in the church. Christian or secular songs? Some churches strongly encourage its members to listen only to Christian music because secular music can contaminate minds with their ungodly and suggestive lyrics. However, there is also no denying that some secular songs have clean, well

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written lyrics and catchy melodies. And the problem arises when Christian artists use a secular song, "wash" its secular lyrics, and replace the words to contain a Christian message. Some examples of these are Coldplay's Fix You and Ed Sheeran's Perfect. Both are massive hits from widely popular, secular artists. Christian artists seem to ride on the popularity of these hits, so they modify the lyrics and use them to spread a gospel message. These and some others can be easily accessed through Youtube. Young Christians in the church see this as a safe pick for songs and they feel less guilty for it even though these songs clearly come from secular origin. I believe the church must teach members to apply wisdom in choosing good music, not based on the labels "Christian or secular", but on qualities they can use to evaluate the music or the artist. Christian artists also must put more effort in creating original material. After all, as image-bearers of God, they are supposed to reflect originality, creativity, and excellence in creating music or writing lyrics. Christian or secular musicians? Like the issue mentioned above, some people interested in developing their musical skills and techniques for serving in the worship ministry also have an uneasy feeling learning from secular musicians.

The church must try to correct this by teaching that skills are just what they are and that God can use anyone to teach us. As long as people do not imitate a person's wrong lifestyle or share in their wrong beliefs, there should be no problem in having secular musicians as indirect mentors for aspiring worship ministers. Spiritual or emotional/physical wellbeing? God did not create robots; man was designed to respond to situations in life with the aid of emotions. Worship ministers or worshipers are not shielded from tragedy, hardships, pruning, discipline, and pain. And sometimes when they grieve because of a certain situation they go through in life, people can be so quick to judge that they can't minister by singing or playing their instrument because they might "contaminate" the atmosphere. While it is true that ministers should be careful and responsible with the way they conduct themselves and handle their emotions, it is also important that the church is made aware that emotions are from God and can be used ultimately in worship. We can worship God in our grief, disappointment, pain, failure, as much as we can in joy, triumph, hope, and expectation. There is no need to deny the reality of a person's emotions. God must be worshiped and is worthy of worship no matter what status our hearts are in. There should be transparency before God during worship and people must not act as if God is only after the condition of our spirit. We must worship Him with our whole being (Matthew 22:37). Spirit or skill? Some churches can go to the extreme of relying too much on the work of the Holy Spirit in order to have an anointed worship. However, the development of skill is equally important and is part of good stewardship as a worship minister. In fact, over-spiritualizing things and viewing skill as non-spiritual can make musicians lazy and irresponsible with their gift.

The worship ministry must present a balanced view of these two aspects when serving in the church. The Christian Worldview and the Worship Ministry The worship ministers are on the church's frontlines not only because they are among the first people the congregation and

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attendees see, but also because a significant amount of people's first knowledge about the God they worship will come from the theology found in the lyrics of the songs they sing. It is more likely that people will remember a line from a song from the lineup rather than a point from a preaching outline. Visitors who are from a different faith or who hold no profession of faith will most likely be engaged in music first rather than in preaching. Our pastor says that worship must bring people to a conviction of their need for God and salvation. It must be more than just having catchy tunes or an "engaged audience." Through careful study and selection of songs, the worship ministry can be indirect teachers of the Christian worldview. Through music, the congregation learns the story of creation, fall, and redemption. There should be careful screening of song themes, so we can avoid merely "expressive and emotional" worship. Though church songs have a wide variety of themes, songs selected in the weekly lineup must have themes that reflect the creation story, the greatness and omnipotence of our Creator God, the need for a Savior as a result of the fall, a heart that expresses repentance from sin, and the exaltation of the redeeming God and a declaration of His works.

In an article that contains insights from worship leaders, one author summarized his thoughts about the focus of worship: the precedence of God's revelation and redemption, the people's retention of the revelation, God's character and work that compels people to worship, and love and obedience as the appropriate responses. With this in mind, the worship ministry must have not only knowledge of the Christian worldview, but an accurate understanding of it. Every lyric sung on stage and flashed on the screen is a direct expression of what we believe at our core as individual Christians and as a church. A song with a wrong theology may have a negative impact in the way people see the reality of God, life, and the world. The word of God says that true worshipers worship the Father in Spirit and in truth. With emphasis on worshiping in truth, it is the ministry's responsibility to lead people to worship God based on who He is and what He reveals about Himself in His word.

With the church's call to make disciples, it is important that every opportunity ministers get to be on stage must be done carefully to bring people to an understanding of God and the world. As people's beliefs will constantly be shaped by stories, the church must also be wise in using stories that will draw people to an understanding of God so they can worship Him right. The Psalms of the Bible are not just a lovely poetry section but many of them recount stories of people and of a nation. They also contain many examples of God as a Creator, Savior, and Redeemer, and having songs that are taken from the Bible may help in leading people back to a more God-focused worship. As Christians, we also have a story to tell, and that is the gospel -- God's story. Songs must be carefully planned and arranged in a lineup in order to strategically tell God's story. The church must teach its people to be encouraged in a song not because of the feeling they get from it but because of the truth it reveals about God's character and the great things He has done.

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The worship ministry has a great platform for evangelism and discipleship. But this can be especially effective when their principles and perspectives are grounded on the proper understanding of who God is and how He relates to the world. I believe that churches must either revolutionize or revisit their views on worship and so they can be partners with God in His work of redemption.

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