

Short articles on the elements of Evangelical Worship

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Worship in SW Denver Evangelical Churches

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.Soundliving.org

Between September of 2009 and February of 2011 I visited nearly 50 churches in south/southwest area of metro-Denver, Colorado. Admittedly this is a small sampling drawn from a very specific part of the country. I don't pretend that it represents all of evangelicalism in America but I do suspect it represents more than just Denver.

Churches visited:

Evangelical Lutheran ELCA
 Lutheran Church Missouri Synod
 Southern Baptist
 Conservative Baptist
 Independent Baptist

Baptist General Conference
 Reformed Baptist
 Evangelical Mennonite Brethren
 Evangelical Presbyterian
 Presbyterian Church in America

Presbyterian Church USA
Sovereign Grace
Episcopal
Anglican
Calvary Chapels
Evangelical Free
Christian Reformed
Bible Church
Evangelical Covenant
Independent Community
Independent Charismatic

My bias as I visited was that there are Biblically mandated elements of corporate worship (Acts 2:41-47; Hebrews 10:25) which include:

- The Word – Read aloud (1 Timothy 3:13), Preached (2 Timothy 4:2) and applied (Nehemiah 8:8))
- Sacraments – (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26) Lord's Supper and Baptism The sacraments (ordinances) are a means of grace (but not salvific).
- Prayers – (1 Timothy 2:1,8) of corporate praise, thanksgiving, confession & petition The worship and catechetical nature of public prayer.
- Praise in song – (Acts 2:47; Colossians 3:16) by the congregation (not just a few musicians)
- Offering – (1 Corinthians 16:2) as an act of corporate worship

Other biases I carried were:

- A desire to allow for Awe/Reverence; to allow for transcendence as well as imminence.
- A concern with beauty – Our God is beautiful – Everything from the heart of the worshipers, the worship we offer (music/songs, etc) even to the facility in which we worship should strive to reflect the beauty of our God.

Observations of worship in Denver Churches in 2010-12:

- With some good exceptions (noted further below) I found too many churches minimizing or disregarding many of the basic elements of worship:
- The Word is preached better than I expected but seldom read.
- The sacraments are observed infrequently and when they are they seem to have little place or importance in the worship.
- Prayer is truncated at best (often no more than a few seconds in an entire service of worship).
- The “praise” (music) sounds much the same everywhere; Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) addressing a narrow range of

theological issues and Christian experience) with varying degrees of expertise. And in only a few churches are many congregants actually singing.

- Offerings are often received with no effort at connecting them to the worship of God.
- With exceptions, the Anglicans and Lutherans seem to appreciate all the elements except the preaching of the word, which is less likely to be substantial in content (more homilies than sermons).
- With exceptions, The Reformed and Presbyterian churches appreciate more of the elements of worship than other “evangelical” churches.
- In all of the churches the trend seems to be to CCM praise with the liabilities noted above and below.

As noted above there are several concerns about the music:

- There was a narrow range of theological concepts articulated in the lyrics. Compare that with a typical hymnal topical index.
- There was a narrow range of Christian experience reflected in the lyrics (and music) – celebration and romanticism almost exclusive of sorrow, reverence, meditation, etc.
- There was a man-centered emphasis in many songs. “My worship, my love, my response,” etc. consistent with the romanticism noted above.
- Apparently little regard is shown for the catechetical nature of songs.
- There seems to be even less regard for objective beauty (audio or visual); it seems too many have accepted that “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” or “ear of the listener.”
- There seems to be a greater concern for the people who aren’t there than the ones who are – apparent confusion over pre-evangelism and worship. Greater concern with what is accepted (popular) than what is acceptable (regulative principle?).

What follows are a series of short articles on the elements of worship.

The Reading of the Scriptures in Public Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson
www.Soundliving.org

What happened to the public reading of God's Word?

A visit to many "evangelical" churches will confirm how few give serious attention to this biblically mandated part of corporate worship. Maybe some would suggest that in a highly literate culture where most have access to printed Bibles, public reading of the Scriptures is not as necessary. But the real issue is not whether people can read but do they read the Bible.

But even if people do read the Bible on their, the Bible illustrates and declares that public reading is to be part of God-directed and God-centered worship. Consider the following passages:

1 Timothy 4:13 "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching." (ESV) Though the Greek word "public" is not in the manuscript, almost all major English translations insert the word because of the definite article ("the") used with the word "reading" and the context of the public acts of "exhortation" and "teaching."

Luke 4:16-17 "And he (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and he entered, *as his custom was*, into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And he opened the book, and found the place where it was written (and he read)..." (NIV)

Ezra 8:2-3 "And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until midday... (NIV)

It is important that we do not allow the sermon to become a substitute for the reading of the Bible. Both are necessary. Clay Schmit (author of The Public Reading of Scripture) points out that the sermon is really a secondary proclamation, God speaking through a preacher. "Reading the Word is God's direct proclamation to us. You are called upon to be the human embodiment of the Word of God when you read Scripture publicly," he says. <http://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/soaking-in-scripture-memorization-and-public-reading/>

If you look again at the Ezra 8 passage you do have to ask yourself how practical it would be to read the Bible aloud each Sunday for 5-6 hours. And if you read further in that 8th chapter you find that the people stood for the reading (for 5 hours?).

Some suggestions for making the public reading of Scripture a joy and not a burden for listeners:

- Select readers whose voices are pleasant to the ear and easily understood and who are teachable as to public reading.
- The reader should know the passage and context well to be able to accurately communicate the intention of the writer.
- The reader should read the text with proper expression (the kind of expression that communicates the ideas accurately). A monotone reading or, conversely, an overly dramatic reading will detract.
- Select carefully the number of verses to be included in the reading. The passage needs to be long enough to capture the main idea of the text selected but not so long as to be difficult for people to maintain attention.
- Encourage people to follow along in their own Bibles (best) or with the text projected for all to see – what we **see** and hear is usually better comprehended.
- Use variety in the reading – responsive readings, two or more readers if it is a narrative dialog, etc.
- If the reader is visible to the listeners they should dress so as not to distract thus detract.
- Practice, practice, practice.

For more information see:

Reading the Bible and Praying in Public by Stuart Olyott (Banner of Truth)

The Public Reading of Scripture Clay Schmit (Abingdon)

The Anglican tradition (along with others) does three readings each Sunday with the Gospel reading done among the people. One Anglican priest explained it this way: “The NT, OT, and Psalm are typically read/led from the lectern and the gospel reading is read in the midst of the people with the people standing. The imagery reflects Jesus coming among his people. The gospel in the midst of the people proclaims in outward form the doctrine of the incarnation.”

Prayer in Public Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson

www.Soundliving.org

It was over 20 years ago that Gordon MacDonald changed my understanding and practice on the subject of public prayer in worship (“The Cleansing Power of Public Prayer” in *Leadership*, Winter Quarter, 1987). Since then I have read a number of books and articles on the subject (see suggested books below) and am more convinced than ever that prayer should have a significant role in our public worship services. In many evangelical churches I have discovered there is a lack of public prayer. Prayers when offered are but a few sentences (or less) and seem either obligatory or as mere segues in the order of service. **In too many churches, thoughtful, pastorally-significant, biblically-based prayers are infrequent.**

In a well-intentioned attempt to create greater intimacy and genuineness in public prayer many pastors/worship leaders have reduced public prayer to inviting all people to pray their own private prayers at the same time (usually silently). It is as if the intention is to create a private devotional experience in a corporate setting. Obviously, private prayer is very important in the life of the Christian but that is (or ought to be) a different subject than the corporate prayer in public worship about which I am here writing. Certainly Christianity is very personal but it is not private. The Bible

has much more to say about our life together as the people of God than it does about our private experiences. Even the prayer the Lord taught his disciples is corporate (note the plural pronouns and context).

While intentionality should be exercised in prayers of invocation, confession, thanksgiving and benedictions I am here speaking mostly to what was once called the “pastoral prayer” – that usually longer, substantively-inclusive prayer offered in the main body of the worship experience. For that “pastoral prayer,” I am now an advocate for carefully crafted prayers that accomplish several important objectives:

- Lead the people into the presence of the living God in a respectful and thought-filled way. The pastor’s words and demeanor should communicate that we are on holy ground.
- Express our corporate gratitude and plead our corporate cause. The pastor should speak on behalf of his people and himself.
- Teach the people how to pray. Our private prayers can tend to be spontaneous, self-serving and short. The public worship service is an excellent time to demonstrate prayers that are thoughtful, centered on God and his kingdom and long enough to be obviously substantive (but short enough and eloquent enough to hold one’s attention). The pastor can model the appropriate full range of prayer – adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (though not necessarily in every prayer).

You will notice I presuppose the pastor leads such prayer. I clearly believe that such prayer can be effectively led by women as well as men and by non-elders as well as elders (pastors). But as a pastor I am jealous for that weekly opportunity to “pastor,” in this unique way, the people God has given to me as his under shepherd.

Leading such intentional prayers require that we give greater than usual attention to preparing both our hearts and our words. I found that it took upwards of an hour to carefully determine **what** should be prayed for in a

particular prayer and **how** it should be worded so that my words became the people's words; they were following me into the presence of God.

For help in how to lead in public prayer I suggest the following works some of which are instructional and others illustrative:

Leading in Prayer Hughes Oliphant Old

The Pastor's Public Ministry Terry Johnson

Mother Kirk Douglas Wilson

A Method for Prayer Matthew Henry

A Guide to Prayer Isaac Watt

Valley of Vision Puritan prayers edited by Arthur Bennett

The Prayers of John Wesley

The Role of Offerings in Public Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

Why does a church take an offering? Is it to get the money or to worship God? Some churches don't even receive an offering in public worship preferring it to be collected in a receptacle in the back or by mail. Others treat the offering as merely a time to get the money with announcements or some other unrelated activity being done during the offering time. Beyond a short prayer (only sometimes), there is no reference to the offering as an integral part of our corporate worship.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, 1 Corinthians 16:2 "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..."

We want to give opportunity for all of us (God's people) to publicly express our gratitude for God's grace by giving sacrificially from what God has given us. Thus we will encourage regular giving in the public worship services as a biblically commanded and approved expression of our worship.

An offering is an act of fellowship - giving to meet the needs of others and giving according to what one has. An offering provides an example to our children.

How do we demonstrate our giving as an act of worship? Certainly the attitudes of our hearts are key, but our actions are the only windows into our hearts. Receiving the offerings and presenting the offerings with reference to them as a gift to our Lord and his kingdom work is important.

How can we use EFTs (electronic funds transfer) or periodic checks and still participate in the corporate aspect of giving as worship?

Provide cards/envelopes that worshipers place in the offering receptacle as symbolic of their EFT. We might also encourage donors to participate by additionally giving a few dollars in cash each week that will be used for benevolence.

The EFT might actually be a better system for “first fruits” giving than the “left over” giving of so many; It is still a matter of the heart not the amount or method of the giving.

“It’s important to understand the offering as a liturgical act. A recent trend in churches is to simply have a box in the back of the church for people to give their offerings after the service or during the week. Another trend is to have offerings automatically withdrawn from your bank account. These churches do not want to be seen as “money-grubbers”—but are they presenting a biblical view of the offering? Biblically the offering is an act of worship that takes place specifically within the worship service. Every single time worship is mentioned in the New Testament, the offering is one of the items on the liturgical “to-do list.” It’s mentioned more often than preaching! Add to this the overwhelming amount of instruction given to offerings in the Old Testament, and it becomes clear that God cares about how we give. Therefore the offering should be part of our worship service and is worth doing well.”

Kathy Smith Associate director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. <http://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-2011/scripture-reading-offering>

What songs shall we sing in worship?

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

Biblically and historically singing is a significant part of the worship of our Lord. Because lyrics matter, we wish to select songs that best enable us to both learn about our God (as he has revealed himself in Scripture) and to express our love to him. Therefore we have set forth the following criteria for the selection of our songs.

1st The songs we sing should convey enough truth about God to be worth memorizing and singing both privately and publicly.

2nd The songs we sing is that they should reflect the fullness of our God's person and work.

Not necessarily on any one Sunday but over many weeks, the songs should reflect the breadth of our God's character and grace. Robert Godfrey wrote, "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 severs Law from Gospel and repentance from faith." (W. Robert Godfrey "The Reformation of Worship" in [Here We Stand](#) by Boice and Sasse, 1996)

3rd The music we use should fit the content of the song.

Not every song can match the music to the words as well as the "Hallelujah Chorus" or "A Mighty Fortress is our God," but it should be our aim.

4th The music and lyrics should be sing-able by a congregation.

5th The music and lyrics should be easy to remember.

What songs will our children and we know from memory in the years to come? What songs will inform their and our thoughts and be the basis of our private worship? I want our worship to become unself-conscious. C.S.Lewis wrote, "As long as you notice and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you

don't have to notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about ...print or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God." (Letter to Malcolm, 4)

6th The sound of the music should not overwhelm the voices of the congregation. The purpose of the instruments in congregational singing is to support the primary instruments, which are the voices of the people.

What to Believe – The Apostles' Creed Enduring Elements of Public Worship (part 1)

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

Thomas Aquinas said we must know:

What to believe (The Apostles' Creed)

How to live (The Ten Commandments)

What to pray for (The Lord's Prayer)

These are the core issues of life and they are answered in the Creed (What to believe), the Commandments (How to live) and the Prayer (What to pray for). Peter Kreeft in Knowing the Truth of God's Love 1988 p44-47

What to believe? The answer to that question is longer than we usually have time to explain. In fact, we often don't know where to begin to give an answer. For hundreds of years the "Apostles' Creed" has been a common statement of faith for Christians all over the world. Forms of it appear as early as A.D. 140 and full versions as early as A.D. 460. Though not written by the apostles it is based in Scripture. It has become for many of us Christians a concise statement of our own belief – a shorthand way of expressing the fundamentals of our faith. It is also, importantly, short enough to memorize and readily bring to mind. When recited together we remember we are the new people of God **here, all over the world, and throughout the past 20 centuries.** Ephesians 2:19 "*you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of*

God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. We do well to commit it to memory and declare to ourselves and each other what we believe. I commend it to the church as a regular part of worship.

Next we will consider "How to live - The Ten Commandments" and "What to pray for – The Lord's Prayer."

What to Pray for - The Lord's Prayer

Enduring Elements of Public Worship (part 2)

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

In Luke 11:2 Jesus' disciples said to him, "Teach us to pray." Jesus' response was what we call "The Lord's Prayer." While there are many other prayers in the Bible from which we can learn much about prayer, none other is **explicitly a model** for our prayer. Both because it came in response to the specific request to "teach" us to pray and also because it is a relatively comprehensive prayer, we do well to model our own prayers on it.

Thomas Aquinas said we must know:

- What to believe (The Apostles' Creed)
- What to pray for (The Lord's Prayer)
- How to live (The Ten Commandments)

We serve people (including our children) a great service by incorporating these three elements in worship frequently that they know them from memory and can recall them in many other life-situations.

I wish, here, to address the issue of The Lord's Prayer (sometimes referred to as the "Our Father"). The Protestant churches of the Reformation found the Lord's Prayer to be essential teaching, including it in the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechisms and Luther's Catechism. For centuries the

church has prayed the Lord's Prayer when gathered together. Teaching and praying this prayer together in our corporate worship services gives Christians a ready reminder of the God-ordained core subjects of our prayers. Michael Brown has written a helpful article on the reason for often including the Lord's Prayer in our public worship. You will find it at:

http://www.christurc.org/articles/why_pray_lords_prayer.pdf

In our private prayers also we would do well to take the time to pray often as our Lord taught us. Meditate on each petition and put the prayer in your own words. Come to the Father; he is ready and able to respond. My own example follows:

“Our Father who art in heaven”

You are not just my Father, but “Our” Father, and not just the transcendent, sovereign, creator Deity but our ever-present, intimate “Father” who truly exists and is the sustainer and lover of our souls. To you we pray because on you we are dependent.

“Hallowed be your name”

Make your name holy, give your name the highest place and honor, and make your name known and experienced by everyone. Be God, in all your glory, power and sufficiency, so we may be your children.

“Your kingdom come”

Father, make your kingdom come. We need you to act. Revive your people, save us from ourselves. Bring in the full authority, power and presence of your kingdom rule and let it begin with me! Father, break down my “kingdoms”, show me how bankrupt they are, and let me see my desperate need for you to act.

“Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”

Father, do what you have planned and promised. Work your gracious will in such ways that we will be saved and that history will move to the end that you have in mind — a total transformation of this world. Do it God! Do it! And make me open and responsive to your will in my life today.

“Give us this day our daily bread”

Father, meet our physical needs today. We are dependent on you in every detail of life, and content with and grateful for what you provide.

“And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”

We ask your forgiveness of us even as we ask you to enable us to forgive those who have sinned against us. We know that only our openness to forgive others opens our own hearts to receive your forgiveness. Help us, Father.

“And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil”

Father, keep us today from succumbing to subtle but evil temptations that wage war on our souls and Father, keep the evil one from overpowering us today.

“For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen”

You are the One who is worthy (it’s your kingdom), and able (it’s your power) to do what we have requested, and to you alone (not us) belongs the praise (glory) forever. To you we pray because on you we are dependent.

How to live - The Ten Commandments

Enduring Elements of Public Worship (part 3)

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

Thomas Aquinas said we must know:

What to believe (The Apostles’ Creed)

What to pray for (The Lord’s Prayer)

How to live (The Ten Commandments)

Today I wish to address the issue of the 10 Commandments . Following Christ means something and the Bible, including the law, tells us what it

means. Obedience to the law is one way of bearing witness to the reality and beauty of God. We don't only sing songs in our worship services we also obey God in our everyday lives. Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Yes, that includes specific deeds (not lying, not stealing, etc) but it is so much more than mere compliance – it is a lifestyle reflecting our Lord to the world around us. **Thoughtless children and legalists think only of complying with the letter of the law. One who loves God thinks of the spirit of the law as well.**

The Bible is not a "morality manual with an index we flip through to find answers." (Peter Enns in [Romans](#) p383) God always meant for his people to love and obey HIM not just his laws. And he always meant for it to be from our hearts. "Oh that their HEARTS would be inclined...to keep all my commands always..." "These commands I give you today are to be upon your HEARTS." "I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my HEART."

So what is my relationship to the moral law of God? That law expressed in the 10 Commandments and expressed in the commands of the New Testament gives us insight into the very heart of our Savior. Each command reveals the character of God and my privilege to bear his image in my life. My response is to the one who gives the law not to the law in and of itself. I must never detach my obedience to God's commands from my relationship with Jesus; I am following HIM. And that means I want to know what he thinks, how he acts and what he loves, that I may think, act and love as he does.

As we look at each moral imperative, each written reflection of the character of God given in the 10 Commandments (and seen perfectly in the person of Jesus) we seek to know Him that we may be more like him. We are not legalists; we are lovers – lovers of God. Is the moral law of God binding on us? Yes, because we are bound to Jesus. We are saved by his grace and desire to reflect his image.

While it is possible to summarize the commands as Jesus did to “loving God and neighbor,” it is also possible to recite lengthy lists of commands as in Romans 12:9-21 (Yes, the NT has commands). But in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament the 10 Commandments were known to be brief enough and yet give sufficient specificity to form a memorable summary of the will of God. For that reason and others the 10 Commandments have been recited by the Christian church for centuries. We would do well to emulate their example and include it often in our public worship so as to teach it and to remember the breadth of the will of God for our lives.

For further reading I recommend “The Law of God in the Life of the Christian” and “The Beauty of God in the Beauty of the Law” found at www.soundliving.org “Books” “Ten Commandments”

An Open Letter to the Church regarding the Lord’s Supper

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

I wish for you to consider the following three issues regarding the Lord’s Supper:

1. The Lord’s Supper is **a means of evangelism** for the **unbeliever**.
2. The Lord’s Supper is **a means of grace** for the **believer**.
3. We must be cautious that we don’t turn the Lord’s Supper into an evangelical “confession and penance” ritual wherein we repudiate the very gospel we claim to proclaim.

One observation of many of the evangelical churches I have visited in the past three years (40+ and counting) is that the Lord’s Supper is observed rather infrequently, with little explanation as to its efficacy and with little connection to the rest of the worship. One argument advanced for the infrequent observance is that the Lord’s Supper is perceived to be less “friendly” to unbelievers. I suspect the rationale is that if we desire to be more open to newcomers who might be less familiar with the Lord’s Supper, we might consider reducing the times per month

that we observe it. Unfortunately, with that thinking we pit “evangelism” against the Lord’s Supper.

1. The Lord’s Supper is a means of evangelism for the unbeliever.

What is odd about such thinking is that it is the very opposite of what Scripture says of the Lord’s Supper. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26 “*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord’s death until he comes.*” That word “proclaim” is used throughout the NT to refer to the proclamation of the Gospel message. It therefore seems that one of the benefits of observing the Lord’s Supper is that it is a powerful visual demonstration of the very Gospel that unbelievers need to hear and receive. The International Critical Commentary refers to the Lord’s Supper as “an acted sermon, an acted proclamation of the death which it commemorates.” (1 Corinthians, p 249)

Contrary to thinking that the Lord’s Supper is counterproductive to evangelism, **the Bible indicates that the Lord’s Supper is a means of evangelism.** It is reasonable to still discuss the *frequency* of the Lord’s Supper but *not on the grounds that it inhibits evangelism.* **Regardless of the text of Scripture that is being preached on any given Sunday and regardless of the theme of the worship music we sing, the Lord’s Supper gives us occasion to reiterate visually, tactilely, and certainly verbally the basic message of the cross. That I submit is evangelism at its most potent.**

2. The Lord’s Supper is a means of grace for the believer.

Now just as importantly, the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace. There is mystery in this but not magic. I must start with what that does not mean. Sacramentalism is a view that, when blessed, the bread and the cup bring God’s saving grace to the recipient even if the recipient doesn’t believe. In other words the bread and cup become inherently and automatically effective. This we reject as totally unbiblical and damning to souls.

So if we reject such a magical view, what do we accept? When we say it is a “means of grace” we declare that by it God grants His grace to us whereby we are spiritually benefited. When, for example, seeking to hear from God, we humbly read God’s Word, the Holy Spirit supernaturally minister’s God’s grace to us nurturing our faith. The reading of the Word of God with faith becomes a means of grace.

Likewise, but even more particularly, as we participate in the Lord's Supper, humbly seeking the Lord Jesus in faith, He comes to us in the bread and cup. He is not physically present, but He is really and truly spiritually present. Pastor and theologian, Robert Letham, wrote, "Thus in the (Lord's Supper) the Holy Spirit unites the faithful (people) to the person of Christ as they eat and drink the signs, the physical elements of bread and wine. There is an inseparable (joining) of sign and reality. As truly as we eat the bread and drink the wine, so we feed on Christ by faith...The role of those who take the bread and cup is, therefore, to believe and receive." (Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 28-29)

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus says it is like eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In other words, by faith we are taking Him in, trusting Him, reaffirming our faith, declaring anew our belief and trust in Him. And in that He ministers His grace to us to believe. There is a mysterious synergy in this that we cannot fully explain.

He offers us Himself in the bread and cup.

We obey and eat and drink, believing Him.

He ministers His grace to us to trust Him more fully.

In a well-known passage in John 6, after miraculously feeding bread to thousands of people, Jesus refers to Himself as the bread of life. Then Jesus says plainly, "*For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*" (John 6:40 – Emphasis Added) The point is that He, in His very person, is the life they need. But to press the point that it is Jesus, Himself, that they need, He uses metaphors for what He has already said, when He says again, "*Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.*" (John 6:54) Certainly we see the parallel between verses 54 and 40. When we trust in Jesus He does not physically come into us but He does truly come into us spiritually.

Likewise, when we come to Jesus' words, in the Lord's Supper, about the bread being His body and the drink being His blood, we see that He is not saying that He is physically present in the bread and drink or that He physically enters us in the bread and drink. He is saying that He is spiritually present and He comes to us. The ingesting of the bread and drink corresponds to the spiritual indwelling of Christ in us. He is part of our very spiritual beings, as food becomes part of our physical beings. This is a mystery to be sure but no less declared by God's word.

Until the day we see Him face to face, there could be no sweeter, more intimate, fellowship with Jesus than what He offers us in the bread and cup. He comes to us – He comes into us to commune with us, reassure us, and strengthen us. It seems life-giving that we would observe such a means of grace more frequently not less frequently.

3. We must be cautious that we don't turn the Lord's Supper into an evangelical "confession and penance" ritual wherein we repudiate the very gospel we claim to proclaim.

I want to deal briefly with what I think is a misunderstanding about Paul's warning in that same text: 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 *"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord **in an unworthy manner** will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to **examine himself** before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."*

Here is a section of the teaching that I think has caused no end of unnecessary mental suffering among God-fearing people especially those with sensitive consciences. The typical understanding of this passage is that the believer is to inspect his life to see if there is any unconfessed sin. Then feeling sufficiently sorry for it and confessing it, the believer is somehow made worthy again to take communion. And further, if we take communion without confessing our sins we eat and drink judgment on ourselves. If you think about it, it sounds very much like what we criticize in some Catholics who go to confession and do penance before they take communion. In this popular evangelical misunderstanding of this passage have we created a form of "evangelical" confession and penance before Communion?

Closer inspection of three words might relieve us of that misunderstanding. **First is the word, "unworthy."** Paul is not addressing your character, as if because of sin you are unworthy to take communion. **The Gospel message is that no one is worthy on their own and we are made worthy not by our "work" of confession but by Jesus' righteousness being given to us.** Instead Paul is describing certain actions that he has already been pointing out; the entire context is about how they were treating each other, namely how the "haves" were treating the "have nots."

The second word is "examine." Again, this is not some sort of morbid introspection attempting to ferret out any vestige of formerly unknown or

unconfessed sin. Paul is saying I want you to test yourself to see how genuine your motives and actions are particularly toward each other (see context).

That becomes clearer when we look at **the third word, “body”** in verse 29. You will recall that the problem Paul was addressing in Corinth was their lack of love for each other. That disregard for each other spilled over even into their participation in the Lord’s Supper. Paul describes their guilt as not “recognizing the body of the Lord.” It is not that they looked at the bread and said, “I don’t know what that is.” It is that they were claiming to belong to Christ and his church, as indicated by their participation in the Lord’s Supper, while at the same time sinning against their brothers and sisters in the Lord of which they have been made part.

Dr. Blomberg writes of this, “The (Lord’s Supper) should be a time of self-examination, not so much for past sins, though (true) repentance from them is always appropriate. Rather, Christians should consider their present attitudes toward those needier than themselves. This would lead to a radically different group of people who ought to refrain from the Lord’s Supper than usually appears. All repentant sinners are welcome, no matter how far away from God they may have recently felt. (But) all professing believers who are unprepared to give generously of their wealth to help the poor in their midst, or who treat people of lower classes as second-class citizens, or who simply remain unreconciled with fellow (believers), should refrain. Jesus’ words concerning a somewhat analogous situation remain remarkably relevant here too: ‘If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24).’” (The NIV Application Commentary) In 1 Corinthians 11 the Lord’s Supper explicitly calls for us to examine our attitudes and conduct toward other Christians, especially the poor. The usual call for introspection, confession and feeling sorry for our sins can lead too easily to a sense that we somehow make ourselves “worthy” to receive the Lord’s Supper.

If we believe it is necessary to refer to 1 Corinthians 11:27-28 in our Lord’s Supper ritual (“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”), I think it is imperative that we do so **only** in the context of Paul’s argument wherein the exact observance of the Lord’s Supper is not the issue but how they were treating each other is. (See also Gordon Fee in [The New International Commentary on the New Testament p561ff](#)) I

suggest that we focus instead on the grace of God given to us in and through Jesus Christ.

For the unbeliever in our midst and for the believer, I urge church leaders to reconsider the importance and frequency of participating in the Lord's Supper .

Is Baptism Necessary to be a Christian?

Dr. Jerry Nelson

www.Soundliving.org

An actual e-mail exchange of ideas:

Dear Pastor,

I have been doing a Bible study on baptism. I, myself, have not been baptized as an adult and was preparing to do this (by you, of course) but I wanted to understand the point of it before I did, lest it be a meaningless act. I'll spare you the details of my study but, in general, John the Baptist, Jesus, and others all drew a sharp distinction between water baptism and baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Apparently one receives the Holy Spirit upon acceptance of Christ, though it is unclear whether it requires the laying on of hands, etc. It would seem that at one point Jesus himself did not conduct water baptism while at other points he did. The disciples are never revealed to have been water baptized though John the B must have baptized at least some of them while they were yet his disciples. Baptism of the Holy Spirit seems to be a result of acceptance of Christ and NOT a second step. Thus if we accept Christ as our savior, we receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a result and it would seem that nothing more is needed for our salvation. Paul seems to stand for the idea that no works can bring about your salvation because the crucifixion was sufficient and thus it would seem that water baptism is just a public declaration of commitment to accept Jesus as Savior but not essential to salvation. I consulted a book authored by Billy Graham who says he is convinced that baptism is not necessary. Then I came across John 3:5 and Acts 2:38 (KJV). While Acts 2:38 makes water baptism the instruction of Peter, John 3:5 is where Jesus expostulates with emphasis ("verily, verily I say unto you") to Nicodemus that both water and spirit baptisms are EACH utterly indispensable for salvation. I am uncomfortable with an understanding of the legalistic ritualistic nature of water baptism being indispensable for salvation, yet that is what Christ says. I was baptized as an infant as

was my wife. I have never had a "confirmation" but my wife, who was raised Catholic, was "confirmed". From my study, I have concluded that being baptized as an infant is meaningless and a confirmation is not a baptism. So I think we both need to be baptized. My wife insists I'm drawing too many conclusions from John 3:5 and asked that I email you. I know you are busy but your opinion would be valued as a modern day Berean.

Awaiting your reply,

John

Dear John,

Thank you for your note. I fully agree with your understanding of the timing of "spirit" baptism as coincident with conversion. I might clarify your wording somewhat by saying that the baptism of the Spirit is the act of the Spirit whereby he joins us/immerses us in/unites us to Christ. I also concur with you that water baptism is not a "work" that is required of us to become a Christian. Water baptism is however commanded of us by our Lord and practiced by the church since its inception. Water baptism is not only a witness to what the Spirit has wrought inwardly but is also a means that God uses (as he uses other means such as worship, prayer, reading of the word, etc) to minister his grace to our lives as believers. These "means" do not save us but they are used by God to minister to us. Likewise, God blesses obedience in baptism.

The passage in Acts 2 has been used by some to indicate that water baptism is an act essential to the process of BECOMING a Christian. While I believe that baptism is a believer's obedient response to Jesus, too many other verses would contradict the idea that water baptism is essential to BECOMING a Christian. Maybe one way of saying it is that water baptism is an "essential" obedient response of one who IS a Christian. It was inconceivable that a NT believer would not be baptized - but that doesn't say that the baptism was essential to BECOMING a Christian.

As to John 3:5, the controversy over what that verse means is unending. Let me say that explaining the word "water" as a reference to water baptism is NOT a given. No less a NT scholar than Don Carson (probably the leading NT scholar in the English language today) sees it as a reference to cleansing, thus "water" (cleansing) and "spirit" (as God's nature) refer to two dimensions of salvation - we are cleansed from sin and given God's nature. I recommend his lengthy discussion of this and alternate views on pages of 191-196 of his commentary on John (available from me if you wish).

Based on the difficulty of having certainty of what Jesus meant in John 3:5 it seems unwise to base our theology of baptism on it. It seems wiser to use less controversial

passages as our basis. Having said all of the above, I still concur that infant baptism, which has no direct and only inferential evidence in the NT, is not the baptism, which the apostles practiced. I know of no one who would suggest that confirmation is any kind of equivalent of baptism. Because the word "baptism" speaks of an immersion and because I believe the NT teaches and illustrates a post-conversion public demonstration of commitment to Christ through baptism, I recommend, though do not demand, that believers be baptized by immersion following their conversion to Christ. I hope this has been helpful

Warmly,

Pastor

Beauty in the Music of Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson www.soundliving.org

From dirges to “screamo” it seems that in our “tolerant” evangelical subculture nobody dares to call some “music” what it really is – Ugly. We have bought the lie that all beauty is in the eye of the beholder. On that basis, speaking of music, we accept any style of music as an equally legitimate expression of the worship of our God. I don’t think so!

After a lengthy illustration of a WWII concert by Olivier Messiaen in a Nazi prison camp compared with a 1950’s Woodstock “concert” by John Cage, Chuck Colson and Harold Fickett in their book, *The Good Life*, make the following comments:

“Very few people today understand beauty as an extension of the creation. Many people say that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ or ‘beauty is a matter of taste.’ To declare something is beautiful means only that it pleases them. Such value judgments are always merely one person’s opinion. To the Christian and the classical mind, however, beauty is not a subjective value judgment, and art is not merely the expression of an artist’s inner world. Beauty, like goodness and truth, is part of reality; beauty is essential to the created order, part and parcel of the world in which we live.

“The reason one person judges one thing to be beautiful while another disagrees is that different people are more or less able to perceive beauty. Some people’s judgments about beauty are more accurate. This may be an idea that many people in our culture find intolerable; nevertheless, it’s true.

“The Christian view of beauty has its basis in its theory of origins – how the world came to be. God made a world that reflects His identity, not only His unimaginable genius but also His majesty – His beauty. The ancient Greeks understood from the order and beauty of creation alone that truth, beauty, and goodness were interconnected absolutely. This understanding was captured powerfully by theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar: “Beauty demands for itself at least as

much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated...from her two sisters.”

“The beauty of the world communicates God’s love for us. He designed a universe in which the sun’s rising and setting, the pale moon hanging in the sky, and the power of rushing clouds would inspire us each day. He made a world in which we can delight in a field of daffodils, be haunted by a loon’s call, and find amazement in the chameleon’s powers of camouflage. In his poem “The Tiger,” poet William Blake recognized God’s hand behind the beauty of His creation.

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright,
In the forest of the night
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

“God’s ways are far beyond ours, yet the beauty of His creation shows us His love.²⁰ Because Olivier Messiaen believed that beauty is a sign of God’s care, he paid tribute in his music to a loving Creator. Messiaen’s audience was far less tutored than Cage’s in musical theory, and yet Messiaen’s music communicated to his fellow prisoners that the world was ultimately God’s, not the Nazis’, and that every human hope “has a legitimate basis in God’s rule. He wasn’t selling cheap comfort or ex-pressing himself.” Who among his fellow prisoners could possibly have cared about that? He was translating truth that they needed to hear— truth essential to the good life—into music.

“All of us intuitively understand the connection between beauty and truth. Ask teenagers and even younger children whether they can tell the difference between good art and bad art. Most groups, as I noted be-fore, are not sure whether they believe in absolute truths. Often I’ll ask them to imagine a painting that catches their eye, that they can’t stop looking at—perhaps J. M. W. Turner’s famous marine painting showing a sailboat, keeling under the wind, plowing through the seas. It’s so lifelike that you can almost feel the boat’s driving motion. The colors are at once watery yet startling. I ask my young audience, “If you saw a painting like that, wouldn’t you say it’s cool?” They all nod approvingly. I then ask them, “If you went to Germany today and saw an exhibit of body parts, a huge mural on a wall with pieces of flesh hanging from it, would you say that’s cool?” Most of them instantly look revolted. I confirm what they are thinking: “No, you would say it’s yuck, right?” They all nod. They get it. There is a difference between cool and yuck. And there are absolutes. Something in us resonates with beauty. It inspires us. It lifts us, exactly as Messiaen’s music lifted the prisoners of war in Stalag VIIIA during World War II.

“The arts are so powerful because they communicate directly to our emotions as well as our intellect—to the heart and its superior reasons. The students I’ve talked with would immediately understand the difference between Cage and Messiaen—Cage, the emperor without clothes, and Messiaen, the maestro of creation, whose work captures a history of time from the perspective of eternity. While the arts capture our thoughts and penetrate our imaginations, they awaken us to the world’s wonder and touch our emotions. At their best, the arts reflect the truth of the human experience in its heartfelt wholeness. The arts point to what lies beyond the merely human because the source of beauty, I believe, is beyond the merely human.”

Congregational Singing

Part of a larger article:

The Theology and Place of Music in Worship
<https://www.rca.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=1863>

1. **Of all the musical instruments that may be employed in the praise of God, the human voice has priority.** Other instruments are to be used primarily in the service of the singing of God's people. Reformed theologian Karl Barth points out that singing is not an option for the people of God; it is one of the essential ministries of the church:

The Christian church sings. It is not a choral society. Its singing is not a concert. But from inner, material necessity it sings. Singing is the highest form of human expression....What we can and must say quite confidently is that the church which does not sing is not the church. And where...it does not really sing but sighs and mumbles spasmodically, shamefacedly and with an ill grace, it can be at best only a troubled community which is not sure of its cause and of whose ministry and witness there can be no great expectation....The praise of God which finds its concrete culmination in the singing of the community is one of the indispensable forms of the ministry of the church.²

2. **Singing is a ministry that belongs to *all* the people of God.** The congregation is always the primary choir. The role of professional or volunteer choirs and musicians is to aid the whole people of God in their worship. While anthems or vocal and instrumental solos may be offered, they do not have to be. Congregational singing, however, is essential. While it is possible to be actively engaged in worship and in prayer while listening to an anthem or solo, a diet of worship which does not regularly include ample opportunity for all the members of the congregation to join in song will be impoverished worship, and the life of the church and the faith of its people will suffer.
3. **Of all the art forms that may be employed in worship, singing is especially corporate.** Indeed, it is the art form most suited to expressing the church's unity in the body of Christ.³ Different voices, different instruments, different parts are blended to offer a single, living, and unified work of beauty. John Calvin recognized the power of congregational singing and unison prayer in helping the church express and experience the unity of the body of Christ. Asserting that the human tongue was especially created to proclaim the praise of God, both through singing and speaking, he noted that "the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of the believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we all glorify God together, worshiping him with one spirit and the same faith."⁴
4. **The church's ministry of song is for the glory of God.** The principal direction of congregational singing is to the Lord (Ps. 96:1). Music is made first of all to the Lord and only secondarily to each other. Music should communicate and express a sense of awe and wonder in the presence of God; it should lead our thoughts toward God rather than toward ourselves.

God can be glorified by beautiful sounds and spirits may be uplifted by a pleasing melody, but it is primarily the joining of the tune to a text that gives meaning to Christians' songs. Not only should both text and tune glorify God and be consistent with each other, but the tune must serve the text. Music is always the servant of the Word.⁵ Calvin cautioned that "we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words....[S]uch songs as have been composed only for the sweetness and delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree."⁶

5. **The church's ministry of song is for the edification of God's people.** Through congregational singing Christian faith is not only expressed; to a very real degree it is formed. Since people tend to remember the theology they sing more than the theology that is preached, a congregation's repertoire of hymnody is often of critical importance in shaping the faith of its people. Here again, it is the meaning of the text that is of primary importance. It is through the sense of the words that God's people learn of the nature and character of God and of the Christian life. Noting that if one prays in a tongue, the "spirit prays," but the "mind is unfruitful," the Apostle Paul vows, "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also" (1 Cor. 14:14-15, RSV).

Christian hymnody contains some of the most tightly packed, concise doctrinal and devotional thought of the church.⁷ Through congregational song God's people learn their language about God; God's people learn how to speak with God. Songs of worship shape faith. It is, therefore, very important that a congregation have a rich "vocabulary of praise." Simple, repetitive music such as praise choruses and Taize chants are very appropriate in worship and can be very effective in moving individuals to prayer and to praise. But it is also important for the congregation to know some of the great hymns of faith in order to have a sense that the Christian faith is both relevant and enduring, and to be enriched by the faith of the "great cloud of witnesses." Hymns, both ancient and modern, which stretch minds, increase vocabulary, rehearse the biblical story, and teach of the nature and the mighty acts of God are essential for the congregation's growth in faith.

Principles of Worship

Dr. Jerry Nelson
www.Soundliving.org

The Biblically mandated elements of worship include prayer (1 Timothy 2:1,8), the reading (1 Timothy 3:13) and preaching (2 Timothy 4:2) of the Word, Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2) and the sacraments (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26) in the context of the people of God.

Principle #1 Unity in Diversity – Many Members yet one Body.

An important way to express our oneness in Christ is in our worship – all ages worshipping together (“Unified” worship).

Galatians 3:28 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 “For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.”

For several years there has been a trend to tailor worship to meet the expectations of various age groups. But we are guided by a principle that says worship will not be about Builders, Boomers, Busters or Millenials but about the people of God, of all ages. Our worship should not be driven by what music or style or loudness or softness we like best. Mark Horst wrote, “As soon as we come to worship looking for and expecting an experience, we have violated the most basic principle of (worship). We easily become religious aesthetes capable of judging the entertainment value of a church service while remaining unaware of the reality it can open us to. Unfortunately for us, when our worship becomes self-conscious rather than God-conscious, it points not to God’s reality but (only to) our own.”

There are many places in the life of a church where groups based on age or life experience are both appropriate and necessary. We think there is value in our youth congregating separately for the purpose of study and fellowship that is unique to their

age and place in life. Likewise, there are times when men meeting with men or women meeting with women are helpful ways to minister. **But where do we meet together as the diverse yet unified people we are by God's grace?** Where do we experience the young and the old, men and women, married and singles, new believers and mature believers coming together? When the people of God are seen worshipping in both the Old and New Testaments, it is not by age grouping, marital status, spiritual maturity, or any other division – it is all of God's people, regardless of differences, coming together to worship the Lord.

"While by nature "birds of a feather flock together," Christ's body invariably includes an unusual combination of quite disparate individuals, who have in common only their faith in and love for Christ. But that is the whole point! In order for corporate worship (unarguably the most important thing the church does together) to accurately reflect the nature and the unity of the body, it must include the people of God in all of their diversity, unified in the worship by the common focus of that worship: the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of glory... It is in our corporate worship of all places, as the most purely God-directed activity of the church, that our unity should be *most* in evidence.

(From Ron Mann in "Blended Worship – Good for the Body")

When you read of the worship that will happen at the throne when Christ comes again, it is quite apparent there will be unified worship focused on who God is. We want our worship here and now to reflect the unity that is ours in Christ. *"Enthralled in the presence of the living Lord and Savior, we can expect to engage in the most glorious worship service of all time. No one has any sense of an "order of service." No one is conscious of any worship "style." The Father has set matters in order. The Son is the focus of all eyes. The Spirit prompts the singing of songs. From the lips of sinners saved by amazing grace come Hosannas to the King of kings and Lord of lords..."* (p155 The Journey Home Bill Bright)

Psalm 148:12-13 "Young men and maidens, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted"

Principle #2 Diversity in Unity – One Body yet many Members

An important way to express our diversity in Christ is in our worship – appreciating the richness and variety of God's people worshipping together and honoring one another in doing so ("Blended" worship).

"Praise the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the Lord (Psalm 150)

Might I call our God variegated? When I think of the variety God has given his universe, when I think of the colors, textures, sounds, creatures, and all else God has created, I begin to capture something of the infinity of our God. Our worship requires

great variety to give it the richness our God deserves. No one of us is capable of expressing the worship that is due our God. No one of us has had all the experiences that reflect his goodness. Not any one age group or any other group of us can adequately remember and adequately express with sufficient creativity the worship our God deserves. But we forget that too easily.

Opposition to the way others express their worship is not new to the church. One group saw fit to express their disapproval of the new music entering the church in these words: *“There are several reasons for opposing it: It’s too new. It’s too worldly, even blasphemous. The new Christian music is not as pleasant as the more established style and because there are so many new songs you can’t learn them all. It puts too much emphasis on instrumental music rather than on godly lyrics. This new music creates disturbances, making people act disorderly. The preceding generation got along without out.”* Those comments were made in 1723 and they were made in criticism of Isaac Watts who wrote “Joy to the World” and “I sing the Mighty Power of God.” They were made because Watts was encouraging congregations to sing hymns in the church. (from David Hocking [The Joy of Worship](#) –23-24) These are the people who have forgotten that the infinity of our God deserves an ever-changing, ever-creative expression of worship.

No one music style, not several music styles, can possibly express all the glory of our God. C.S. Lewis wrote: *“I very much disliked (the church) hymns, which I considered to be fifth-rate poems set to sixth-rate music. But as I went on I saw the great merit of it.... I realized that the hymns (which were just sixth-rate music) were, nevertheless, being sung with devotion and benefit by an old saint in elastic-side boots in the opposite pew, and then you realize that you aren’t fit to clean those boots. It gets you out of your solitary conceit.”* Is God more pleased with hymns than choruses, more pleased with Michael W. Smith than Charles Wesley? When I look at Psalm 98 or Psalm 150 I see worship with a variety as great as: “harp, singing, trumpets, ram’s horns, rivers clapping, mountains singing, tambourines, dancing, strings and flutes and crashing cymbals. The issue isn’t “What kind of music do I like”, but what kind of worship does God like. And God likes worship from the heart – and worship from the heart will be as creative and varied as we are able.

One church has captured well the attitude that we desire: “Because we value *increasing in a humble willingness to support others whose tastes are different than ours*, we will put understanding above accusation, forbearance above faultfinding, and Biblical unity above the demand for uniformity. We will create opportunities for God’s reality to be conveyed more powerfully by learning to affirm the forms and styles that edify our brothers and sisters. Our relationships of love for each other will lead us to patiently support and rejoice with those who appreciate other styles, believing that God is able to meet us in the context of any Christ-exalting worship style.” (From Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN)

We need each other to bring the richness and variety to the worship our God deserves. Psalm 95:6 “Come, let us bow down in worship.

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Principle #3 Worship is for God

Psalm 95:6 "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker."

Too often we think of worship mostly or solely in terms of how it impacts us rather than how it impacts God. And we are the losers when we do that. When we seek an experience we may get it but it will be empty and fleeting. Don Carson wrote, *"If you seek peace you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ you will find joy. If you seek the experience of worship you will not find it; if you seek to worship the living God, you will experience Him."* (Carson p15) If we think of ourselves as the necessary beneficiaries of worship we won't truly worship. If we think of God as the beneficiary of worship, we will also benefit. One of the major reasons people argue about worship today is that they have the wrong person (themselves) in view. Worship is not about us; it is about God. We want to help people come into the presence of God and allow them time to interact with Him. We want people to consciously, intentionally think about God and engage Him in singing, praying, listening to His word, and vicariously interacting with Him through the testimonies of other.

We want to meet God together. We want to know his presence - to be reminded of his greatness and grace. We want to be with him, to enjoy his closeness – to know the security of his love. We want to express to him our affection and admiration and exuberant adulation. And we want to do this together. What would we do if Jesus chose to physically appear here this morning? We would stop talking – you and I would not be needed to speak his word. I think we would also instinctively kneel – only the truly infirm would not go to their knees. We would ask his forgiveness. And when he pulled us to our feet, we would delight in hearing him tell how much he loves us and that it was his love for us that took him to the cross. We would ask him to remind us about the future and he would. Then we would be unable to contain ourselves as we told how much we respect and love him. And the longer we spent in his presence the more likely we would tell stories about his provision for us in the past. Like the family gathered at Grandma's and Grandpa's 50th wedding anniversary - Everyone could hardly wait to tell why they appreciate him. "I remember when..." The stories of the past would be told and retold with the subtle but important differences that were each person's experience with Jesus. Somebody would remember a song that expressed our thoughts and love so well and we would gladly sing it. The style, instruments, and tempo would make no difference because these are personal expressions of love and thanks, which we are using as our own. Little kids would be allowed to sing or read even though the words or melodies weren't all that sophisticated or even that well done. No one would be judging the music for its quality but for its intent. And all of us would be saying, "Yes, that's what I feel too, Jesus." And it would happen because: Worship is about God

Read Leonard Payton "Congregational Singing and the Word of God" **AND** Robert Godfrey's "Pleasing God in our Worship" **AND** Charles Spurgeon's "Our Own Hymnbook" preface along with principles 4 & 5.

Principle #4 Worship is a response to revelation.

Our worship, including our songs, must be so biblical that they reveal God as he has revealed himself so that we may respond to him and not to a caricature of him. The church has a rich history of such creeds, readings and songs and by God's grace new expressions of the timeless truths of God are being written in each generation

Colossians 3:16-17 (NASB)

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom **teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."*

I think Colossians 3:16-17 captures an idea that is expressed throughout the rest of the Bible that our songs should do two things, they should teach us and they should allow us to express our heartfelt emotion to God. Any song will be judged not by how it makes us feel but by how well it expresses the great truths about our God and how well it allows us to thank our God for them. It seems that the Psalms and the other songs of the Bible are at least a model for us of what our songs should be. Singing was to be a means of teaching us about God and expressing our response to him. In my study I haven't found one Psalm of praise (with the possible exception of Psalm 150) that did not spell out specifically what it was about God that caused the praise. Not every song can convey everything about God **but every song should convey something** – something that will elevate our understanding of God's person or work.

Jesus touches on the same idea when he says to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4:23-24 "... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and truth." The "spirit" here is not the human spirit but the Holy Spirit. "Spirit and truth" is one inseparable concept. It is worship empowered by the Spirit and **informed** by truth, the Revelation of God himself. But as I said, our songs should not only teach us about God, they should allow us to express our emotion to God. Again see Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, **singing with thankfulness in your hearts** to God."

Worship is heartfelt! I don't mean it must necessarily be showy but it must be authentic. Praise is not so much an action as a reaction. Just as we pity those who are in love with love, so we would pity those who are enthralled with praise. I want us to encounter God, he will enthrall us and we will respond. Praise is not a product but a by-product. Just as we pity those who are in love with love, so we would pity those who are enthralled with praise. I want people to encounter God, he will enthrall them and they will respond. That is why I say I want our worship leading to put people into the presence of God and leave them there. "Sir, we would see Jesus!" (John 12:21 KJV)

Our worship, including our songs, must be so biblical that they reveal God as he has revealed himself so that we may respond to him and not to a caricature of him. The church has a rich history of such creeds, readings and songs and by God's grace new expressions of the timeless truths of God are being written in each generation

Psalm 96:2 “Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Principle #5 Our Worship Themes each week are determined by our doctrine.

Because we believe worship is response to revelation (God reveals himself in his word and we respond to him – see Principle #4), our worship each week will center on a particular aspect of God’s person and/or work. In order to teach and respond to the broad range of truth about our God, our worship themes are drawn from our doctrinal statement, which reflects our understanding of the essential biblical truths about God’s person and work. The songs we sing should convey enough truth about God to be worth memorizing and singing both privately and publicly. They should reflect the fullness of our God’s person and work. Not necessarily on any one Sunday but over many weeks, the songs should reflect the breadth of our God’s character and grace.

“I once examined the entire worship music repertoire of my congregation, most of which I had inherited, placing each song under one of three biblical categories: (1) “teaching”; (2) “admonition”; and (3) singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Of some four hundred praise choruses and hymns, I found that most of them fit within category three, with about thirty in category one, and fewer than ten in category two. This may reflect our American spirit—the notion that we are free and that nobody can tell us what to do, least of all a worship leader. A new gnosticism has crept in, convincing us that feeling good is an inextricable component of orthodoxy. Admonition just does not fit “orthopathos,” an orthodoxy of shared feelings and experiences.

Having stumbled onto this feature of my own congregation’s worship music diet, I then went to the 150 Psalms to see what the proportions of these categories would be. I read the Psalms with three colored highlighters in hand. I used one highlighter to mark teaching, one for admonition, and one for gratitude to God. More skillful Bible scholars I will anticipate what I found: There was simply no way to separate the categories. Consider Psalm 103. The way we “bless the Lord” is to reel off a *long* list of blessings:

- He forgives all our iniquities
- He heals all our diseases
- He redeems our lives from destruction
- He crowns us with lovingkindness and compassion
- He satisfies our years with good things, and so on

Later in this psalm, it becomes clear that these blessings are given to those who fear the Lord. Taken together, we have a song of gratitude to God that teaches us about God’s provision and further admonishes us to fear the Lord. This is the nature of true biblical worship music. The glorification of God and the edification of the saints occur concurrently. Worship music functions as an integral part of the teaching ministry. Pulpit preaching has greater power to explain the text more logically, but music has greater power to *inculcate* the text, to take the text more profoundly into other parts of the hearer’s being. (Page 2 of “How Shall we Sing to God?” by Leonard Payton)

The words we take upon our lips to sing to God must be true and pleasing to him. The Cambridge Declaration reminds us that one of the problems we face today is what we sing: “Pastors have neglected their rightful oversight of worship, including the doctrinal content of music.” How can we be sure that the words we sing please God? God has given us direction by giving us in the Bible a whole book as a model for what we are to sing. The Book of Psalms (which in Hebrew is entitled the Book of Praises) provides us with songs that God himself has inspired. The Psalms should at least function as the model for what we as Christians sing to God.

Principle #6 Worship is both for the head and from the heart.

Worship is not only correct thoughts about God but correct thoughts expressed to God. Some of the heat generated in the worship wars is over the issues of substance versus style. Some will argue that the old hymns are stuffy and lifeless. Others will argue that the new songs are trite and shallow. Some want content while others want energy. Almost every Psalm in the Old Testament combines passion with content. The Psalmist uses emotive words of excitement or reverence to express specific things about the Lord. He wrote, “My heart yearns for you” (emotion) because you are shelter and you are strength (content). Knowledge without emotion is sterile. And emotion without knowledge is futile.

“A young man falls in love with a young woman. He begins to whistle a tune as he walks down the sidewalk. Then he sings. He believes that he has never seen a day more beautiful than today the sky, the trees the people. Now he is skipping, almost dancing down the sidewalk. “Young man, do you know what you are doing?” someone asks. “What good will all this singing, dancing and joy do you?” What a silly, impertinent question to ask of someone who is in love. Of course he doesn’t know what he is doing, and that’s just the fun of it... If it is only thought it isn’t good worship... Worship is a way of being in love, of glorifying and enjoying the One of whom we can say, “We love, because he first loved us.”

(Williamon p63) On the other hand imagine the young man saying to his girlfriend, “I love you, I love you, I love you.” And then she asks him what it is he loves about her. He responds, “I don’t know, I just love you!” She would have every right to say, “Go away – that is nonsense.” Some people fear emotionalism, others fear deadness. Bishop Moule of England was supposed to have said he finds it easier to tone down a fanatic than to resurrect a corpse. Do you know why we sing so much in church? Because music expresses a range of emotions better than almost any other activity. Or as William Willimon said it, *“Prose is usually too confining for the joyful business” of worship.* (With Glad and Generous Hearts p60)

We are able to take our thoughts (content) and express them to God from our hearts (emotion). Expressed emotions of wild enthusiasm are every bit as valid as emotions of quiet adoration. And conversely, expressed emotions of speechless awe are every bit as valid as dancing before the Lord. Worship has content and emotion. C.S. Lewis wrote, *“The most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval or the giving of honor. I had not noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... I had not noticed that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they*

spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it.... Delight is incomplete until it is expressed... (Reflections on the Psalms p 93-95 in Piper p37) John Piper added, "There is the solution! We praise what we enjoy because the delight is incomplete until it is expressed in praise... So if God loves us enough to make our joy full, he must not only give us himself; he must also win from us the praise of our hearts – not because he needs to shore up some weakness in himself or compensate for some deficiency, but because he loves us and seeks the fullness of our joy that can be found only in knowing and praising him, the most magnificent of all Beings." (Desiring God p37)

Principle #7 We want to provide, over time, for the full range of biblical emotions to praise our God.

"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 severs Law from Gospel and repentance from faith." (W. Robert Godfrey "The Reformation of Worship" in Here We Stand by Boice and Sasse, 1996)

Using the Psalms (the Bible's hymnbook) as our guide, we discover the wide range of moods that form appropriate responses to our God. Thanksgiving, celebration, awe, contemplation, lament, anger, fear, and repentance among others are expressed in the Psalms. Our desire is to provide for a range of emotional responses to match the themes. (e.g. The holiness of God presented in reverential tones while the second coming of Christ is presented in celebrative tones.)

What do the Psalms teach about song? First, they remind us of the rich variety of songs that we can and should present to God. The Psalms contain joyful praise and thanksgiving. The Psalms are called the Book of Praises because they not only contain but also culminate in the praise of God (see especially Pss. 146—150.) But the Psalms contain more than praise. Some Psalms reflect on creation (for example, Pss. 19 and 104); others recount the great saving work of God in Christ (Pss. 2, 22, 24, and 110); still others meditate on the perfections of God's revealed Word (especially Ps. 119). There are Psalms of lamentation and repentance (Pss. 32, 51, and 137) as well as Psalms that express the confusion and frustration that God's people sometimes experience living in this fallen world (Pss. 44 and 73). John Calvin rightly observed about the Psalter, "There is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here presented as in a mirror." In some churches today it seems that only happy, joyful songs are sung. But joy is not the only emotion that Christians experience. Christian worship needs to provide times when sad or reflective emotions are expressed as well as happy ones. A variety of song texts, as we find them in the Psalter, are crucial for that purpose. Second, the Psalms also model for us the substance of our singing. A few Psalms are short and have repetitive elements, but most are full, rich, profound responses to God and his work. Singing praise to God, the Psalter reminds us, is not just emotional expression, but a real engagement of the mind. Songs that are very repetitive or shallow and sentimental do not follow the model of the Psalter. The command to love God with all our mind must inform our singing. Mind and emotions together are the model of praise presented to us in the Psalms, and the modern church must work at restoring that union where it has been lost. (Robert Godfrey, Pleasing God in our Worship)

Principle #8 The music should fit the lyrics.

Not every song can match the music to the words as well as the “Hallelujah Chorus” or “A Mighty Fortress is our God,” but it should be our aim.

“What tunes shall we sing? We may use any tune that is singable for a congregation and that supports the content of the song. The tune should reflect the mood and substance of the song in light of the joy and reverence that are appropriate to worship. With those guidelines in mind (and a sensitivity to the congregation’s difficulty with change), the issue of tunes for songs should be resolved smoothly. (From Pleasing God in our Worship” by Robert Godfrey)

Principle #9 The primary instruments in worship are the voices of the people.

*“What kind of musical accompaniment is biblical? In Old Testament worship a wide range of instruments was used in the worship of the temple. Yet in the worship of the church it appears that for almost the first thousand years of its history no instruments were used in Christian worship. Today most churches use one or more instruments. But where instruments are used, **the instruments should aid the singing of the congregation, not overwhelm it.** They should contribute to a deep spirit of reverence and joy, not undermine it. (From Pleasing God in our Worship” by Robert Godfrey)*

Principle #10 The music and lyrics should be sing-able by a congregation.

The lyrics of songs are usually in the form of poetry, which enhances their beauty and enables easier memorization. But care must be given to not use overly unfamiliar or stilted language, which inhibits the understanding and expression. Likewise the music can be too complicated or awkward making it hard to follow or learn. Creativity and even ‘beauty’ will sometimes be sacrificed to allow for singability.

Principle #11 The music and lyrics should be easy to remember.

What songs will our children and we know from memory in the years to come? What songs will inform their and our thoughts and be the basis of our private worship? I want our worship to become unself-conscious.

C.S.Lewis wrote, “As long as you notice and have to count the steps, you are not yet dancing but only learning to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don’t have to notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about ...print or spelling. The perfect church service would be one we were almost unaware of; our attention would have been on God.” (Letter to Malcolm, 4)

Principle #12 Musical genre matters.

Just as contemporary music is to be presented in a contemporary fashion so historic music is to be presented in historic fashion. Much of contemporary music would not sound “right” sung to classical instruments in classical styles. Likewise some of the stately hymns of the past would not sound “right” sung to jazz instruments or distorted guitars and trap sets.

Principle #13 An established repertoire of songs greatly aids in reflecting on, responding to and remembering the fullness of God's person and work. (Also see Principles #5 and #7 above)

Because singing is an important expression of worship, because songs ought to convey truth about God and **because songs are a primary means of teaching the truths of God**, it is important that we have a basic repertoire that covers the major aspects of the gospel. **Songs and singing are primary means of discipleship.** Luther, Spurgeon, and many others have commented that the hymnal is the second most important book in a Christian's experience because biblical truth set to music is such a powerful tool of instruction.

For these reasons we have developed a "core" list of hymns and other songs that we will sing with greater frequency so that they can hopefully be learned and remembered and become part of the internal spiritual repertoire of the people of SGC.

Charles Spurgeon wrote: *"Our congregation has distinctive features which are not suited by any hymnal known to us. We thought it best to issue a (hymnal) which would contain the cream of the books already in use among us, together with the best of all others extant up to the hour of going to press; and having sought a blessing upon the project, we set about it with all our might, and at last have brought it to a conclusion. Our best diligence has been given to the work, and we have spared no expense: may God's richest blessing rest upon the result of our arduous labours! Unto His glory we dedicate "Our Own Hymn-Book." The range of subjects is very extensive, comprising not only direct praise, but doctrine, experience, and exhortation; thus enabling the saints according to apostolical command to edify one another in their songs. **If any object that some of the hymns are penitential or doctrinal, and therefore unfit to be sung, we reply that we find examples of such in the Book of Psalms, which we have made our model in compiling or work; there we have Maschils as well as hosannahs, and penitential odes as well as hallelujahs. We have not been able to fall in with modern scruples, but have rested content with ancient precedents. We have not cast about for models suggested by the transient fancy of the hour, but have followed the indications given us the word of God and in the long-established usage of the universal church; desiring to be obedient to the sacred precept, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."*** Charles Spurgeon from preface to "Our Own Hymnal."

Principle #14 The Word of God will be central in our worship.

In Preaching: Preaching will be thoughtful exposition and explication of the word. Paul wrote to Pastor Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-5 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

In Nehemiah's day we read, Nehemiah 8:8 "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read."

It is true that sermons should be true, clear, interesting and relevant but they must also be substantive. We will not cater to the idea that people today cannot listen to intelligent speech, cannot understand the English language, cannot learn except through pictures or movies, and that everything must be a felt experience.

“The unspoken but increasingly common assumption of today’s Christendom is that worship is primarily for us – to meet our needs. Such worship services are entertainment focused, and the worshipers are uncommitted spectators who are silently grading the performance. From this perspective, preaching becomes a homiletics of consensus – preaching to felt needs – man’s conscious agenda instead of God’s. Such preaching is always topical and never textual. Biblical information is minimized, and the sermons are short and full of stories. Anything and everything that is suspected of making the marginal attendee uncomfortable is removed from the service, whether it be a registration card or a ‘mere’ creed. Taken to the nth degree, this philosophy instills a tragic self-centeredness. That is, everything is judged by how it affects (the person). This terribly corrupts one’s theology.” (Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man, 106)

In Reading: We will read significant portions of the Holy Scriptures as part of our worship. Nehemiah 8:2 is descriptive of the place of scripture reading in worship. “Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly... (and) He read it aloud from daybreak till noon...in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.” This second text is prescriptive: 1 Timothy 4:13 “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

We will not succumb to a sound-byte culture. Just as in a pre-literate culture the Bible had to be read aloud to meet the needs of the people, so in a post-literate culture, when people no longer are willing to read, the Bible needs to be read aloud so that we hear the Word of God.

In Singing: As stated in Principles # 4 and 5

Principle #15 Offerings are a part of corporate worship.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, 1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income...” We want to give opportunity for God’s people to publicly express their gratitude for God’s grace by giving sacrificially from what God has given us. Thus we will encourage regular giving in the public worship services as the best expression of the worship of giving.

Principle #16 Corporate prayer is an essential part of worship

In 1 Timothy 2:1 we read, “I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” Prayers will not be kept short to accommodate the short attention spans of people nor will they be inordinately long just to prove a point and lap over into vain repetitions. Such prayers will often include adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication or petition.

Principle #17 We are part of the people of God from history past and need to be reminded of that connection and learn from it.

We learn from God's people of the past through the creeds, confessions, hymns and writings that have enriched the church for centuries. The Apostles used such material in the very writing of the New Testament. We find them in several places such as Philippians 2 and 2 Timothy 2:11-13.

It seems evident that not only in Scripture but also throughout the ages, short summaries of the faith have been important to God's people to capture the essence of their faith and make it easily remembered. I desire for all of us to have at least some of these summaries committed to memory. Many have asked why we recite the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Great Command and the Lord's Prayer. It is because we need a ready answer for certain fundamental questions that get raised by every generation.

Emmanuel Kant asked:

1. What can I know? (Creed)
2. What shall I do? (Commandments)
3. What may I hope? (Prayer)

Thomas Aquinas said we must know:

1. What to believe.
2. How to live.
3. What to pray for.

These are the core issues of life and they are answered in the Creed, the Commandments and the Prayer – answers that come from the love of God to His "cross"-loved people. (See Peter Kreeft in [Knowing the Truth of God's Love](#) 1988 p44-47)

As noted above, the hymns of the church (past) are a significant part of that literature with which the church (present) needs to connect. Our worship is enriched by the worship of the past.

Principle #18 The Lord's Supper is central to our worship

The Lord's Supper is a central expression of the Gospel message on which our lives depend and for which our praise is greatest. Luke 22:19 "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Cf 1 Corinthians 11 A preacher cannot preach all the important themes and texts of the Bible and still adequately address the cross and resurrection in every sermon. Therefore, by celebrating communion more often we can more often focus our attention on that great central theme of the gospel.

Communion is also an important means of grace. As we participate in the Lord's Supper, humbly seeking the Lord Jesus in faith, he comes to us in the bread and cup. No, he is not **physically** present, but he is really, truly and personally **spiritually** present.

Pastor and theologian, Robert Letham, wrote, “Thus in the (Lord’s Supper) the Holy Spirit unites the faithful (people) to the person of Christ as they eat and drink the signs, the physical elements of bread and wine. There is an inseparable (joining) of sign and reality. As truly as we eat the bread and drink the wine, so we feed on Christ by faith... The role of those who take the bread and cup is, therefore, to believe and receive. (Robert Letham, *The Lord’s Supper*, 28-29)

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus says it is like eating his flesh and drinking his blood. In other words, by faith we are taking him in, trusting him, reaffirming our faith, declaring anew our belief and trust in him. And in that he ministers his grace to us to believe. There is a mysterious synergy in this that we cannot fully explain. He offers us himself in the bread and cup. We obey and eat and drink, believing him. He ministers his grace to us to trust him more fully.

Other Notes:

Resources:

“Blended Worship Good for the Body” by Ron Mann

“Congregational Singing and the Ministry of the Word” by Leonard Payton

“Pleasing God in our Worship,” “The Reformation of Worship” by Robert Godfrey

“Biblical Worship” Douglas VanDorn

Worship by the Book by D.A. Carson

Discipling Music Ministry by Calvin Johansson

A Royal Waste of Time and Reaching Out without Dumbing Down by Marva Dawn

The Ultimate Priority by John MacArthur

In Search of Wonder by Anderson

Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper by VanderZee

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly by Marva Dawn

Other books by Harold Best, Robert Webber, Ray Ortland, Warren Wiersbe, et al.

“Genuine worship is a response to divine truth. It is passionate because it arises out of our love for God. But to be true worship it must also arise out of a correct understanding of his law, his righteousness, his mercy and his being. Real worship acknowledges God as he has revealed himself in his word.” (John MacArthur, “How Shall We Then Worship” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 184)

A song that contains revelation and response:

O Worship the King

O worship the King, all glorious above

O gratefully sing His wonderful love

Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days

Pavilioned in splendor, and girded with praise

You alone are the matchless King

To You alone be all majesty

Your glories and wonder, what tongue can recite?
 You breathe in the air, You shine in the light

O measureless might, ineffable love
 While angels delight to worship above
 Thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end
 Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

The following is one that, from my perspective, **doesn't** include "revelation" and response – it is all response, but to what?

LET MY WORDS BE FEW

You are God in heaven
 And here am I on earth
 So I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You
 And I'll stand in awe of You
 Yes I'll stand in awe of You
 And I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You
 The simplest of all love songs
 I want to bring to You
 So I'll let my words be few
 Jesus I am so in love with You
 (Chorus)(Chorus)
 And I'll let my words be few
 Jesus, I am so in love with You.

Here's another song that doesn't match the above principles.

Draw Me Close

Draw me close to you, never let me go,
 I lay it all down again,
 To hear You say that I'm Your friend.
 You are my desire, no one else will do,
 'Cause no one else can take Your place,
 To feel the warmth of Your embrace
 Help me find the way, bring me back to you.
 You're all I want,
 You're all I've ever needed,
 You're all I want,
 Help me know You are near.
 (repeated several times)

Who are we talking about in the above song, God or some lost lover? What I have discovered is that many "praise" choruses are only response. They put response into words but they don't tell us what we are responding to – they don't tell us much

about our God. **My contention is that we won't have to tell people as much how to respond if we show them God.** The words of a worship song should follow the biblical pattern that praises God **for** something – for his character and his works.

Let me show you two other songs that illustrate the unfortunate difference between songs that say something and those that don't.

WHAT A FRIEND I'VE FOUND

What a friend I've found,
 Closer than a brother;
 I have felt Your touch,
 More intimate than lovers.
 Jesus, Jesus,
 Jesus, friend forever.
 What a hope I've found,
 More faithful than a mother;
 It would break my heart,
 To ever lose each other.
 (chorus)(verse 1-instrumental)
 (chorus)(chorus)(chorus)
 What a friend I've found,
 Closer than a brother.
 (chorus)

Our Great Savior

Jesus! What a friend for sinners
 Jesus! Lover of my soul
 Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
 He, my Savior makes me whole.

Jesus! What a strength in weakness!
 Let me hide myself in Him;
 Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
 He, my strength, my victory wins.

Jesus! What a help in sorrow!
 While the billows o'er me roll,
 Even when my heart is breaking,
 He, my comfort, helps my soul

Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Psalms quite admittedly refers to the Older Testament Psalms

Hymns might be a synonym for the Psalms (The word is used that way in the LXX and in such passages as 2 Samuel 6:5; 22:1) but just as likely is a reference to Christians songs, some of which we find in the NT – e.g. Philippians 2:6-10

“Who, being in very nature God,
 did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
 PHP 2:7 but made himself nothing,
 taking the very nature of a servant,
 being made in human likeness.
 PHP 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man,
 he humbled himself
 and became obedient to death--
 even death on a cross!
 PHP 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
 and gave him the name that is above every name,
 PHP 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

Cf. Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 5:14; Luke 1 Magnificat and Benedictus. It is apparent from church history that hymns other than the Psalms were used in the church.

Spiritual songs might be unpremeditated, spontaneous, words sung “in the Spirit”.

Eg. Revelation 4:11 ““You are worthy, our Lord and God,
 to receive glory and honor and power,
 for you created all things,
 and by your will they were created
 and have their being.”

Revelation 5:9,12,13 "You are worthy to take the scroll
 and to open its seals,
 because you were slain,
 and with your blood you purchased men for God
 from every tribe and language and people and nation.
 "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
 to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
 and honor and glory and praise!"

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
 be praise and honor and glory and power,
 for ever and ever!"

And in all three kinds of songs, singing it is to be done in gratitude, thankfulness to God. It expresses and elicits praise of God. It doesn't praise “praise” or just make the singer feel good; it flows out of gratitude and expresses it to God. And that it is “in your hearts” means it is rooted in personal experience – it is heart worship not just lip service.

The **instructional and meditation** value of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs has been recognized throughout the generations. The Levitical musicians of the Older Testament wrote the songs, led the people in worship in the Temple but the rest of the year they were scattered throughout Israel very likely teaching the great truths of God

through their music. A levitical musician didn't reach maturity until age 30 (unlike the unspecialized Levite) as we see in 1 Chronicles 23:3, 5, and 24. Every revival of spiritual life in the past 2000 years has been accompanied by songs that spoke of who God is and what he has done. The monastic orders of the middle ages, the reformation, the revivals of Whitfield and Wesley, even the Jesus People movement of the 60s and 70s. Every major movement of the Spirit of God has been accompanied by music that taught the truths of God. Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon and others knew that the Hymn book (meaning the body of songs that the people sang) was second only to the Bible in importance to spiritual vitality of the people.

D. G. Hart 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 experience that characterizes adulthood, evangelicals...want to recover and perpetuate the experiences of adolescence." (Calvin Theological Journal 3- (1995) 454)

"To great sections of the church the art of worship has been lost entirely, and in its place has come that strange and foreign thing called the 'program.' This word has been borrowed from the stage and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us." (A.W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God, 9)

Two other entailments:

1 Disproportionately we wisely use songs of the church from history past.

Thousands of songs for worship of God have been written throughout history. The OT suggests there are many songs that are not recorded in the biblical Psalter. Apparently only relatively few of them survived. Throughout church history since the resurrection of Christ, thousands more have been written. But again only relatively few have remained as part of the church's music literature. History and God's people have been the means over time of selecting and retaining, for the most part, only the better songs from the past. But those relatively few are solid both lyrically and musically. They both express great truth about God but also allow for great expression to God. In addition, as noted above, they are a good connection with the people of God of the past.

Thousands of songs have been written by each generation including our own. Of those "contemporary" songs, of our own generation, only relatively few will survive into the next generation or generations beyond.

If we are going to select the "best of the best" of the songs of all generations, it seems to me that more (but certainly not all) of those songs will come from the past than from the present. **Thus I believe our music should be "anchored in the church's historic worship and seasoned with the fresh winds of the Spirit's movement in the present."**

2. The music (in contrast to the words commented on elsewhere) should reflect the character of God. There is music that better reflects the character of God and thus is better suited for worship than other music.

I do not believe that all music or forms are neutral. For example, some music is unfit for worship in the present because of its current connections to ungodly lifestyles and themes. I suggest that “rock” music initially fit into this category, as would “hip-hop” today. The genres were so associated with ungodliness, at least for a period of time that it is unsuitable for worship for many people.

Another reason I do not believe all music forms are neutral is because I also believe there is music that is more beautiful than other music (even if such beauty is only determined by popular consent). Our God is worthy of the best we can do. In addition, I suspect that beauty is not only in the eye of the beholder or in the ear of the listener but located/defined objectively in the created order.

For centuries, church music, though constantly changing, was a distinctive music not just lyrically but musically. It was recognized by all that different kinds of music fit best in different contexts and church music was a genre of its own. Now it seems that the criterion driving new church music is how closely it can approximate the music of the other contexts. Thus many church musicians are apparently intentionally “chasing” the latest styles of music to bring them into the church. I contend that this is largely driven by the “church-growth mindset of the last 30 years. We began to see the church gathered not as God’s people meeting for worship and edification in connection with the people of God historically and universally but as gathered for outreach to the non-Christian. Such a church would do nothing (including music) that would seem strange to the non-Christian. If the primary purpose of music is worship and edification and the worship and edification of all ages (unified worship) then we must select music (as well as lyrics) that can best encourage such worship.

Public Worship in the Bible is set on the first day of the week:

The resurrection was on the first day of the week. The followers of Jesus met on the first day of the week.

Acts 20:7 “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

John refers to this as “The Lord’s Day”

Revelation 1:10 “On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit,

1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

We don’t think of how we can get worship “over with” but how we can set aside a day to reflect on our God, gather with his people, and do acts of service. A Sabbath is a privilege not a chore.

“The true, the genuine worship is when (people), through their spirits, attain to friendship and intimacy with God. True and genuine worship is not to come to a certain place; it is not to go through a certain ritual or liturgy; it is not even to bring a certain gift. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of (the person) speaks to and meets with God, who is immortal and invisible.” (William Barclay, The Gospel of John, Vol 1, 154)

“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.” (John Calvin, Reply to Sadoletto , 58)

The Place of Preaching in Worship

John Piper

Feb 8, 1998

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (4:1) I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: (2) preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. (3) For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, (4) and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

Why Is God's Word so Prominent in Corporate Worship?

In our series on worship, which will come to an end in two more weeks, we need to ask this question: Why is preaching so prominent in our corporate worship services? Almost half the time of a typical morning worship service is taken up with preaching the Word of God. That is a remarkable proportion and demands some explanation.

But why should I spend time teaching you about preaching, when you are not in seminary preparing to preach? There are three simple answers. First, you will know better what to do with preaching if you understand biblically why it is here. Second, you will be able to assess whether you are, in fact, hearing the right kind of preaching if you know biblically what it is supposed to be. Third, if you know what true preaching is, you will be able to discern and call the right kind of preacher when my time is up in this pulpit. So it has huge implications for your life and family and the future of the church - and all the churches - if the people of God know what true biblical preaching is and why it is so prominent in corporate worship.

Now this question - Why is preaching so prominent in corporate worship? - is really two questions. One is: Why is the Word of God so prominent? And the other is: Why is this form of presenting the Word of God so prominent? Someone could simply read the Bible for half an hour rather than listen to preaching, and that would certainly make the Word of God prominent. Or one could lead a discussion of the Bible for a half-hour. Or one could do mainly academic analyses of vocabulary and grammar and historical circumstances in the Bible. So we must ask not only why is the Word so prominent, but why is preaching, as such, so prominent.

Let's take the first question: Why the prominence of God's Word in our corporate worship?

God Revealed Himself as the Word and by the Word

The first reason is that God has chosen to reveal himself as the Word and by the Word. [John 1:1](#) says, "In the beginning was the Word." Not in the beginning was the song, or in the beginning was the drama. God identifies his Son, who himself is God, as the Word. This is tremendously important. "In the beginning was the Word." The Son of God is the Word of God. He is God's communication to the world, God's Word.

God has also chosen to reveal himself not only as the Word but also by the Word. Look at our text, [2 Timothy 3:16](#), "All Scripture is inspired by God." This means that God ordained to speak to us and reveal himself to us and interpret his deeds in history for us by inspiring written words. That's what "scripture" means: writings. All the Scripture - all the writings in the Jewish-Christian canon - are inspired, God-breathed. Or as [2 Peter 1:21](#) says, "No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men, moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God." The scriptures of the Old and New Testament are God's revelation of himself to us.

So the first two answers to why the Word is so prominent in worship is that God revealed himself as the Word and by the Word. If worship is meant to be a spiritual communion with God and a reverent, loving response to God, then at the heart of worship must be the revelation of God himself, and he has ordained to be known mainly by his Word.

God Performs His Work by His Word

But we can say more. Worship is a response to God's work, and the Word of God is the means by which he works in the world. This is the way it was in the beginning when God created by his Word ([Hebrews 11:3](#)). And this is the way it has been ever since as God performs great acts by his Word. For example, we know that Jesus simply spoke and seas were calmed ([Mark 4:39](#)), fevers were cooled ([Luke 4:39](#)), demons were cast out ([Mark 1:25](#)), sins were forgiven ([Mark 2:10](#)), the blind received their sight ([Luke 18:42](#)), the dead were raised ([Luke 7:14](#)). God worked by means of his Word!

But we also know that God goes on working by his Word. Consider our text again: [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#), "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." In other words, the way God brings about the good works of his people is by the Word.

This is why Jesus said that men will see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven ([Matthew 5:16](#)). God works by his Word to do his works through his people in his world.

You can see this again and again in the Bible. For example, [Psalm 1:3](#) says that the man who meditates on the Word of God day and night will "be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers." So the Word brings fruit and makes a person prosper in the will of God. Or consider [Hebrews 4:12](#), "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." The Word is God's agent in the great work of conviction and judgment. Or recall [John 17:17](#), where Jesus prays to his Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." The great work of sanctification God does by the Word of God. And the list could go on and on.

The point is that worship is about knowing and admiring and savoring God through his works. And these works are seen in his Word and performed by his Word. Therefore the Word is prominent in worship.

God Brings About New Birth by His Word

Let me mention one other reason why the Word is so prominent in worship. Worship depends utterly on the spiritual miracle of the new birth and the ongoing work of reawakening faith. And these miracles God does by the Word. For example, [1 Peter 1:23](#), "You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." New birth is worked by God through the Word. This means that the life we need to worship authentically comes by the Word. No life, no worship. No Word, no life.

Not only that, the constant reawakening of faith Sunday after Sunday comes by hearing the Word of Christ: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" ([Romans 10:17](#)) - not just the first time, but over and over again.

So the Protestant church has put the Word of God at the most prominent place in corporate worship because worship is a seeing and savoring of God himself, and God reveals himself as the Word, and by the Word. In particular, God does his works in the world by his Word and gives new life by his Word and awakens faith by his Word. Without the Word of God, there would be no life, no faith, no work, no revelation and no worship. The Word of God is to worship as air is to breathing.

Why Is Preaching so Prominent in Corporate Worship?

Now the second question is: Granted that the Word of God should be so prominent in worship, why is this particular form of the word called "preaching" so prominent?

Notice what follows in our text right after declaring that all Scripture is inspired by God (in [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)). Immediately Paul says (4:1-2), with amazing solemnity and high seriousness, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and

the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word." So it is clear that for this young minister of the Word (see [2 Timothy 2:15](#)), preaching was to be a prominent activity. And the context of 3:16-17 seems to imply that preaching is not just for evangelism on the street corner or in the synagogue, but for the saints who need (as verse 2 says) "reproof, rebuke, exhortation, patience and instruction."

So we could say, we preach because [2 Timothy 4:2](#) says we should. But I want to go beneath that and ask Why? Why is it so fitting in God's scheme of things that preaching be so prominent in worship?

Old Testament and New Testament Precedents

One answer is that there is a biblical precedent for explaining the Scriptures in public worship. For example, in [Nehemiah 8:6-8](#) it says, "Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen,' lifting up their hands; and they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground . . . the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. And they read from the book, from the law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (RSV). So there was not only the reading of the law, but there were called and appointed men who "gave the sense" and "helped the people understand the law." And all that was in the context of blessing the Lord and lifting the hands and falling down in worship.

In the New Testament, the Jewish synagogue continued this pattern. For example, in [Luke 4:16ff](#), Jesus came to Nazareth early in his ministry and entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and read from the prophet Isaiah about his own coming, and then sat down and began his interpretation: "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" ([Luke 4:21](#)). This was the typical synagogue pattern: the Word read and then an interpretation and application of the Word.

You see it also in the book of Acts. Paul comes to the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and in [Acts 13:14-15](#) it says, "On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down. After the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, 'Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.'" And Paul stands up and preaches (verses 16-31).

So the first reason that preaching became central in the church was that this was the pattern established in the Old Testament and in the New Testament synagogue.

The Twofold Essence of Worship

But there are two reasons for the prominent place of preaching in worship that go deeper than this. They have to do with the twofold essence of worship: understanding God and delighting in God. Jonathan Edwards explains God's goal in worship like this:

God glorifies Himself toward the creatures also in two ways: 1. By appearing to . . . their understanding. 2. In communicating Himself to their hearts, and in their rejoicing and delighting

in and enjoying the manifestations which He makes of Himself . . . *God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in.* When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.¹

So there are always two parts to true worship. We can say it in two pairs: there is seeing God and there is savoring God. You can't separate these. You must see him to savor him. And if you don't savor him when you see him, you insult him. Or another pair would be this: in worship there is always understanding with the mind and there is always feeling in the heart. Understanding must always be the foundation of feeling, or all we have is baseless emotionalism. But understanding of God that doesn't give rise to feeling for God becomes mere intellectualism and deadness. This is why the Bible continually calls us to think and consider and meditate and remember on the one hand, and to rejoice and fear and mourn and delight and hope and be glad on the other hand. Both are essential for worship.

Now preaching is the form that the Word of God takes in worship because true preaching is the kind of speech that consistently unites these two aspects of worship, both in the way it is done and in the aims that it has. When Paul says to Timothy in [2 Timothy 4:2](#), "Preach the word," the word for "preach" is a word for "herald" or "announce" or "proclaim" (κηρυξον). It is not a simple word for teach or explain. It is what a town crier did: "Hear ye, Hear ye, Hear ye! The King has a proclamation of good news for all those who swear allegiance to his throne. Be it known to you that he will give eternal life to all who trust and love his Son." I call this heralding "exultation." Preaching is a public exultation over the truth that it brings. It is not disinterested or cool or neutral. It is passionate about what it says.

Nevertheless this heralding contains teaching. You can see that as you look back to [2 Timothy 3:16](#) - the Scripture (which gives rise to preaching) is profitable for "teaching." And you can see it as you look ahead to the rest of [2 Timothy 4:2](#), "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." So preaching is expository. It deals with the Word of God. True preaching is not the opinions of a mere man. It is the faithful exposition of God's Word.

Expository Exultation

So in a phrase, preaching is "expository exultation."

In conclusion, then, the reason that preaching is so prominent in worship is that worship is not just understanding but also feeling. It is not just seeing God, but also savoring God. It is not just the response of the mind, but also of the heart. Therefore God has ordained that the form his Word should take in corporate worship is not just explanation to the mind and not just stimulation to the heart. Rather the Word of God is to come teaching the mind and reaching the heart; showing the truth of Christ and savoring the glory of Christ; expositing the Word of God and exulting in the God of the Word.

That is what preaching is. And that is why it is so prominent in worship. It is not a mere work of man. It is a gift and work of the Holy Spirit. And therefore it happens most and best where a people are praying and spiritually prepared for it. That is what we will talk about next week.

For now, pray for me and pray for yourselves. And let us seek with all our might to become a people who live and worship by the power of the Word of God - read and memorized and taught and preached. Amen.

¹ Jonathan Edwards, The “Miscellanies,” ed. by Thomas Schafer, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p, 495. Miscellany #448; see also #87, pp. 251-252; #332, p. 410; #679 (not in the New Haven Volume). Emphasis added.

Benedictions in Worship

Are benedictions just pious sounding words with which we end a religious service? While the benediction is being pronounced do you find yourself collecting your belongings and thinking about who you will talk to when it’s over? Pastor, do you know why you pronounce a blessing at the end of the service?

Mark E. Ross in an article in *TableTalk* (p62-3, July, 2012) gives good counsel regarding the benediction. I have shortened the longer article but the words remain Mr. Ross’s:

“Blessing from the Lord”

“Blessing as an act of God goes back to the creation of the world, when our Creator blessed the living creatures and our first parents so that they might be fruitful and multiply. God also blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy that it might for us as it was for him: a day of rest and refreshment in the enjoyment of all that God has made and given to us.

“God has also provided that blessing for his people be given through human agents, and scripture gives numerous examples. Chief among these are the blessings given through the Lord’s appointed priests. The best known of these is the special formula given to Aaron and his sons when Israel set out from Sinai to march into the wilderness; Numbers 6:22-27.

“These words are familiar because they are a regular part of Christian worship in many places, often spoken at the close of worship services, weddings, funerals and other special gatherings. But the very repetition that makes them so familiar, as well as their placement at the end of the service, can easily dull us to their significance and cause us to take them for granted or treat them with indifference...

“Yet the words were spoken to Israel as powerful words of blessing. They formula is framed with statements of its purpose and effect: “Thus you shall bless the people of Israel...So shall

they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.” This blessing is, as James Phi8lip has said, “is not the mere expression of pious hope” (Mastering the Old Testament: Number, p88). It is not a prayer offered by the priest on behalf of the people. It is not, therefore, a word to God from us, or from one of us on behalf of all. It is a word from God to his people, a royal proclamation spoken through is appointed representative, declaring that the Lord’s blessing is given....

“While the New Testament puts an end to the Aaronic priesthood, it continues the benediction. Our Savior gave such a blessing as he ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50-51). Nearly all the New Testament Epistles close with an Apostolic benediction. As minister have succeeded the Apostles as the preachers of God’s Word, so they are appointed to proclaim God’s word of blessing. Like all spiritual blessing they must be received by faith. But when spoken to believers, the blessing empowers and sustains, refreshing faith and renewing hope, confirming God’s promises to us so that we can meet life’s challenges. Don’t leave church without it.”

The “prelude” is the signal for a more focused response to worship to begin. We should consider the prelude the first movement of worship, with an accompanying change in behavior and mindset. The prelude, when done well, should be a prompt to recognize and begin responding to the presence of God and the purposes of gathered worship.

The call to worship is simply that – a call to “come” and worship our God. It is the call of God to his people as in Psalm 95 “Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song...Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

The procession of the cross and Bible is to remind us in a vivid and symbolic way that Jesus through his Word and cross-work is central to our worship.

The Prayer of Invocation is a formal appeal to God to receive our worship and bless his people.

The Apostles’ Creed is the oldest of the creeds (2nd C) and summarizes essential elements of the Christian faith in a memorable way reminding us what we believe.

We stand for the reading of God’s Word as a sign of respect and to manifest an eagerness and attentiveness to hear his Word. Even in our everyday experience, if we are eager to meet someone important who is about to enter the room, we would stand out of respect. In the same way, we stand out of respect for our God and to anticipate his Word.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by our Lord as both a memorial of his cross-work and as a means of grace for believers. There is mystery in this but not magic. When we say it is a “means of grace” we declare that by it God grants His grace to us for our spiritual benefit. The Lord’s Supper also demonstrates the gospel for unbelievers.

A “doxology” is an expression of praise to God, especially a short hymn. The word doxology comes from the Greek doxa, (“glory, splendor, grandeur”) and logos, (“word” or “speaking”). Praising God for His

blessings ([Ephesians 1:3](#)), ascribing to Him all glory ([Romans 11:36](#); [Ephesians 3:21](#)), and affirming the Trinity ([Matthew 28:19](#)) have always been integral parts of true Christian worship.

The Benediction is meant to be a word from God to his people, a royal proclamation spoken through his appointed representative, declaring that the Lord's blessing is given.... Like all spiritual blessings it must be received by faith. But when spoken to believers, the blessing empowers and sustains, refreshing faith and renewing hope, confirming God's promises to us so that we can meet life's challenges. Don't leave church without it.