

Peterson, David. *Engaging with God*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1992. 317 pp. \$24.00.

Introduction

David Peterson is the author of the book *Engaging with God*. Concluding his tenure as a lecturer at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, David Peterson became the principal of Oak Hill College in London, England. His other books include *Hebrews and Perfection* and *Possessed by God*. As *Engaging with God* examines worship, *Possessed by God* makes a Biblical theological study on the doctrine of sanctification. Biblical theology is Peterson's passion and forte. Thus the reader can expect a faithful exposition of Scripture in his treatment of worship.

In *Engaging with God*, Peterson combines erudition with experience to give the reader a book that is founded on Biblical truth while attempting to provide practical, worshipful counsel. Recognizing the proliferation of books on worship in recent years, Peterson's contribution aims at filling a noticeable gap. In contrast with other worship books, Peterson's work is an inductive study committed to Biblical exposition and theological precision (15-16). His monograph comprehensively examines the whole of Scripture to answer the question, "What is worship?"

Beginning with the Old Testament's understanding of worship, Peterson carefully works through the Hebrew and Greek to define worship; he then devotes attention to important Jewish concepts for worship; and he furthers his study by investigating the various but parallel perspectives on worship espoused by different Biblical writers. Considering the whole of

Scripture, Peterson finds the theme of worship running throughout. Highlighting worship as a response to God's revelation, he says, "Acceptable worship means approaching or engaging God on the terms that he proposes and in the manner that he makes possible" (283). This concluding statement is thesis endeavors to expand upon in his Biblical theology of worship.

Summary

In the first chapter Peterson starts with the genesis of true worship in the Old Testament. He emphasizes that God's revelation and redemption are monergistic, and true worship originates from God not man. Only by God's gracious initiative can sinful man have a lasting and meaningful relationship with God. It is in this context that God gave the law, implemented sacrifice, and gave the dimensions for temple worship.

Chapter 2 helps the reader understand worship by looking at a word study of all the technical Greek and Hebrew words for worship. Here again worship begins with God's invitation and not man's invention. With worship defined by God, adoration, obedience, and reverence become to the appropriate responses to God's revelation and redemption.

Chapters 3-4 center on Jesus. Here Christ surpasses and supplants the temple, while his death confirms and inaugurates the new covenant. From Matthew's gospel, Peterson demonstrates how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise that God would reside with men. This is made more explicit in John's gospel, where Jesus becomes the place where true worshipers would pay homage to God. In regards to the new covenant, Peterson walks through Jesus personal worship and obedience toward the Father. Yet, his main thrust focuses on Jesus' death as consummation for the new covenant. Participation in his death consequently provides entrance for believers into the benefits of the new covenant sealed with Jesus blood.

Chapter 5 draws on the community aspect of temple worship and records how the disciples of Jesus related to one another in a Spirit of worship. Peterson begins by positing that the temple was the place where God revealed himself. Yet, Peterson's emphasis does not remain vertical throughout the chapter. Beginning in this chapter, he explains how worship is carried out horizontally within the community of faith. Peterson looks at the disciplines of the word, fellowship, and prayer in their corporate setting and describes how each are facets of worship.

Chapters 6-7 continue this appraisal of horizontal worship. Peterson says this, "The aim of this chapter (6) is to uncover the substructure of worship theology in Paul's writing. The following chapter (7) focuses on his teaching about the gathering of the church" (166). The horizontal aspects unfurled in these two chapters then have to do first with the gospel and its proclamation to unbelievers inviting them to true worship. The next chapter addresses the dynamics of church life among believers. Here Peterson deftly draws with broad strokes important worship themes found in many of the letters written by Paul. Some of those themes in chapter 6 include worship as a consecrated lifestyle, worship that God receives as acceptable, and sacrificial giving and martyrdom as worship. Then in chapter 7 Peterson focuses on congregational worship and its design to edify fellow worshipers as they exalt God.

Chapter 8 isolates the teaching of Hebrews. Here again, Jesus is the centerpiece. As the greatest high priest and the most valuable sacrifice, Peterson shows the perfect work and worship of Christ. More than that, he reinforces the necessity for sin's atonement in worship.

Chapter 9 is the culminating chapter on worship with a vision of heaven found in the book of Revelation. With a historical hermeneutic, Peterson shows how the Revelation contrasts true Christian worship with the pagan emperor worship present in John's day. Moving from this historical context, Peterson shows how earthly worship should model heavenly worship.

Ultimately, Revelation shows Christians that we as worshipers are to worship the triune God in obedience and song as the Creator, Redeemer, Victor, and Faithful God.

David Peterson concludes his study with a chapter connecting worship with the gospel. Reiterating all the highlights already mentioned, he finishes with this statement, “Through the gospel message of God’s mercy in Christ, and through his Spirit, men and women from all nations are united in his praise and service. (288)”

Critical Evaluation

In *Engaging with God* David Peterson aims to provide a Biblical theological framework for worship, and he does just that. As he unfolds the Bible’s teachings on worship from Genesis to Revelation it is evident that the Bible is truly a book about worship. And more specifically, it is a book that tells those made in the image of God how they are to worship their Maker with reverent hearts and obedient hands.

There are many features of this book that make it outstanding. First is its Biblical theological approach. Instead of severing Scripture from its historical-grammatical context, Peterson faithfully preserves the Bible’s unity and makes a theological study along the progressive revelation of Scripture. Doing this takes into account greater sections of Scripture, it shows the stream of worship running through the Bible, and adequately covers all of the themes that a more systematic approach would likewise cover.

Second, the readability of the book is incredibly helpful. Peterson does a great job communicating deep theological truths with plain speech. Likewise, the format of the book is helpful in synthesizing the wealth of information disseminated throughout each chapter. Because the volume of Scripture covered is so great, the subdivisions and groupings along Biblical lines are incredibly helpful for retention. Instead of delineating ideas according to

systematic themes, the use of book-by-book exposition was both fresh and effective in communicating the truth of Scripture. Future reflection on books like Romans, 1 Thessalonians, and Ephesians will now have an element of worship highlighted in them.

Third, Peterson's willingness to take time to labor in the Scriptures is evident. His conclusions reveal his diligence. In light of all the books available providing shallow or truncated analyses of worship, Peterson's work standouts as a comprehensive study of a complex subject. Likewise, his willingness to connect theology to practice is also appreciated. This can be seen in his comments regarding the arrangement of furniture in church for greater corporate fellowship and edification (215), his critique of theologically impotent worship songs (278), and his call to revisit the practice of communion in local churches (218).

Yet, his book remains more theoretical than practical. While professors, seminary students, and most pastors will be able to wade through this extensive book, many lay people will not be able to tackle such a hefty book. Many people will fail to have the interest or endurance to work through a book of this depth and length. Peterson does such a good job teasing out all that Scripture has to offer about worship that the final product becomes more of a reference piece than a book on Christian living. It is informative, but not inspiring. Though it will help man think rightly about worship, it will not set a man's soul on fire to worship.

Though, it must be said, Christianity needs both kinds of books.

Still for the pastor or worship leader this is a must read. Its faithfulness to the text of Scripture, its willingness to address a variety of sticky worship issues, and its exacting, evangelical approach make it a work that will help form the theology of worship for many years to come. Many readers and writers of more practical worship books will be aided by this straight-edge for Christian worship.

Conclusion

Overall, David Peterson's *Engaging with God* is a thoughtful, thorough look at all of what the Bible has to say about worship. It asks the question, "What does the Bible have to say about worship?" and then faithfully, exegetically answers that question. Unlike other books on any number of subjects, it does not merely use Scripture to advocate a pre-existing set of opinions. It rather goes through all the parts of the Bible pertinent to the subject of worship and reports what it finds. Peterson should be commended for his Biblical theological approach, and we as readers, and expositors of the Word, should be reminded that this is the kind of study we should pursue. Through much study and toil, Peterson has written a book that informs the reader of what the Bible teaches on worship and thus how men and women made to worship can acceptably worship the God who has revealed himself in the Bible.