

Frame, John M. *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996. 171 pp. \$10.99.

John Frame was serving as an associate pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church in Escondido, California, when he wrote *Worship in Spirit and Truth*. His ministerial experience, both within and without church settings, certainly equipped him to write a biblically sound book about corporate Christian worship. Before authoring the subject of this review, he developed and taught an adult Sunday school course on worship at least half-a-dozen times in the church he attended. Frame received his formal theological and philosophical training from Westminster Theological Seminary and Yale University—two institutions of very high repute. His occupations outside local churches have included professorships at two Westminster Theological Seminary branches and Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. One must know God well to inform others accurately of how He ought to be worshiped.

Frame wrote *Worship in Spirit and Truth* “to state simply the main biblical principles governing the public worship of God’s people” (xiii). It is intended, primarily, to educate adult laypeople, especially those who teach classes in the churches that they attend. Like many authors of similar doctrinal persuasion and tradition, Frame recognizes the great value of consulting the confessions and other writings of believers who have gone before us. He is “enthusiastically” committed to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms. Yet Frame differs from many within the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition in the extent and application of the long-held, specific enunciation of the rules pertaining to what is and what is not permitted in the corporate worship of God’s people. Man and his creeds are fallible. God is not. His word is perfect and “divinely authoritative” (xiv). Frame consults historic confessions

to glean only the insight and wisdom which is commensurate with God's revelation. In one sense he builds off the work of others; in another, he contradicts it by faithfully subjecting it to the perfect bar of Scripture.

Frame tells his readers that "the existing literature on worship is of three types" (xiv). That which follows his statement is informative but, most of all, comforting. Solomon said there is safety in a multitude of council. It is quite clear that Frame is knowledgeable of the work of others in the field of worship. He admits there is value for the Christian in each strain of books and articles. Frame, however, believes that his book is unique among the other worship writings in that it critically focuses on the question, "What does God command for worship, and what does he forbid?" (xv).

With precision and force, Frame succeeds in fulfilling the aforementioned, overarching purpose of his book. As I and other Christians have often said, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ must be both systematic and biblical theologians if they wish to honor Him. The breadth of appropriate scriptural citations in Frame's book shows his desire to consider faithfully the *whole* counsel of God as he answers his thesis. The Scripture index on pages 161–171 contains references from almost every book of God's Word.

Before entertaining the subject of contemporary, corporate, Christian worship, Frame lays the proper foundations for the later discussion by essentially providing a topical Bible study of worship in general. He addresses the basic principles of the subject. Then the ways which the Old Testament saints approached and worshiped Yahweh are presented, followed by the corporate worship practices of believers in the early church. The elements and "major forms of Israel's worship" (15) (e.g., the tabernacle and temple) are shown to typify and foreshadow the substance of their homage and praise which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Frame writes,

“... the church worships in a way that is parallel to that of the Old Testament, in that every ordinance of the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ” (29).

Next Frame lays down the God-given boundaries for authentic Christian worship by grappling with a few views of the regulative principle, including his own. He concludes by stating it is a “charter of freedom” (45) that, if rightly applied, helps the saints of God by freeing them from the bondage of man’s traditions while limiting them to worship God in the broad ways that He has specified. Using the regulative principle as it has been defined, Frame then proceeds to catalog the general events and elements of New Testament Christian worship services by obeying the “whole counsel of God” (54).

Once a list of worship practices has been agreed upon, how should we do or observe them? Frame invokes and critiques three common models that have been used by churches.

1. “The Historical Approach” (67) which advises believers to imitate their forefathers
2. “Reenactment of Redemption” (68) which advises believers to pattern services after the redemptive story line in Scripture
3. “Dialogical worship” (69) which teaches believers to emulate the “God speaks, man responds” (69) order we often see in Scripture

In my opinion Frame begins to discuss the more controversial matters of corporate Christian worship during the latter half of the book. What does the Bible say about our emotions during worship? How do we determine what is and is not reverent (something that I often thought about during the services of the church that I formerly attended in Texas)? Chapters eight and nine of the book follow the scheme of that which was previously termed dialogical worship. Frame spends some time looking at the “major aspects of worship more closely” (89). The place and meaning of God’s Word, drama, church discipline, and the ordinances are suggested by again

referring to many Bible texts for substantiation. How then should Christians respond to what God has told them via word and deed?

Perhaps the most controversial subject pertaining to corporate Christian worship is saved for the last few chapters of Frame's book—music! The author makes it clear that God is the One who has ordained music as a means of worship and edification. The bottom line regarding music is this—our Lord wants us to use it “in a way that embraces His own purposes . . . and therefore speaks the heart languages of our fellow worshipers” (120).

I will use the remaining space of this book review to deal more extensively with the regulative principle of Christian worship. About three years ago, I was forced to wrestle with the propriety of Christmas and Easter. My opinion of the holidays, especially Christmas, radically changed in the course of one year. One Christmas, I reveled in it. The next Pegamas, as I called it, I condemned the recognition of the Romish “holy” day. God has used resources such as *Worship in Spirit and Truth* to challenge and moderate my assessment of Christian worship practices. For various reasons, I still abstain from the celebration of Pegamas. (I refuse to associate Christ with Rome's doctrine of Mass, hence my revised spelling of Christmas.) But I am no longer *deeply* troubled by those who recognize the holiday. What I do still feel strongly about is the imposition of the “celebration” on the consciences of believers. Frame wrote, “Our Puritan fathers were certainly right to argue that the regulative principle limits what the church authorities may ‘impose’ on worshipers” (45). Frame's balanced view of the regulative principle is correct because of its biblical corroboration. This, I believe, is why it is also usable. “It is a doctrine about worship, about all forms of worship” (44). The narrow view of the regulative principle bifurcates the Christian life. Supposedly, God is very concerned about that which takes place in “His house” yet is lenient at all other times of the week.

Worship encompasses all of life, so Frame's bibliocentric book has been of great value to me. The scriptural references to just about everything he adduces are invaluable. They make the book effective at evangelizing both sinner *and* saint. I would feel completely comfortable giving *Worship in Spirit and Truth* to my unbelieving friends because it is so Christ-centered. For this and the other reasons I have mentioned in this review, I will recommend *Worship in Spirit and Truth* to friends and family, lost and saved. Doubtless, Frame achieved the purpose of his work.