



Statements of Sófár

worship as we would like to make the Sófár Team's standpoint clear and available for everyone. It has also become necessary because the word *worship* and the related concepts are interpreted and used in various ways and trigger several different reactions inside and outside the Reformed Church of Hungary. We are aware that our biblical knowledge is far from being perfect, therefore we are happy to correct and amend this document if we are presented a sounder theory.

1. The concept of worship

1/A) INTERPRETING THE CONCEPT OF WORSHIP

Worship is a very complex and vague expression and as a result it can be interpreted in many different ways. To sum it up we can say that it refers to **anything through which God's creatures acknowledge His goodness, perfection and power over them and all of creation**. We can differentiate between *direct* or *indirect* worship, see b) and c) below.

1/B) INDIRECT WORSHIP

Generally speaking creation itself, the work of salvation and the work of the universal church around the world all show the greatness of our God and thus contribute to universal worship. In the same general sense of the word it also embraces all our actions, work and life founded in Christ.

Consequently, it is quite impossible to define worship by describing an action or a form. Here is a list to show its manifold and infinite nature and to illustrate some of the indirect ways of worshipping God in our lives.

We worship God when

- we display a grateful and hopeful attitude to life, which is built upon our trust in Him
- we are open to His work in every field of our lives
- we obey Him under any circumstance
- we take up challenges and trials and we persevere
- we give our offering of gratefulness to Him and receive His gifts thankfully
- we show the desire to grow in faith and righteousness



- we refuse to make a compromise with sins and we are willing to repent
- we maintain a strong personal relationship with Him even in times of struggles
- we do our everyday tasks and work conscientiously
- we show our affection and care for our friends and relatives and are ready to make sacrifices for them
- when we give ourselves time to relax and have a rest as He commanded us

1/C) DIRECT WORSHIP

Strictly speaking we worship God when, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge His goodness and power over us right before Him. This can happen in a private prayer, in a prayer group or within a church community, and it might take several different forms. We worship Him directly when we praise Him, extol Him, revere Him, when we give thanks, when we confess our sins, when bow down or use other movements before Him, when we dance etc.

Worship with music and songs:

Worshipping God with music and songs has been a form of worship for communities since Old Testament times. Praise and worship may include songs, prayers, testimonies, the proclamation of biblical truths and even dancing together. We believe that God takes delight in these manifestations of magnification and we can experience His special presence as He sovereignly reveals Himself to individuals or groups of people from time to time.

It is important to point out, however, that a praise and worship service is fundamentally **different from a Christian concert**. At a concert you have active performers and audiences as recipients, whereas a service led by a worship team requires the active participation of everyone present. At a concert the band intends to communicate a message to the audience, whereas the purpose of a service is to go before God in as one body as His people and communicate with Him.

At a concert the band can't avoid being in the centre of attention, whereas worshippers focus on the Triune God. Therefore it is rather unfortunate to muddle the two genres.

Praise and worship might take place and be blessed in the form of a one-off occasion or a regular but **separate meeting** for a church or a larger group of people. However, we think that God's desire is to see it become an integrated



part of church life and gain more significance **at the usual Sunday morning services.**

Note: hereafter the term *worship* refers to the direct form of praise and worship, including prayer, songs and music, involving a group of people primarily.

2. The foundations of worship

We believe that a praise and worship service has to be pure and sacred in terms of contents. The most important principles are

- relying on pure biblical teaching in all aspects
- worshipping the Triune God without corruption
- being Christ-centred.

3. Worship and the choice of music

Worshipping God cannot be constrained in terms of style and trend, we cannot label certain styles as 'worship' and others as 'non-worship'. It is possible to write and play songs exalting God in any style.

Nevertheless, when choosing music it is essential to bear in mind that we have to

- be considerate towards the group of worshippers – the style mustn't alienate them
- make every effort to play high quality music
- put our personality, creativity and our God-given gifts in the selection of instruments and songs
- choose songs which people can easily follow and sing and which are suitable for leading worshippers.

4. Worship and Christian trends

We know that there are different religious trends and groups within Christianity, some of which attribute great importance to worship, while others push it in the background. Yet worship cannot be viewed as a phenomenon that is typical of some Christian trend exclusively, and, on the other hand, no group of people, trend or denomination has the right to claim it as exclusively their own. We are convinced that it is God's plan to see worship fulfil its purpose in every single group, trend and denomination within His church.



We don't agree with any denomination, church group or trend claiming exclusive ownership over songs written by any Christian musicians. We also object to degrading any song as unsuitable for worship solely on the grounds that it was written in another denomination, church or trend. We only make an exception in case of songs that convey a creed that is totally unacceptable by the Reformed Church or our own church group.

5. Worship and generations

It is easy to realise that to generations growing up in the Church nowadays worship is becoming more and more central as a collective form of maintaining their relationship with God. It does not imply, however, that we cannot find any predecessors who have set an example to us since Old Testament times up until recently. It is not true, either, that worship can only be associated with a certain age group within the Church.

It cannot be proved any longer that a particular music style is associated with a particular age group. It is also incorrect to say that only the young can identify with the new songs. Therefore we disagree with any terminology and theory that categorise songs on the assumption that they are favoured by any age group (e.g. 'youth songs').

We believe that God's desire is that all His children worship Him through their lives day by day, regardless of their age, and that they all come before Him, both individually and as a group, bringing their offering of worship.

6. The role of will, mind and emotions in worship

Worship can become part of our private and group prayer life as a result of the Holy Spirit's work in us and our *conscious* **decision-making**. It depends on our **will** whether or not we worship God. The kind of worship He really likes is done 'with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength', and in it we try to do our best to offer all our **thoughts and emotions**, our body and soul, our whole being.

It will also please God if we make a conscious decision to go and bow down before Him, even though we **are not emotionally motivated** and feel rather empty; but what He really longs to see is that our hearts get filled with the fire of our first love, thankfulness and adoration again and again. However, we



disapprove of worship **without the mind**, aiming only to console or stir up our emotional lives; because the act of worship has to serve God in the first place and not our feelings. Furthermore, we regard worship **lacking both the mind and the heart** – when we go before God simply because it has been decided – as a false and empty form, which, if it becomes a routine in our private lives or at our church meetings, will not delight the heart of God. (Warnings against this attitude are present throughout the Old Testament e.g. Psalm 78:36-37, Isaiah 1:10-15, Isaiah 29:13-14, Ezekiel 33:30-33,; and Jesus also reiterates it: Matthew 15:6-9).

Therefore we think that according to God's purpose we must surrender to Him all that we are: our will, mind, emotions and we must seek to grow in this kind of worship individually as well as in church.

Szerkesztés