



how worship can  
destroy the world

# how worship can destroy the world

slides will be available at  
[brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net)

how worship can  
destroy the world

just keep worshipping exactly as we've  
been worshipping since 1607 ... exactly  
as we're worshipping now.

while we've been happily worshipping ...

this beautiful planet has been plundered  
and raped, treated like a stolen bank  
account or a trash dump or a sewer,  
while churches worship on, obliviously.

while we've been happily worshipping ...

this cries of the poor have gone unheard, the power of the super-rich has multiplied rapidly, the gap between the rich minority and poor majority has become a gaping chasm, all to the accompaniment of organs, pianos, guitars, and drums, with polite Presbyterian "amens" and raucous Pentecostal "hallelujahs!".

while we've been happily worshipping ...

racism resurges,  
antisemitism and islamophobia intensify,  
more and more people live by the gun and die  
by the gun,  
and church members pray for peace in theory  
but know nothing of what makes for peace in  
practice. So they buy more bombs, drones,  
and guns, and use them in jesus' name.

our system is perfectly designed  
to yield the results we are now getting.

if we do what we've always done,  
we'll get what we've always got.



how worship can  
destroy the world:

just keep worshipping exactly as we've  
been worshipping since 1607.

thank you.



1. worship that celebrates an evacuation plan for “us” and leaves the earth and “them” to destruction ... destroys the world.

1. worship that celebrates an evacuation plan for “us” and leaves the earth and “them” to destruction ... destroys the world.

because it teaches us to seek first our own “eternal security” and personal well-being - breaking solidarity with our neighbors and selling out the earth to the highest bidder.

2. worship that puts God on our side as “the chosen people,” and therefore creates a sense of spiritual elitism, religious supremacy, and excessive, unreflective confidence ... destroys the world.

2. worship that puts God on our side as “the chosen people,” and therefore creates a sense of spiritual elitism, religious supremacy, and excessive, unreflective confidence ... destroys the world.

because it gives us permission to dominate, exclude, and seek our own interests, even to the harm of other humans and other living creatures.

3. worship that frames the story of the universe as a cosmic war that ends in eternal conscious bliss for us winners and eternal conscious torment for the losers ... destroys the world.



3. worship that frames the story of the universe as a cosmic war that ends in eternal conscious bliss for us winners and eternal conscious torment for the losers ... destroys the world.

because it leads to colonialism, torture, cruelty, and offense/defense rather than dialogue.

4. worship that renders “us” clean and  
“them” unclean ... destroys the world.

4. worship that renders “us” clean and  
“them” unclean ... destroys the world.

because it leads to “ethnic cleansing”  
and genocide, not to mention  
scapegoating and racism/nativism/  
nationalism.

5. worship that empowers toxic masculinity, bureaucratic or charismatic patriarchy, and the suppression/stigmatization of women and LGBTQ people ... destroys the world.

5. worship that empowers toxic masculinity, bureaucratic or charismatic patriarchy, and the suppression/stigmatization of women and LGBTQ people ... destroys the world.

because it denies what the gospel makes clear: God's way subverts patriarchy, so that in Christ, there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.

6. worship that reduces jesus to a variable in a cosmic damnation/salvation equation, or demotes Jesus to the level of “personal savior” ... destroys the world.

6. worship that reduces jesus to a variable in a cosmic damnation/salvation equation, or demotes Jesus to the level of “personal savior” ... destroys the world.

because it shrinks the gospel to a consumer product and detaches the life and ministry of Jesus from a God who created the world, loves the world, and inhabits the world.

7. worship that celebrates magical skyhooks and guarantees the “everything is under control” ... destroys the world.



7. worship that celebrates magical skyhooks and guarantees the “everything is under control” ... destroys the world.

because it allows us to be piously, naively, and irresponsibly complacent about injustice, and therefore complicit in it.

8. worship that requires us to say & sing “lord, lord” but doesn’t equip us to do what Christ taught and modeled, or to believe things about him and even worship him but not follow him and be formed in his mind/spirit... destroys the world.

8. worship that requires us to say & sing “lord, lord” but doesn’t equip us to do what Christ taught and modeled, or to believe things about him and even worship him but not follow him and be formed in his mind/spirit... destroys the world.

because jesus said we are the salt of the earth and light of the world, just as he is, and that we would do greater things than he had done ...

9. worship that tries to make us feel good rather than be good ... destroys the world.

9. worship that tries to make us feel good rather than be good ... destroys the world.

because it renders us fans rather than followers and embodiments of Christ.

10. worship that teaches us to seek forgiveness without seeking repentance, and to seek forgiveness without learning forgiveness, and to evade justice without seeking first God's commonwealth and justice ... destroys the world.

10. worship that teaches us to seek forgiveness without seeking repentance, and to seek forgiveness without learning forgiveness ... destroys the world.

because it allows us to do the unthinkable and gain instant, free, convenient, easy absolution, and it is focused on evading justice (defined as punishment) without seeking first God's commonwealth and justice (defined as making wrongs right).

11. worship that relies on authoritarian  
(even quasi-inerrant) leaders and  
compliant (even quasi-cultic) members ...  
destroys the world.



11. worship that relies on authoritarian  
(even quasi-inerrant) leaders and  
compliant (even quasi-cultic) members ...  
destroys the world.

because it renders us susceptible to  
demagogues and con artists who demand  
trust and obedience under threat of  
banishment, punishment, and death.

12. worship that motivates primarily through fear, guilt, and shame ... destroys the world.

12. worship that motivates primarily through fear, guilt, and shame ... destroys the world.

because it renders us easily to manipulate with fear, guilt, and shame, rather than alive and free in the Spirit of empowerment, love, and a sound mind.

13. worship that serves as a chaplaincy to an extractive and exploitive economy and a covert white supremacist ideology, all the while boasting in its correctness of doctrine, hierarchy, liturgy, and polity ... destroys the world.

13. worship that serves as a chaplaincy to an extractive and exploitive economy and a covert white supremacist ideology, all the while boasting in its correctness of doctrine, hierarchy, liturgy, and polity ... destroys the world.

because it teaches us to strain at gnats  
and swallow camels.

14. worship that spiritualizes poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... but never addresses actual poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... destroys the world.

14. worship that spiritualizes poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... but never addresses actual poverty, slavery, sickness, and hunger ... destroys the world

because it raptures us into an alt reality rather than deploying us for mission in this actual reality.

15. worship that lives by the donor and therefore dies by the donor because it is afraid to challenge or confront the donor ... destroys the world.



15. worship that lives by the donor and therefore dies by the donor because it is afraid to challenge or confront the donor ... destroys the world.

because it is held hostage by its donors and the values of the economic and political systems that have made them wealthy.

16. worship that claims to be divinely  
sanctioned in form and content ...  
destroys the world

16. worship that claims to be divinely  
sanctioned in form and content ...  
destroys the world

because it is blind to its ethnic origins, incapable  
of being changed, and bound to the cultures and  
conditions of its sacred texts, rendering it  
incapable of adapting to address the emergencies  
of our current (and constantly changing) world.

But just imagine if every experience of worship - every element of worship - rooted and formed us in the Spirit of justice, joy, and peace ...

helping us celebrate the God who made and loves **all creation**, who loves **all people** (no exceptions), and who empowers and deploys us as **spiritual activists** who work for peace and justice in all dimensions of our lives.

The very practice that has effectively pacified people and lulled them to sleep could awaken, inspire, activate, and empower them to become agents of change ...

filled with the Spirit of justice, joy, and peace ... as lifelong spiritual activists in a growing spiritual movement, following the way of life modeled by Jesus, our liberator and leader.

# how worship can destroy the world

slides will be available at  
[brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net)

