

The Reformation of Worship

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Chapter 7 in *Here We Stand* by Boice and Sasse

This is a critique of much that passes for worship in evangelical churches today. Godfrey thinks much of the change is without reflection. Instead, he argues: “The historic elements of worship reflected a sense of the greatness and presence of God, Evangelicals must recapture a profoundly God-centered worship and move away from their increasingly man-centered worship. As Calvin wrote: ‘It is not very sound theology to confine a man’s thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves.’... Contemporary worship too often is only concerned with the emotion of joy – and that in a very superficial way. The Bible stresses joy AND reverence.’

I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to u? (John 4:25). With these words the Samaritan woman began to reflect on her remarkable meeting with Jesus. He had spoken to her of several matters: living water, her husband, and proper worship. At first glance his conversation seems disjointed, but his words led her to faith and ultimately led many from her village to faith as well. He taught her about the water of eternal life that he as God’s Messiah brought into the world. He challenged her immoral life, reminding her that God’s will is for a chaste and godly marriage. He called her away from worship that was false to new covenant worship in spirit and truth. In his brief but comprehensive words Jesus explained true discipleship, showing that his disciples accept the truth, repent of their sins, and faithfully worship God.

For Christians who have understood the teaching of Jesus, doctrine, worship, and life have always been intimately intertwined and interconnected. Faith involves the truth of God (doctrine), meeting with God (worship), and serving God (life). The inseparability of these three elements can often be seen in the Scriptures and in the history of God’s people.

For example, when Paul wrote to the Colossians, he connected these themes. He discussed the doctrines of the divinity of Christ and his saving work on the cross (Col. 2:9—15). He refuted a variety of errors about worship, concluding with a warning against all forms of “self-imposed worship” (2:16—23). He called the Colossians to holiness by putting to death their fallen nature and by living in and for Christ (3:1—14). Paul expressed the ‘interdependence of these three in just two verses, 3:4—5: “When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you’ also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity; lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” The *doctrine* of the glorious return of Christ should lead the Christian to a *life* of mortifying the flesh, recognizing that vices such as greed are idolatry, a form of false *worship*.

Worship through the Centuries

Throughout the centuries Christians have seen this same connection of doctrine, worship, and life. Augustine, for example, expressed it clearly in his *Confessions* as he discussed his conversion. His conversion had an intellectual dimension as he accepted the truth of Christian doctrine. It had a moral dimension as he abandoned his carnal habits and embraced chastity. It had a sacramental dimension as he was baptized and became a full part of Christ's worshipping community.¹

The Reformers insisted on the need for reform in all three areas. Martin Luther related doctrine, worship, and life as essential to the Reformation in his attack on the Mass. He wrote in the Smalcald Articles: "The Mass in the papacy must be regarded as the greatest and most horrible abomination because it runs into direct and violent conflict with this fundamental article [of Christ and faith]. Yet, above and beyond all others, it has been the supreme and most precious of the papal idolatries.... Since such countless and unspeakable abuses have arisen everywhere through the buying and selling of Masses, it would be prudent to do without the Mass for no other reason than to curb such abuses."² Luther taught that Christians must reject the Roman Mass because it attacks sound doctrine, is false worship, and leads to corruption of life.

Luther made a similar point in a moment of reflection upon his life and experiences recorded in his *Table Talk*. He said, "I chose twenty-one saints and prayed to three every day when I celebrated mass; thus I completed the number every week. I prayed especially to the Blessed Virgin, who with her womanly heart would compassionately appease her Son. Ah, if the article on justification hadn't fallen, the brotherhoods, pilgrimages, masses, invocation of saints, etc., would have found no place in the church. If it falls again (which may God prevent!) these idols will return."³ Again doctrine, worship, and life are intimately interrelated.

Similarly John Calvin connected these three as he thought about the heart of the Reformation: "There are three things on which the safety of the Church is founded, viz., doctrine, discipline, and the sacraments, and to these a fourth is added, viz., ceremonies, by which to exercise the people in offices of piety."⁴ In another place Calvin imagined a Christian at prayer who laments that the medieval church has offered teachings "which could neither properly train me to the legitimate worship of thy Deity, nor pave the way for me to a sure hope of salvation, nor train me aright for the duties of the Christian life."⁵ He makes the same point again as he reflects on the beginning of the Reformation: "When God raised up Luther and others, who held forth a torch to light us into the way of salvation, and who, by their ministry, founded and reared our churches, those heads of doctrine in which the truth of our religion, those in which the salvation of men are comprehended, were in a measure obsolete. We maintain that the use of the sacraments was in many ways vitiated and polluted. And we maintain that the government of the Church was converted into a species of foul and insufferable tyranny."⁶ The doctrine of salvation, worship with pure sacraments, and life in the church were basic for Calvin to the reform of Christianity.

This Reformation concern continued among orthodox Protestants. For example, the Puritans in the seventeenth century produced a great summary of doctrine in the Westminster Confession of Faith. But that assembly also prepared both a Psalter for singing God's praise and a directory to guide public worship. The Westminster Assembly further showed its concern for faithful Christian living in the detailed exposition of the Ten Commandments that it made part

of its Larger Catechism.

Although the three elements of doctrine, worship, and life always remain affected by one another, at times in modern church history one element has seemed more prominent than the others. Doctrine was preeminent in the controversy between liberalism and fundamentalism in the '1920s and 1930s. Worship was the center of Scottish Presbyterian struggles in the seventeenth century. Life has dominated a variety of modern movements that primarily reacted against the perception of formalism and deadness in the church. Pietism, Methodism, revivalism, the holiness movement, and Pentecostalism all stress the call to life. In the past thirty years the evangelical movement has expressed concerns in all three of these areas. Evangelicals have worked to preserve sound doctrine in their defense of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. They have manifested their moral commitment in their opposition to abortion. They have also undertaken extensive experimentation in the public worship of God.

Changes in Worship

Recent evangelical experiments in worship are particularly significant for two reasons. First, they represent the most widespread changes in Protestant public worship since the Reformation. While various changes in worship had occurred earlier, they came much more slowly and were much less radical. Second, the contemporary changes in worship offer perhaps the best perspective from which to evaluate the health of evangelicalism today. We can effectively discern the spiritual vitality and biblical fidelity of contemporary evangelicalism by looking at the changing character of its worship.

Variety has long characterized evangelicals in their practice of worship, from the high Anglican liturgy to the wildly charismatic. But beyond these historic differences evangelicals from many traditions in recent years have introduced some common, specific changes in worship in at least five areas. First, many have added new elements to worship. Second, many have changed the character of traditional elements of the service. Third, many have altered the quantity, character, and role of music in the service. Fourth, churches have shown a willingness to involve many more people in leading worship. Fifth, many churches have made changes in the times of their worship.

These changes invite more detailed scrutiny.

Many congregations have added a variety of new elements to their worship. Some have added liturgical dance and dramatic or humorous skits. Some have used visual aids—from banners to slides and films. Some have added a variety of Pentecostal activities, from being slain in the Spirit to holy laughter. Some have added popcorn and Super Bowl viewing—although perhaps not as an act of worship proper.

Many congregations have changed the character of traditional elements of worship. Worship leaders read much shorter passages of the Bible and spend much less time in prayer. Sermons are more likely to be psychological rather than theological or expository. How to manage stress or time or money seem to be among the most pressing spiritual issues of our time. The Lord's Supper is apt to be either eliminated or elaborated with new ceremony and symbolism.

Many churches have seen major changes in the area of music. They give much more time to music and make use of a greater variety of instruments and of more special music, especially soloists and choirs. The style of music has also changed in many churches. Classical music and traditional hymnody have given way to praise songs in styles ranging from Christian rock or pop to country and western. Even more important, the role of music has changed for many.

Whereas traditionally music was an important part of the dialogue between God and his people, for many it has become the heart of worship, even called the “Praise and Worship” part of the service. Music seems to have become for some a new sacrament, mediating the presence and experience of God, establishing a mystical bond between God and the worshiper. With eyes closed and hands in the air worshipers repeat simple phrases that become Christian mantras.

Many churches have abandoned the historic practice of having an ordained minister lead the service. Various parts of the service are now led by professionals or members of the congregation. In some places no part of the service—even sermon, sacrament, or benediction—seems reserved for the minister.

A number of churches have made changes in the time of worship. The Sunday evening service has died in many places. The Saturday evening service has emerged as a new time of worship for the busy, who save Sunday for work or recreation. Some churches give much more attention to the holy days of the church year. Christmas receives at least a month of preparation in many churches (as well as in the stores). But, strangely, services are often not held on Christmas Day itself.

In spite of the magnitude of these changes, an amazingly small amount of discussion or controversy has attended their introduction. To be sure some local congregations have had troubles and some articles and books have appeared on worship. But relative to the impact of the changes on the life of the church, the discussion about them has been remarkably mild. The ease with which such momentous changes have taken place points to the dissatisfaction prevalent among evangelicals with traditional worship and gives an insight into the contemporary evangelical mind.

Change without Reflection

Why have these changes occurred so easily and in many cases with so little reflection? Many evangelicals had concluded that their public worship was marginal, ineffective, dull, and irrelevant. More specifically, first, for a long time many evangelicals have not seen public worship as being at the heart of their Christian life and experience. Indeed a distinctive role for public worship diminished as many stressed that all of life was worship and that worship could take many other forms than just the worship of the whole congregation together. For many the real focus of their Christian lives became small groups for Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and discipleship. Small groups seem to offer more personal and heart-felt prayer, more intimate and meaningful fellowship, more relevant and effective teaching. For others the center became para-ecclesiastical organizations of service, education, and evangelism. Probably few evangelicals today would agree with Calvin that listening to a sermon is more important spiritually than reading the Bible privately.

Second, leaders have introduced many changes to public worship in the name of evangelism. A passion for evangelism has long been a central concern of evangelicals. So an argument that new elements of worship (whether drama or dancing or drums—or even an entire service designed for “seeker”) will enhance evangelism and church growth becomes irresistible. So whether real evangelism will occur or not, the changes are made.

Third, the changes have made worship much more interesting and engaging for many. In a culture where the images of television and the cinema are powerful and nearly omnipresent, new uses of the visual are very appealing. In a culture where the music from radio, CD, and

tape is varied and professional, American evangelicals are accustomed to being entertained. The traditional church—with many words, slow pace, and antique music—appears tedious and boring. The changes seem to put vitality back into worship.

Fourth, these changes represent an acceleration and extension of changes that have been taking place in evangelical worship for around two hundred years. Particularly the rise of revivalism as the dominant form of evangelicalism in nineteenth-century America established tendencies in worship that have culminated in what we see today.⁷ The altar call became a new element in many worship services. Sermons often became primarily evangelistic in character. Suspicion of the professional clergy and education encouraged the rise of lay preachers, of whom Dwight L. Moody was the most notable. In music the Psalms were first replaced by the hymns of Watts and Wesley and they in turn gave way to revival songs that seemed to decline steadily in the quality of their theological content, poetry, and music. Cantatas and music programs replaced worship services at times. Choirs, special music, and revival hymns became important for setting the mood of worship. The 1914 authorized biography of Billy Sunday reported of his meetings: “From half an hour to an hour of this varied music introduces each service. When the evangelist himself is ready to preach, the crowd has been worked up into a glow and fervor that make it receptive to his message.”⁸

Fifth, evangelicals have not considered how many contemporary changes in worship they have borrowed from Pentecostal or charismatic churches: the spontaneous style, the multiple leadership, the expression of individual thoughts and feelings, the character of the music, and the dramatic. (Of course the charismatic worship is itself an extension of some elements of the earlier revivalism.) Many of these changes rest on charismatic theologies of spirituality, worship, and ministry. Do evangelicals really want to embrace these theologies and all that such theologies entail?

Sixth, the ready acceptance of these changes shows how much evangelicals have accommodated themselves to modern culture. These changes all seem natural in a culture that tends to be democratized, individualistic, anti-intellectual, pragmatic, and optimistic. In a democratized and individualistic culture it seems fully appropriate that each member of the congregation should be able to lead in worship and that each should find forms of worship and music that are attractive and fulfilling. In an anti-intellectual and pragmatic culture forms of worship will seem proper that appeal more to the emotions than the mind, that are immediately accessible and draw crowds rather than are challenging or disciplined. Entertainment replaces edification. As D. G. Hart has aptly put it in an article entitled “Post-Modern Evangelical Worship”: “Indeed, contemporary worship—and church life for that matter—depends increasingly on the products of pop culture.... Rather than growing up and adopting the broader range of experiences that characterizes adulthood, evangelicals... want to recover and perpetuate the experiences of adolescence.”⁹ In an optimistic culture churches will assume that many are seeking God and that the message of sin, judgment, and hell must be muted.

Reflection on Change

This new situation calls for careful consideration. It requires reflection not only on the new trends in worship, but also on the character of contemporary evangelicalism. How should we evaluate the new worship and the new evangelicals?

Obviously many see these changes in a positive light. Robert Webber, for example, in his work *Signs of Wonder*¹⁰ has written very positively of the ways in which liturgical, charismatic,

and traditional Protestant churches have been borrowing from each other in worship. He sees this as evidence of renewal in all these groups.

Such positive evaluation seems profoundly wrong, however, from a variety of perspectives. In keeping with modern culture we might evaluate the changes pragmatically. Have the churches grown? Have the churches successfully evangelized many? Have Christians achieved new levels of faith, devotion, love, and service? Anecdotally one might conclude that many churches have succeeded. Stories abound among evangelicals about churches growing and churches planted by the use of the new measures of the new worship. But do these reports give a true picture of contemporary church experience?

Sadly these stories more often seem to reflect the evangelical addiction to superlatives rather than accurate reporting. Most everything we do is heralded as the best ever. Not long ago a full page advertisement in a major newspaper for an evangelistic meeting promised the greatest manifestation of the power of God in the history of the world. Evangelicals seem always “at unique moments of opportunity” to be met “with the greatest resources ever available.”

Evangelical superlatives are one manifestation of the legacy of Charles Finney, who saw excitement as the key to evangelical success. He wrote: “God has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce powerful excitements among them, before He can lead them to obey”¹¹ There must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers, and roll back the tide of degradation and sin.”¹² To stimulate that excitement Finney developed his “new measures” - what J.I. Packer somewhere called “religious technology.” Finney declared, “The object of our measures is to gain attention and you must have something new.”¹³

The problem is that once one gets beyond anecdotes about the new, exciting achievements, the evidence for evangelical success is sadly wanting. America is not experiencing a revival of faith or holiness. Christians may be moving from one congregation to another, but Christianity does not seem to be growing overall.¹⁴ Indeed evangelicalism seems weaker and less influential for the gospel than ever. It has failed according to its own criteria of success.¹⁵

The most important evaluation of evangelicalism and its worship, however, needs to be biblical and theological. The only criteria for faithfulness that matter are God’s, and those criteria can only be found in the Scriptures.

A Theology of Worship

The Scriptures use the word “worship” in a variety of ways. Worship may refer to the whole of life (Rom. 12:1—2). It may also refer to various forms of personal or informal devotion (for example, Deut. 6:4—9). Of particular interest to us is worship as the official gathering of the covenant people to meet with God (for example, Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25).

Corporate worship is meeting with God. Psalm 74:8 speaks of the places of Israel’s worship as “meeting places with God.” Even before the fall in the Garden of Eden man needed concentrated time with God. As finite beings humans need specific times and opportunities to focus on God. Israel worshiped around a tabernacle that was known as the Tent of Meeting. When the temple was built, Israel gathered at that dwelling of God to meet with him. In the new covenant the gathering of the Christian community is a meeting of God in the heavenly temple—a theme developed, for example, in Hebrews 10 and 12.

This meeting with God anticipates the everlasting fellowship that God will have with his people in a new heaven and a new earth. The whole purpose of salvation is that the broken relationship between God and man might be overcome so that true fellowship might be restored. The importance of worship is remarkably expressed in this statement of Calvin: “To debate about the

mode in which men obtain salvation, and say nothing of the mode in which God may be duly worshipped, is too absurd.”¹⁶

God has always taken his worship very seriously. He speaks of his worship not only in the Second Commandment, but at least implicitly in the first four of the Ten Commandments. He offers serious warnings about worship throughout the Law (for example, Deut. 4). He visits terrible judgment on those who pervert his worship (for example, Lev. 10 and 2 Chron. 26). The same concern is clear in the New Testament. Worship is a concern of Jesus and Paul. Hebrews 12:28—29 sums up this concern well: “Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’”

An Evaluation of Worship

God’s concern about his worship must lead evangelicals to much more careful evaluation of their practice of worship. First, evangelicals must reconsider the new elements introduced into worship. Are visual elements such as drama, dance, and film acceptable to God? They do not seem consistent with a thoughtful application of the Second Commandment. Rather, they seem more like strange fire offered to the Lord (Lev. 10:1). God in Scripture never approved of creativity or innovation in worship. How can evangelicals so blithely assume God approves of their new activities?

These elements need to be rigorously subjected to the Scriptures. Evangelical failure to do so shows that the Bible does not function in a central way in the life and thought of many. Too many evangelicals are content to take themes or motifs from Scripture, but not to study carefully its details or see it as presenting a coherent, systematic truth. Evangelicals need to see that worship must be Word-directed in specifics, not just in a general, vague way.

For many evangelicals the justification of their new worship is rooted in their sincerity. Worship must certainly be sincere to be acceptable to God. But sincerity by itself does not make worship acceptable to God. The worshipers of Baal in Elijah’s day were sincere. Many worshipers of Yahweh in Samaria were sincere. But God rejected such worship as violations of the First or Second Commandment. Sincerity does not justify false worship any more than it does false doctrine or disobedient living.

Worship that is simple and spiritual will encourage Christian living that is disciplined and consistent. It will lead evangelicals back to the Bible. Such worship will truly build up the body of Christ in doctrine and in life.

Second, evangelicals must reexamine the ways in which they have changed the traditional elements of worship. Sermons must again be closely expository so that the church really hears God’s Word, not human opinions. The exposition of the Word in its richness will confront our sinful ideas, values, and ways, insuring that worship will not be simply soothing and comforting. The Bible must be read as a central act of worship—not only to inform but as an act of reverence and thanks to a God who has revealed himself. Prayer must be restored as the congregation’s privilege to speak to the God who draws near to them. The sacraments must be seen as the kindness of the Lord in giving a visible expression to the gospel.

The historic elements of worship reflected a sense of the greatness and presence of God. Evangelicals must recapture a profoundly God-centered worship and move away from their increasingly man-centered worship. As Calvin wrote: “It is not very sound theology to confine a man’s thoughts so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive of his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for

ourselves.”¹⁷

The Christian life will flourish in a context where a vital relationship with God according to his Word is cultivated. Meeting with God in truth will strengthen Christian living.

Third, evangelicals must look carefully at their music. Music is a key way to express emotion in worship. But contemporary worship too often is only concerned with the emotion of joy—and that in a very superficial way. The Bible certainly stresses joy, but it equally stresses reverence. Psalm 2:11 says, “Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.” Reverence and joy must both be expressed in worship.

Joy and reverence reflect the character of God, who is just and merciful, holy and loving. Worship that is only joyful serves a God stripped of half his attributes. It produces a gospel that tells of peace where there is no peace. It severs Law from gospel and repentance from faith.

The worship songs of the church must follow the pattern of the Psalter that praises the character and great works of God. Such praise is not composed of the repetition of phrases or bad poetry. It is verbally rich, emotionally varied, and full of content.

Such praise will fill the minds and hearts of God’s people with the truth of God and with love for God as he truly is. It will fill minds with truth for meditation. It will encourage the people of God to holy living.

Fourth, many evangelicals have diminished the role of the minister in leading worship and multiplied the number of worship leaders. Such actions are in accord with a democratic culture and are often justified by an appeal to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. But the change has often brought to leadership people who are not educated or experienced for that role. More important, such people have not been called or set aside by the congregation for that work.

Evangelicals need to regain a theology of office and ministry. One of Christ’s great gifts to his church, according to Ephesians 4, is the office of pastors and teachers. Those gifted and called by Christ and his church need to lead the people of God in their worship carefully in accordance with the Word.

Such leadership will help Christians in all *their* living reflect on the importance of the structures and authorities that God has appointed. The decline of respect for authorities, whether parents, teachers, employers, or government authorities, is a major problem of our time. The church must be an example to society in its respect for the ministers and elders that Christ has established in his church.

Fifth, evangelicals have changed the time of worship to make worship easier and more accessible. But have the evangelicals understood the call of the Lord to sanctify the Lord’s Day? There is a Lord’s Day in the new covenant—Revelation 1:10—and by sanctifying it the people of God learn obedience and self-denial. Real Christianity is not easy, but embraces the discipline and blessing of rest and worship on the Lord’s Day. True faith delights to spend time with God. It treasures time for devotion, learning, and service. It does not seek to get worship over with, but seeks to follow the revealed pattern of a day with God.

Evangelicals in relation to worship, doctrine, and life have tended to become minimalists. Too many are asking, what is the least I can do and what is the easiest way to do it to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? Evangelicals must remember—of all things—the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18—20). There, Jesus declared what true discipleship is. It has a doctrinal dimension: Disciples must acknowledge Jesus as possessing all authority in heaven and on earth. It has a worship dimension: Disciples must be baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It has a life dimension: Disciples are to obey everything God has commanded. Evangelicals must recapture the fullness of biblical religion.

Repentance and Reformation

This brief analysis and evaluation of evangelicals and contemporary worship will not commend itself to everyone. Some will reject it entirely. Others will object to one or more points in it. But it will serve its most important function if it provokes a spirited discussion of these issues. In our day evangelicals need to engage in more debate on matters of doctrine, worship, and life.

True ecumenicity will require a return to polemical theology which, while scrupulously civil and honest, is also sharp and spirited. Polemic cannot only be a treasured part of Christianity's heroic past, but needs to be part of our present. Defenders of the faith today must follow in the train of Athanasius and Augustine, of Luther and Calvin, of J. Gresham Machen and Robert Preus. We must not be emasculated by what James Hunter has rightly called our "ethic of civility," where we strive always not only to tolerate, but to be tolerable.¹⁸ As Calvin wrote: "For then only do pastors edify the Church, when, besides leading docile souls to Christ placidly, as with the hand, they are also armed to repel the machinations of those who strive to impede the work of God."¹⁹

In a spirited defense of the Reformation Calvin attacked the papacy, daring anyone "to give the name of Christ's Vicar to one who, after routing the truth of Christ, extinguishing the light of the gospel, overthrowing the salvation of men, corrupting and profaning the worship of God, and trampling down and tearing to pieces all his sacred institutions, domineers like a barbarian."²⁰ In our culture of civility such polemic will strike many as excessive. But for Calvin the gospel was at stake. He followed the example of the Apostle Paul in his writing to the Galatians. What language should we use in an evangelical world where some teach doctrines of God and salvation worse than any pope; where some promote worship that is more self-indulgent and self-righteous than any pope; where some ignore the Law of God more flagrantly than any pope? So-called evangelicals promote anti-Christian doctrine teaching the mutability of God and denying the forensic character of justification.²¹ They debase worship with unholy laughter, false prophecy, and vain repetition. They corrupt Christian living by condoning divorce, homosexuality, abortion, and infanticide.²²

B. B. Warfield once observed of the theology of Charles Finney: "God might be eliminated from it entirely without essentially changing its character."²³ The same might be said of too much of contemporary evangelicalism. We need sharper analysis and pointed refutation. We need to ask whether Calvin's judgment of the medieval church applies also to us: "They have contaminated the pure worship of God by impious superstitions, and involved the doctrine both of faith and repentance in endless errors; that by darkness of various sorts they have not only obscured but almost extinguished the virtue and grace of Christ; and by unworthy methods have adulterated the Sacrament."²⁴

Today as always doctrine, worship, and life remain closely interdependent. Where doctrine teaches that man is good and God is benevolent, worship will be upbeat—the children's playroom—and life will be oriented to self-fulfillment. Where worship focuses on human needs and entertainment, the doctrine of God, sin, and grace will wither and life will become self-centered. Where life is self-indulgent, doctrine and worship will also be self-indulgent.

Today evangelicals need careful self-examination as we consider their doctrine, worship, and life. We need to meditate on passages of Scripture such as Deuteronomy 4.

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that

you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers is giving you. Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD that I give you....Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him?....Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the LORD your God has forbidden. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deut. 4:1, 2, 6, 7, 23, 24).

Evangelicals need to repent. Too often we have replaced the consuming fire with a mild-mannered God; replaced the worship of the invisible God with some forms of human invention; replaced the moral law of God with the fulfillment of felt-needs. J. B. Phillips decades ago stimulated evangelicals with his book, *Your God Is Too Small*. Today we need a book entitled, *Your God Is Too Bland* or even, perhaps, *Your God Is a Pagan Idol*. Evangelicals need a spirit of repentance that will lead to a thorough reformation of doctrine, worship, and life.