Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts

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UNCEASING WORSHIP

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON WORSHIP AND THE ARTS

HAROLD M. BEST

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Christ the Savior has come. He has done a work that no one else could ever do. Having come to us from the eternities, he comes again and again, yet he abides in us forever. "It is finished" runs through the fullness of the comings of Christ. Our outpouring need no longer be wasted in lostness. In him alone our new work begins and embraces the whole of our living. In Christ, *imago Dei* comes home. The prodigal son returns from pouring himself out among the swine and the husks, again and again, to the waiting Father. Continuous outpouring, of which the Savior is Author and Finisher, is made pure and is made ours.

Authentic worship can only be in Christ. It is not driven by a liturgy or a call to worship, a change in style or a methodology. Redemption does not signal the beginning of worship. Instead, it marks its once-for-all cleansing. It is washed in the blood of the Lamb and turned into a following after of the example of Christ and into continued deliverance from the intrusions of fallen worship. Our redemption and our worship are henceforth one with the other. Our entirety, not just a narrowed spiritual corridor or mere churchgoing and ministry, is swept up in newly complete living. Work becomes worship, just as worship becomes duty and delight. Eden is not just restored; it is surpassed, for in his redemptive outpouring, God gave us the
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supreme gift of Christ-in-us-in-Christ. Our salvation comprises a new-
found continuous outpouring of everything that we are and can become in
light of all that Christ was, is and shall be—always the same, always new,
yesterday, today and forever.

In this chapter I want to emphasize the importance of continuousness,
saying once more that continuous worship and continuous outpouring
are synonymous. As important as it was to make inquiry into unfallen
worship in chapter one and the creational linkage between God and im-
age of God, we must now apply our thinking and our biblical knowledge
to our present sojourn. This means revisiting what we already know and
praying that we will stop narrowing it down to a few handy tools. So we
begin at the roots with the irreplaceable triad of faith, hope and love. Au-
thentic outpouring and continuous worship are grounded in these as in
nothing else.

FAITH AND AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Living by faith means worshiping by faith, and worshiping by faith means
living by faith. The two are a seamless continuum. We do not begin by faith
and then, at some point of maturity, move to something higher and more
effectual. Faith is its own steppingstone unto even more faith, even as con-
tinuous outpouring leads to increased outpouring.

We worship by faith. Worship is no more started up because we have
pushed the faith button than our faith is started because we have pushed
the worship button. Saving faith is not a different kind of faith than con-
tinuing faith. We do not step into or out of faith, nor do we step into or out
of worship. Therefore, continual worship is not of a different substance
than worship that takes place at a set time and in a certain place. The faith
by which we live and the faithfulness of God cannot be separated. Our
trust is in his trustworthiness and cannot survive on anything of our own
manufacture. Karl Barth says it this way:

Only faith survives; faith which is not a work, not even a negative
work; not an achievement, not even the achievement of humility.
... Faith is the ground, the new order, the light... Faith is not
... an atmosphere which [men] can breathe; not a system under
which they can arrange their lives. . . . There is nothing but God Himself, God only.¹

It is important to understand the way faith, as defined in Hebrews 11:1, is coupled to Genesis 15:6. In the latter passage, we read how righteousness was accounted to Abraham because he believed God without doing one thing to start his believing. In the Hebrews passage, it is not the doing of something that is central. The verb is becomes pivotal: faith is substance and evidence. Faith needs nothing outside itself to substantiate it. Faith does not bring substance and evidence to something; faith is itself substance and evidence, even in the absence of the very things for which faith hopes. This difference between being evidence itself and bringing evidence to something cannot be overlooked. It goes to the heart of authentic worship. Forgetting this difference may indicate the beginnings of false sacramentalism, then legalism and finally idolatry.

If I am a carpenter framing out a house, as a Christian I will certainly want this work to glorify God. I will have every obligation to say that I pour my carpentry over the feet of Jesus as sweet perfume. But if I assume that faith brings a special substance or evidence to the work itself (that is, if I say that the stuff that constitutes the framing—the wood, the nails, the chalk lines, the cuts, the angles, the eventual wholeness—has become inherently special because I have put it together by faith), then I am ever so subtly slipping into darkened territory. I may even slip further by believing that calling my work worship changes me, instead of believing that because I have been radically changed, my work is worship. The danger is that substance and evidence begin to grow out of my work instead of remaining the property of faith alone. If I am not careful, I will slip even further by waiting for or depending on the work to make my faith effectual—God is nearer when I am carpentering than when I am not. This by no means implies that I cannot feel good (or bad) about my work or that I am not built up and confirmed by work well done. Rather, it means that the primary foundation for my life is found in the substance and evidence that faith alone is, not in the circumstantial comings and goings of my days.

I want to jump ahead a few chapters for a moment and apply this concept to music in corporate worship. (We could use vestments or architecture or
sculpture or liturgy to make the same point.) If in making music or listening to it I assume that faith will bring substance and evidence to the music, so as make it more “worshipful,” I am getting into real trouble. If I truly love the music—that is, if I have chosen a church that uses “my music” and I am deeply moved by it—I can make the mistake of coupling faith to musical experience by assuming that the power and effectiveness of music is what brings substance and evidence to my faith. I can then quite easily forge a connection between the power of music and the nearness of the Lord. Once this happens, I may even slip fully into the sin of equating the power of music and the nearness of the Lord. At that point music joins the bread and the wine in the creation of a new sacrament or even a new kind of transubstantiation.

Or let’s say that I deeply love Jesus but I detest the music—it is not “my music.” What am I then to do in the absence of a linkage between having faith and loving the music? Where is God in all of this? If he is in the music, I will never find him, because to me there is no substance or evidence, even though others are seemingly finding him there. Do I wait for the right kind of music so that my faith becomes effectual? Do I look for another church, hoping that my faith will be fed and my felt needs met? Or do I turn from the music to the Lord, knowing that faith remains faith and the music is merely music and not a sacramental substance that mediates between God and me? I hope that the last question becomes the only question. Otherwise, faith needs exterior scaffolding for worship to become authentic worship.

I do not think I am playing exegetical games with Hebrews 11 when I say that going to work or going to church or taking a vacation may often seem more like not receiving the promises than the opposite. As with the heroes of the faith, we ordinary persons might spend lengthy times, even whole lives, without receiving what we think we should have. Worship leaders may exhaust their repertoires, preachers may ply every scriptural byway and praying may go on without ceasing, and the only thing there is the substance and evidence that faith alone offers. On the other hand, our worship can be loaded with blessing after blessing; we are receiving the promises in quick succession and we bless God for every evidence sent our way. But these cannot outweigh or substitute for the kind of faith that is its own substance and evidence. Faith is not circumstantial, yet all circumstances must be gathered together and subsumed under a life of faith.
WHAT IS AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Authentic Worship and Hope

I believe it is more difficult to get a thoroughly biblical handle on hope than on faith or love. This is partly due to the ways we downgrade this word by using it when we are not sure of an outcome or when we want to upgrade a future circumstance in relation to a present one. We cross our fingers and hope that things will get better. “I hope,” “I wish,” even “I pray that” are common partners in the exercise of hoping against doubt, fear and improbability. Furthermore, there is no extended treatise on hope in Scripture as there is on faith (Heb 11) or love (1 Cor 13). The Gospels hardly mention the word (Lk 6:34 may be the only instance), yet the Old Testament, particularly Job and Psalms, uses the word with some frequency. However, it is from the epistles, particularly those by Paul, Peter and the writer to the Hebrews, that the most solid picture can be drawn.

In virtually all biblical instances, hope comes across in a profoundly different way than it does in our secular usages. There is a grounding, a fixed conviction, a brightened outlook that cannot be realized without a direct linkage to the flowering of faith and the assurance of love. Thus the substance and evidence that faith inherently is, is also the final substance and evidence that hope anticipates with unclouded assurance. Love embraces the whole unconditionally and endlessly.

In this sense we can say that we worship continuously in hoping continuously. We can connect our thinking about hope to that of faith by saying first that hope is the forward joy of substance and evidence. Hope is not something we lay hold of in the absence of substance. We cannot afford to say that because there is no substance and evidence now, I will hope that it will appear sooner or later. This relegates hope to a conditional role that depends more on my quantitative concept of substance and evidence. Then I begin to interpret substance and evidence by what I observe happening around me. I become the interpreter and measurer; faith ceases to be faith and hope forsakes itself by resting in what it can see. In short, I have confined God to my spiritual backyard.

But hope that is seen is not hope (Rom 8:24). How surprising that this statement immediately follows this one: “For we were saved in this hope” (NKJV; or even “We are saved by hope,” KJV). That is, even though sub-
stance and evidence may abound around me, whether of faith or of works, I cannot rest in what I can see. I must press on from hope unto continued hope, remembering that I am not guessing at something but trusting fully in that which, from the eternities, has already been substantively realized in the Lord of all hope. Our hope, then, is in Christ, just as our faith is. The substance and evidence, both realized and hoped for, are securely unified in the Savior.

Because of hope, authentic worship has a dimension to it that goes way beyond the blessing or the power or the effectiveness of circumstance. Let's return to the carpenter. His work and his worship are united before the Lord. His work, as we said earlier, does not substantiate his faith. Likewise, his work (let's assume that it is of the highest quality) turns out to be everything he hoped for. But this kind of hope is an earthly hope, a materially measurable one, related more to what his skills have made him capable of than to what he is incapable of on his own. It is similar to having faith that a hammer will drive a nail or a properly designed roof will withstand a heavy snow. But a biblical hope is in a completely different dimension: our hope is not grounded in what we are capable of; rather, we must go to Christ for hope's substantiation. Christ is, literally, our hope (1 Tim 1:1). By faith, hope sees into the magnificence of the completed work of redemption; it sees into the fullness of the wisdom of God, into the summing up of everything in the lordship of Christ. The carpenter has this hope, which reaches way beyond the hopes of his working trade. And when he joins his brothers and sisters in corporate worship, this ultimate hope does not shift in meaning or extent but continues while he sings, prays, hears and responds, even as it does when he hammers, saws and builds.

I also like to think of hope as the architectural agent of faith. By faith, I live in the substance and evidence that is of faith and not works. By hope, my living takes on a faithful shape, a spiritually transformed shape that has a holy relevancy beyond the mere measurable substances and evidences that abound around me and with which my life is filled, in any combination of poverty or abundance, suffering or joy. There is a temporal shape to these circumstances, to be sure, and I can craft any number of life stories and wisdom pearls out of them. But these do not create the true shape that pleases God. The shape that he wants me to sculpt and treasure is faith-
and hope-driven, started up at the instant of new birth, derived out of the mystery of Christ-in-me-in-Christ and consummated in the sovereignty of God. All the while I am continuously at worship, continuously outpouring, by faith and in hope.

**Authentic Worship and Love**

Our continuous outpouring is to be rooted in love unto continuing love. We do not love because we worship; we worship in that we love. If faith is substance and evidence, and if hope is the architectural force that gives substance and evidence its forward shape, then love constitutes the rooting and the grounding of the whole (Eph 3:17). Love raises faithful living and worshiping into a gracious, celebrative, unconditional, unfussed, giving and sharing outpouring. The description of what love is and does in 1 Corinthians 13, and especially the supremacy that Paul accords it in the final verse of that chapter, is an exact description of the way continuously worshiping people should live. And faith itself, without which the just cannot live, carries an extraordinary nuance, for it is not whole without love. Stated positively, it is love that makes faith effectual and puts it in working order (Gal 5:6). Paul is doing both in the Galatians and the Corinthians passages what Christ did when he compressed the Law, the Prophets and the Commandments into one statement in which love of God, love of neighbor and love of self are seamlessly unified. We might even say that love is the single most whole item in the triad in that it roots, grounds and makes effectual the rest. In this sense we can speak of God's love (permit this anthropomorphism) as that which drove him most to give up his Son for our salvation. We can begin to understand the enormity of love when we inquire into any doctrine or any facet of our salvation or any aspect of our living. Sooner or later, we run straight on into love, and love informs and reforms and transforms.

If I were to make God's being, his doing and his love into one name, God is I AM THAT I LOVE THAT I ACT. God's being and doing, completely at one, are love outpoured even into the infinity of itself. Since he is the Author and Finisher of our faith, we cannot but expect his outpouring love to inform, to urge and to guarantee the very faith that only he can increase in us. The intertwining of faith and love gives to the children of God (espe-
cially to us who doubt easily) a firmer hold on him. It is God's inestimable love for us, birthing our love for him, that turns faith and hope into stronger and stronger realities. I am convinced that this is why Paul is so bold as to condition faith's effectuality on love. Even as I write this, I confess to learning this truth in a new way, for it seems that faith, substance and evidence want to elude me—or I want to elude them—as I seek to press on into even the tiniest measure of the stature and fullness of Christ. But I know that the frail love I have for him is not possible without his first loving me, and I know that his love presses me upward to higher ground, further and further away from the erosive backwash of unbelief. Whatever befalls us, wherever we are in our sojourn with the Lord, we cannot escape the simple fact that our worship and our outpouring are to be continuous if for no other reason than that love is ceaseless.

I have recently come to wonder whether the Reformers paid too little attention to the wholeness of the faith-hope-love triad. I wonder, too, about what more could have happened within the body of Christ had the doctrine of love as the effectualizer of faith been pressed with the zeal that "faith alone" has been. What would it be like to imagine a "love alone" ethic from which faith springs in complete effectiveness? How many times is our faith tarnished because of a flawed, underestimated practice of love—loving one's neighbor, much less one's brother and sister, with the love that led God to send his Son?

We may separate faith, love and hope topically if we like, but only for so long, for the depth of one forces the depth of the other. We must always return to their oneness, their saving and effectualizing unity. Doing this does not leave hope in arrears. It repositions it as a living concretion, the antithesis of wishful speculation and repackaged doubt. Hope becomes strong and singular because it sets itself firmly on unassailable love, on substance, evidence and the unseen. Continuous outpouring has no other foundation. It is a condition of soul so firmly fixed that as I share a meal or kneel in prayer or work in the fields, I can at any moment turn within—not from—the doing of these to the sweetness and holiness of the Lord, without any hint of changing from work to worship or from the mundane to the eternal. Personal holiness is not an essence—some ideal out there to which I occasionally turn. It is a
hungering, growing, pressing-on condition in which all things take on the peculiar fragrance of being done for Jesus’ sake. Then we can say that all of our work, done in full-fledged faith, is eternally finished in Christ. Our task, therefore, is to make our way through the doneness of it, step by step, moment by moment.

The whole of Scripture verifies the principle of worship as a continuum. Two words for worship—proskynein and latreuein—suggest a close relationship between worship in a given place and time and worship as an all-pervasive and ongoing condition. Proskynein expresses more the idea of bowing down or surrendering, whereas latreuein is effectively rendered as “service” or “serving.” Thus, while bending low and submitting are certainly included within this idea, serving opens out into a life-wide continuum that, in turn, is driven by submission—continuous bowing down. There is no alternative to this two-in-one principle, even though of late we seem to have separated them more than is warranted. Not so with the Scriptures, even the earliest ones. But when we come to the New Testament, we find that there is no escape from the idea that worship is an undiminished outpouring, even though, curiously enough, the words for “worship” are not used much (that is, not used to refer to what we often think of as worship—the actions that take place in corporate gatherings).

There are many places from which we can take our start, but Romans 12—16 and John 4 are magnets toward which any number of other passages (including those from the Old Testament) are drawn.

CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND LIVING SACRIFICES
Romans 12:1 (NASB) says this: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” This verse cannot be taken by itself. It has been preceded by a ruthlessly detailed inquiry into creation, fall, sin and righteousness. No stone is left unturned and no person is left without excuse or without a Savior. Above all, the first eleven chapters of Romans are about continuous outpouring—that of God in the creation, that of humanity in its fallen and inexcusable enthusiasm for evil, that of Christ in his total victory over sin and death, and that of all believers in their pressing on against sin and upward into Christ’s stature and fullness. Paul fin-
ishes out this remarkable essay with an insight that, in its mystery, only the Holy Spirit could author: "God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom 11:32). In stunning fashion Paul brings together every dimension of divine and human outpouring—eternal, fallen and redeemed—and fits them to God's sovereignty. What more could Paul do but leap into praise (v. 33) and then reach back to Isaiah and Jeremiah and tune their singing to the finished work that he has so carefully explored (vv. 34-35)?

Only then does 12:1 take on its full magnitude. Paul is really saying something like this: "On the basis of all that I have been teaching you about your condition in light of God's holiness and his Christ, about the disappearance of the old system with its continuum of dead sacrifices, and about your turning from these to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, you have only one thing to do: present yourself as living sacrifices, the undertaking of which constitutes your spiritual worship, or continuous outpouring."

There are at least four important ideas tucked away in this verse, each having to do with continuousness. First, we are now to be once-for-all living sacrifices on the merits of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice. There is no repetition, only continuity. The two are sealed together in the eternities and cannot be broken. Second, we remain alive even while we are sacrifices. Death, in all of its significance, even the kind of death that leads to atonement, has been done away with. Having died with Christ, we are caught up in life even as Christ himself took life back to himself, and now we place ourselves on the altar as a way of continued living and outpouring. Sacrifice is moved away from substitutes to incarnation. Third, we offer ourselves. In this we follow hard after the Savior's example with the freedom that comes only in gift giving. Fourth, there is no other way to describe this continued action but to call it worship, even if we prefer the word service, as many translations do. Whichever we choose, we are bound up in intertestamental accord in which bowing down, serving and worshiping are identical. We must call this kind of worship spiritual, not only because it is in Christ and of the Spirit, but also because we walk as continual worshipers by faith and not by sight.

Immediately, in verse 2, Paul says this: "Now that you know where the truth is, don't mess up. Don't rejoin the previous system against which I
have been writing in the beginning part of this letter." Having struggled his way through the crafting of chapter 7, he realizes how easy it is for living sacrifices to flirt with dying ones. He makes it clear that being conformed to this world is inverted outpouring. It is not just the doing of things that vacillate among gray, white and black, depending on the church you join or the traditions that have been following you around. It is a clear-cut mindedness toward fallenness, a desire to leave the manna and go for the leeks and the garlic. Conformity to the world is conformity to a worldview that, however subtly, reverses the order of Creator and creature and once again places power in handiwork and perpetuates the confusion of master to slave.

After the warning against a reversal in mindedness (creature worship) in verse 2, Paul follows with another warning (v. 3) about self-worship, surely to keep individual living sacrifices from making too much of their individuality or their sacrifice. In other words, continuous worshipers are a vast aggregate in which inequality and disregard are abhorred. A continuous worshiper must therefore fight two battles, one against a world-driven mind, the other against self-driven mind. Verses 4-8 make it clear that individual worship carries with it corporate responsibility—the body is not healthy if its members are disintegrative. This is yet another way of remembering that faith working through love is the only effectual faith.

Being members one of another is not a mechanical arrangement, this part interlocking with another, the whole somehow greased up into smoothness. Rather, being members of one another is organic. In a love-driven community of believers, no one should be able to find the seams. No one person or gift distorts the comeliness of the whole. Individual gifts, even, when examined closely, are common property of every member. For example, if I don’t have the gift of prophecy, I must prophesy anyway, because it is the duty of the body of Christ to tell forth, even though some might do this in a particularly gifted way. Continuous outpouring, then, is a totality. Every believer, pouring out to God while in the world, is doing so both in terms of specific gifting and all-encompassing responsibility. This is another way of describing what it means to be a living, not occasional, epistle.
CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND SPIRIT AND TRUTH

This story about the Samaritan woman in John 4 is about two things that encompass each other: salvation and authentic worship. If we were to leave out verses 15 through 22 and connect verse 14 to verse 23 (parenthesizing the first word of the latter), we would have a complete description of continuous outpouring as it should be, in Christ. Whereas Christ will always unify salvation and authentic worship, the woman (representing the generally religious world) wanted to keep them separate. From the beginning of the conversation, Jesus was talking about worship, knowing that it is either fallen or redeemed. It was only when Jesus pointed out the woman's condition and his profound remedy for it that she turned to the subject of worship (the way we often do).

Why did she do this? Perhaps she was genuinely hungry and was trying, however obliquely, to conjoin her hunger with Christ's words. She might have done this because worship talk was safe and religious, as if she and Jesus (the "prophet") could find common ground. Or she might have become downright unnerved, as Peter was on the Mount of Transfiguration when in his fear he talked religiously but irrelevantly. We should not scoff at Peter or the woman but be reminded that we too often show up at the silly end of mystery with our God talk and our overweening worship talk. God does not scoff in these times; he persists and prods, just as Jesus did both with the woman and with Peter. He continuously pours out whatever he sees fit, whether of grace and mercy or chastisement and judgment. In all instances, it is all of love.

In any case, the Samaritan woman saw worship as an occasion, a time, a place, a tradition. In one statement Jesus subsumed without condemning the entire history of time and place, tradition and protocol, under a singular paradigm: Spirit and truth. He prepared the way for Romans 12—16, yet he was reiterating the grand principle that went back to the creation of Adam and Eve and culminated in the perfect outpouring of the Son of Man: true worship is continuous; time and location are incidental. He was saying that salvation and authentic worship together mean always being in the Spirit and always being in the truth. There is simply no letup or alternation. Spirit and truth are to be as manifest in the workplace, the home
and the school as in the corporate assembly. Jesus was talking about the kind of continuous outpouring that precedes, embraces, subordinates and validates, yet looks beyond liturgies, systems, methodologies, teamwork, preludes, postludes, dances, songs and coaxing. Grounding authentic worship the way Jesus did means that placing primary dependence on such things violates the principle of faith, hope and love, the principle of Spirit and truth, and the reality of being a sacrifice for as long as we live. Thus all the work that composes all our living is merely a symptom of the eternal reality of continuous outpouring.

**CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS**

Psalm 29:2 admonishes, “Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (NKJV). Here, once again, we face the reality of worship as a continuing state, because holiness itself is a continuing state to which we are called as redeemed outpourers. Furthermore, the relentless holiness of God is the only beauty that he possesses. It is not aesthetic beauty but the beauty (there is no other English word for it) that self-inhering holiness exudes. Yet when we mention the beauty of holiness in the same breath we use to speak of God as the consummate Artist, we set a trap and then fall into it. Because of our flirtation with the idea that beauty is truth and truth is beauty, and because of the tendency of many to assume that the purpose of the arts in worship is to create a sacred bridge into the holy of holies, we are prone to reverse the order of the verse like this: “Worship the Lord in the holiness of beauty.” All philosophies of “the beautiful,” if they are biblically grounded, must stop short of connections between aesthetics and holiness, no matter how temptingly close they might superficially appear to be.

Any concept of God as the consummate Artist is worrisome even apart from the discussion about beauty and holiness. If he is the consummate Artist, then he is also the consummate Plumber or Engineer or Farmer, but we do not usually talk this way because these activities are not perceived to reach to the mystical level that art does. The problem with hooking God up to art the way we do is that a special justification and otherness are too easily imputed to art. Because we have named God as the ultimate Artist, we imply that our artistic creativity is a cut above other kinds of human creativity.

The beauty of holiness for a continuing worshiper is nothing less than
purity of heart, manifest in working out our salvation while knowing that God-through-Christ is in us, working both to will and to do his good pleasure. The Christian life is not sequential, nor is holiness the final piece in a complex redemption puzzle. It is that which is put into operation the moment we turn to Christ. It is not simply a loathing and avoiding of sin. It is, in essence, being like Christ. There is nothing vague about this. Spiritual worship and the beauty of holiness are as down-to-earth and practical as Christians can get. Presenting ourselves as living sacrifices contains no ephemera, no amorphous shivers, no disembodied inexactitudes. John puts this beautifully and simply as "walking in the light as he is in the light" (see 1 Jn 1:7). And thus two aspects of outpouring—the corporate in fellowship and the personal in privacy—are combined and sanctified in continued cleansing. How, then, can worshiping now and then or only here and there make sense? Am I saved now and then? Am I to love now and then? Am I to serve now and then?

There is nothing more real than to be in Christ and to live in Christ—to walk, run, hunger, thirst, press on, work out our salvation and be living epistles. It is not enough to bounce into a room and say, "Well, after all, all of life is worship," then bounce out, assuming that this wonderment called spiritual worship is a cover-it-all, a free ticket to everything said and done. For me to do so would be to assume that I had the power to translate my acts into worshipful acts because, after all, I am in the Spirit and I can call the shots. It is really the other way around: because continuous outpouring and personal holiness are co-integral, I had better be sure that whatever I am doing has a direct connection to truth. I had better be sure that the supreme worth of Jesus is my starting, continuing and ending value. I had better be sure that my "freedom in Christ" is not of my own manufacture, for if it is, I am still a legalist. I have simply moved from negative legalism (I don't do this; therefore, I'm okay) to affirmative legalism (I can do this; therefore, I'm okay).

So far, we have spoken of continuous authentic worship using two comprehensive triads, the first being faith, hope and love and the second being living sacrifice, Spirit and truth, and the beauty of holiness. Let's put everything together into a single thought: Authentic worship and continuous outpouring are to be undertaken by faith, driven by love, designed by hope.
and saturated with truth, whatever the context, time and place. Our worship is acceptable and effective by our being moment-by-moment living sacrifices, doing everything in the Spirit and according to truth, seeking out the beauty of holiness as our only walk, holding fast to God, who alone is our praise and worship.

Deuteronomy 10:12-13 and 20-21 capture these thoughts as pointedly and simply as anywhere in Scripture.

So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being. (vv. 12-13)

You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast. . . . He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. (vv. 20-21)

There are no exceptions to these words. They are simple, uncluttered and within the reach of every wayward but forgiven believer who follows hard after the Lord of hosts.

CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

With the foregoing in mind, we can turn to any number of Scripture passages and see how the themes of outpouring, continuous worship and personal sojourn offer extended perspective. The passages shown below are not listed according to any logical scheme, nor are they exhaustive. Rather, they reach toward each other and serve as models for additional discoveries. Consequently we could start virtually anywhere, knowing that we remain in close proximity to the theme of personal holiness, which is the singular pursuit and only outcome of continuous outpouring and authentic worship. Remember also that I am not suggesting that these passages equate with unceasing worship on a strict exegetical basis. But since unceasing worship takes in the whole of our living, the overall spirit and force of these passages align themselves easily.
Peter's first epistle is a sweetly expressed parallel to Romans 12—16. We are described as living stones coming to Christ as to a living stone (1 Pet 2:4-5). According to verse 5, we are being built up to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ"—a sure witness to Romans 12:1. In Romans 6:13, Paul prefigures 12:1-2 by contrasting two kinds of continuous outpouring: presenting ourselves as instruments of unrighteousness or presenting ourselves as alive from the dead. Furthermore, on the side of pain and sin, we are instructed to restore erring brothers and sisters "in a spirit of gentleness" and to bear each other's burdens—impossible without faith, hope and love (Gal 6:1-2).

In Hebrews 12, running a race and looking to Jesus (vv. 1-2) are coupled to the chastening of the Lord as it yields the peaceable fruiting of righteousness (v. 11), which in turn prompts us to strengthen ourselves and make straight paths (vv. 12-13) so that we can corporately pursue peace and holiness in a way that extends to shepherding those who falter (vv. 14-15). Then verse 28 says this: "Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe." Chapter 13 iterates the same purpose as Romans 12:9-21, namely serving God acceptably as we "continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). Being a sacrifice (Rom 12:1) means living continuously in love toward God, toward other people and toward oneself in a richly fitted vocabulary of work, service and obedience, knowing that with such sacrifices God is pleased (Heb 13:15-17).

In Philippians we are instructed to be confident in the work of Christ in a vivid way: the work of Christ is completed in us until the day of Christ (Phil 1:6). This continuing of completion, finished as soon as begun, yet being completed moment by moment, suggests that two kinds of outpouring are working together: the outpouring of Christ working in us even as we press continuously toward our completion in Christ. In Philippians 2:12-13, working out our salvation can likewise be seen as mutual outpouring: while we work in the mystery of fear and trembling, God works in us both to keep willing and keep doing for his good pleasure. In Colossians 1:9-12, Paul's intercessory prayer is directed toward the qualities that mark a life of continuous worship: being filled with wisdom and spiritual
understanding, walking in a pleasing way, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in knowledge, being strengthened for the increase of joyful patience and long-suffering, giving thanks to the Father. This last—giving thanks—completes the circle: Paul’s praying results in our praying. In chapter six, more will be said about prayer as continuous outpouring, but it is enough here to remember that worshiping and praying are not two separate subjects but aspects of each other.

It is also important to think of continuous worship using the analogy of isometrics, or working against something that resists. If we were to put all the isometric verbs of the Bible together, they would comprise a rich thesaurus for outpouring expressed in the isometric terms of struggle and exercise. Here are some: running, pressing on, warring, hungering, thirsting, walking, panting, withstanding, fighting and even importuning. But isometrics also bring rest to the authentic worshiper; resting in the Lord (Ps 37:7, among other passages), leading a quiet life and minding our own business (1 Thess 4:11), taking sabbath, taking calm as a weaned child on the breast (Ps 131).

We should read the Beatitudes in light of continuous outpouring, whether in poverty of spirit, mourning, meekness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, mercy, purity, peacemaking or persecution. We can go over the parables of Christ with continuous outpouring in mind: seeking the lost; praying importunately; planting and harvesting; walking the way of the Good Samaritan or the Good Shepherd; waiting for prodigals; laying up incorruptible treasures; asking, receiving, knocking and finding; fruit bearing. Read these and the outpourings of fallenness, redemption and righteousness are made manifest yet another way. Make your way through the psalms and see continuous outpouring—the worst and the best of it, in full dress.

Given these few examples, we realize that the more we contemplate the completeness of continuous worship and personal holiness, the more the whole of Scripture lights up in a new way. Everywhere we look continuous outpouring is there, implied or explicated, in numberless epiphanies. Wherever we turn—to commandments, to promises, to principles, to parables, to stories, to concepts, to warnings and rewards—we are surrounded with this freshening witness cloud, made up of truth itself, urging
us onward to personal holiness and continuous outpouring in and to Christ, or warned us away from our futile outpouring when we are away from him. Each will be consummated in an eternal outpouring, the one unto perfect and unclouded joy, the other into clamoring from emptiness unto continuing emptiness. Thus, in the book of Revelation, continuous outpouring is expressed in its finality: faith becomes sight, hope is consummated in fulfillment and love breaks its earth bonds and bursts into its infinities. Continuous outpouring is fully harmonized; the darkened glass is shattered; God sings over us even as we sing to him.

One more passage comes to mind, with which this section can conclude. In 2 Peter 1:2-7 we might paraphrase as follows:

The knowledge of God's outpouring in Christ Jesus outpouringly multiplies grace and peace directly to us. His outpouring power has given us all things that pertain to a life of outpouring godliness. This knowledge that we have of God walks alongside his call, coming to us through glory and virtue by which, in turn, we have promises of such magnitude given to [be poured out on] us that we can be continuous partakers of the outpouring divine nature. As continuous partakers, our lives must issue in an outpouring marked by diligence, faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

It is not difficult, then, to join this paraphrase to Romans 12:1 by saying that this is exactly the kind of outpouring that living sacrifices show forth.

I have long been intrigued by the peculiar sequence of attributes in the 2 Peter passage (vv. 5-7). They appear to be out of order, even random. Or so I thought until I heard about holograms. If we were to look at a hologram under intense magnification, we would find that any given fragment functions not only as a discrete detail of the whole but also contains a complete picture of the whole. With that image in mind, this list in 2 Peter begins to make sense and the order becomes irrelevant. If, for example, I were to create a hologram of virtue, I would at once have two sets of images, the composite one (virtue) and the many fragments comprising it (love, godliness, perseverance and the like). Each of these fragments would in turn contain a picture of the whole while in its own way presenting a
picture of itself, whether godliness, self-control or the like. In this way the sequence found in the 2 Peter passage can be arranged in any number of ways because whatever composite we wish to create will, holographically, contain miniature composites that can, in turn, be used to create another whole. It does not trouble me one whit to say further that the hologram is a marvelous metaphor for anything found in Scripture: the person of God, his work, our being, our comings and goings, our fallenness, our righteousness, our choice for or against Jesus and our eternal welfare. The hologram has one grand name: continuous outpouring in which composites and fragments freely participate in each other and can freely replace each other. In all cases the picture(s) will tell one grand story in a plethora of ways: Christ is all in all and we are all that can we ever become in Christ.

Too much of today's worship talk (and we may have more of it now than at any other time in church history) overlooks the comprehensive meaning of continuous worship. I believe that our overemphasis on time/place/music worship might partly come from a failure to account for the final dimensions of worship that a New Testament theology can bring to us. Thus talking about worship renewal the way we tend to do is almost like talking about Old Testament renewal instead of Old Testament fulfillment. Here is what I mean.

A principle undergirds the whole of New Testament thought, and it comes into focus in a particular saying of Jesus that is as foundational as anything in all of Scripture. In Matthew 5 and 19 we read something like this: "It was said of old, but now I say unto you . . ." By "said of old," Christ is indicating the law of Moses. And Christ says this after he unabashedly verifies the substance of the Law and the Prophets. Only then did he take these verities and, without tearing away at them, brought them to a unique finality—a filled-to-the-fullness—of which he was and is the unique sum and substance, the final yes.

These words of Christ are of such magnitude that the entire shape of the New Testament depends on them. And it is only because of this that the Old Testament can be quoted with such force and probity throughout the Gospels, Acts and Epistles. To put it negatively, the Old Testament is quoted because it is not finished until Christ finishes it. In this sense the Old Testament reaches ahead of itself longingly and hopefully to its finality.
To put it positively, Christ is established in the Old Testament so efficiently as to make the Incarnation an inevitable reality. Abraham, Jesus said, saw his day and was glad (Jn 8:56). Therefore it is a solemn act of verification to use the Old Testament in establishing the continuity of both Testaments and, even more importantly, the summative force of the New.

But even further, the linkages between Jesus' teachings and the apostolic writings illustrate the cumulative and summative force of the New Testament. The Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ; of that we are sure. However, this fulfillment is furthered in the way parable and wisdom in Jesus' teachings look toward and unite with the propositionally structured writings of the Epistles. I would go so far as to say that the teachings of Christ, as magnificent and world ordering as they are, reach beyond and remain to be expounded on, explored and applied in the propositional work of Paul, the letter to the Hebrews and the work of the other apostles. I do not believe that this statement downgrades or demeans the teachings of Jesus—God forbid! Rather, I consider it to be part of Jesus' superb way of teaching, coupled to his perfect knowledge of what was yet to take place in the disclosure of truth after the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. After all, did he not say that those who believed in him would do greater works because he was going to the Father (Jn 14:12)?

Keeping the principle of "Moses said, but I say" in mind, we can turn back to the problem of overstressing time/place/music worship. This can best be illustrated by thinking of the relationship of Spirit and truth to time and place in each Testament. In the Old, concepts of Spirit and truth are there but hidden (embedded might be a better word) in time and place. Locations were often named on the spot—a rock or a heap or a hastily built altar. There is a tabernacle and eventually the temple. Wherever Yahweh puts his name, he is to be worshiped there. As the tabernacle moves, so moves the ark and so move the locations of sacrifice and worship. As the temple is built, so the worship of Yahweh is centralized and ceremonially magnified. Spirit and truth, as verities, are amply articulated in the Old Testament, but they are not directly linked to worship. Truth lies in the Law, and truthful living lies in the love of the commandments and the keeping of them. (There is no better witness to this than Psalms 19 and 119.) Worshipping in Spirit is not directly linked to God-as-Spirit. Instead...
it is more evident in the idea that a spirit of brokenness or of walking humbly with God is the true spirit that makes the physical offerings of the sacrificial system effectual.

But as we have already seen, the relationship between time and place and Spirit and truth is completely reversed in the New Testament, with nothing of the former canceled out. Time and place are not swept aside but are swept up in Spirit and truth, in continuous worship, in living sacrifice and in the verities of faith, love and hope. When we posit a theology of worship on any other concept, we might be running the risk, however unconsciously (I say this carefully), of legalizing the subject of worship and, by implication, neglecting the finish that New Testament thought puts to the Old.

Once we understand that, in Christ, authentic worship is continuous outpouring summed up in personal holiness, we must conclude that the Christian needs to hear but one call to worship and offer only one response. These come exactly coincident with new birth and, despite our wanderings and returns to the contrary, they suffice for all our living, dying and eternal outpouring. We do not go to church to worship. But as continuing worshipers, we gather ourselves together to continue our worship, but now in the company of brothers and sisters.