

Key Values: Reformed Worship

We hope, God willing to be able to meet for worship in a couple of weeks time and therefore I want us to think about gathering to worship this afternoon. When we worship what should it be like?

In a proposed new church what will worship be like? How and where will it be different to what you may have been used to? Will it be more contemporary or more traditional? Will we be aiming at being as accessible as possible to non-Christians or should we be more focused on building up believers?

What is worship?

The purpose of all God's creation is to serve, praise and bow down before the Lord God as it's Creator, Sustained and Master. As part of the created order and especially as those who bear His image, all people everywhere are under an obligation to do this worship with all of the faculties God has given them. And we are to worship God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”¹

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.²

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.³

All of our worship is to directed to God alone, and since the fall we are only able to worship God acceptably as we come through the one God-ordained mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, enabled by His Spirit. In the gospel, Jesus calls us to worship God in “*spirit & in truth*” – Jn 4:23

As Christians we're called to present their bodies as living sacrifices as our “*spiritual worship*”, that is to see our whole lives as worship to God (Romans 12:2). Yet God established since the creation of the world a one-day-in-seven pattern to be a Sabbath, set apart to Him.

Since Jesus' resurrection this set-apart, one day in seven is now the first day of the week (Rev.1:10, Acts 20:7)), where God's covenant people are to gather together specifically to worship Him.

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. ⁴

² Colossians 1:16

³ Romans 1:20-21

⁴ Hebrews 10:24-25

¹ Revelation 4:11

Question: What should that gathering together look like?

First lets think who it is who calls to together. That's important isn't it, because if it's just us deciding to get together, then we can set together? But throughout the Bible, it's God Himself who calls those He's called into a covenant relationship with Him to gather, not just with each other but primarily with Him.

Just think of the first time God calls the people He's rescued from Egypt to gather together at Mount Sinai, it's the Lord their deliverer who initiates the gathering. Obviously Jesus initiates calling His disciples to gather around Him. And it's the same as we gather for worship as NT Christians, we gather at the Lord's gracious request, & our part is always one of responding to Him

First and foremost then we gather together at God's instruction, to worship Him. God calls us to renew His covenant with his people, that *"He will be our God and we shall be His people,"* as we stand before Him in Christ. So worship is not primarily either for the sake of us as Christians or for the sake of unbelievers.

Yes, worship is to be an *encouragement* to us (Heb. 10:24-25), and a *proclamation* of the gospel to the world around us (1 Cor 14:24-25),

but those things are always secondary. The main reason for gathering before the Lord is to worship & fellowship with Him

Since worship is at God's initiative and not ours, what we do as we gather for worship is not left to us to decide, whether as individual believers or local churches but has been laid down for us in God's Word.

It's the same as if you're invited to someone's house for a party – you don't tell them what will happen – they set the agenda don't they?

This is just an extension of the principle of Sola Scripture we thought about last time, that Scripture is our ultimate authority alone, and we said God stated that,

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. ⁵

Clearly every good work includes knowing how we, as those God's called into covenant with Him, are to worship Him rightly as He calls us to gather before Him.

That means we're not to add anything to our worship as we gather than God has not stated.

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Key Doctrine Sessions 3:

Gathering for worship

To do so would be to require people to worship God in ways He himself had not called them to do. We see evidence of this principle of God *regulating* how He is to be worshiped throughout the Bible. If the first commandment instructs us *who* to worship, the second commandment instructs us *how* the Lord God is to be worshipped.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁶

In this commandment God speaks to **how** He'll be worshipped. When God instructs Moses to build the tabernacle for the people to worship the Lord in their midst, he gives instruction as to how to build it

And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. ⁷

Then in Deut. 12 as God's people prepare to enter the land the Lord God is giving them again God instructs them *how* they are to worship

³⁰ take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying,

⁶ Exodus 20:4-6

⁷ Exodus 25:40

'How did these nations serve their gods? - that I also may do the same.'

³¹ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

³² "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it. ⁸

We see how seriously God considers it when his people don't worship Him as He's instructed. **Nadab & Abihu** are struck down for offering 'strange fire' before the Lord in Lev 10, **Korah's** rebellion in burning incense before God without priestly mediation⁹, God rejects **Saul's** non-prescribed worship (1 Sam 15:22), **Uzzah** is killed for handling the ark of the covenant in a manner God has not instructed even when he acts out of good motives (2 Sam 6). In Jer 7 God gives as the reason He brings the judgment of exile on His people is because they've followed the uncommanded worship practices of the surrounding nations

*And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, **which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.**¹⁰*

The principle that worship is to **regulated** by what God's prescribed is continued in the NT, as Jesus rejects the worship of the Pharisees as

⁸ Deuteronomy 12:29-32

⁹ Numbers 16:36-40

¹⁰ Jeremiah 7:31

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simply being the “*tradition of the elders*,” (Mat 15:1-4) rather than as God’s stated. Paul also rebukes the church in both Corinth & Colossae for unacceptable worship & gives instruction on what worship is acceptable to God, (Col 2:18, 23 & 1 Cor 14:27-28).

For our own spiritual well-being the church must continually seek to maintain this principle, that we must only do in worship those things God commands, and not think that we can do whatever we like unless God has expressly forbidden it.

So our gathered worship is to be made up only of those things or **elements** God has prescribed, but these may be expressed differently depending on the **circumstances**, the culture or context of a particular church. For example, God requires His Word is read and heard when His people gather for worship, but God hasn’t said what language it must be read in. God wants to be understood by those who worship Him, so it’s right God’s word is read in the language of the culture.

Likewise God doesn’t stipulate what time of day we meet for gathered worship, but again we’d want to make gathered worship accessible to all so we wouldn’t want to meet at 4:00am.

The same could be said for the number of songs we sing, what type of music we use or where we worship.

Gathering for worship

So we’re saying as we gather to worship God, we’re to do those things He’s instructed us to do, (for example, we’re to read God’s Word – 1 Timothy 4:13). The manner or circumstances we’re to do those things in, is to be guided by wisely **applying Scriptural principles**. So reading a single verse out of context may be unwise, but so may reading the book of Leviticus all in one go. And we’re not to do any other things than those God has prescribed.

This will keep our worship biblical, simple, spiritual and reverent and because it is centered on God it should transform us. It would also keep our worship from becoming superficial, ritualistic, and sentimental or entertainment. I recall once reading a book about *Church Growth* that described how the church ministerial team in a large US mega-church would wrestle WWF style as part of their morning service. Would that be wrong? And why?

Any questions?

So what has God commanded we should do as He calls us to gather to worship as His covenant people?

God has particularly given us certain resources to help us as believers grow in grace. These have been referred to as the “*means of grace*,” because God works through them to make us more like Christ.

We need God's grace, his undeserved favour towards us all the way through our Christian lives, but how does it come to us. The main means through which the Holy Spirit brings about increased fellowship with and likeness to Christ are His **Word**, **prayer** and the **sacraments** (baptism & the Lord's Supper). These 3 are necessary parts of worship

Of these, we are obviously to read the Bible and pray on our own as well as when we are gathered together in public worship, and the absence of any is damaging to the church.

God's Word

*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*¹¹

The church as the *"pillar and foundation of truth,"*¹² and therefore the reading and preaching of God's Word has a central place in our gathering together because it is through God's Word preached that the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts.

Paul encourages Timothy in his role as pastor at Ephesus to ensure that when the believers gather together God's Word is read, taught and applied. So we might read a section of God's word and be edified by it without it being preached on.

Further, as it is the Lord who calls His people to gather for worship before Him it is fitting that we begin our time with God's Word pronounced in a **call to worship**. We gather in response to His initiative, by hearing from His Word.

In addition to God's Word being read without explanation, it's also to be explained & applied to our minds & hearts for edification through expository preaching of a Scripture passage. Paul instructs Timothy

*I 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, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.***¹³

We need not only to *know* God's word, but to *understand* it's meaning and the purpose the Holy Spirit intended. So preaching includes *explaining* the Bible passage within its context to ensure what is said is God's rather than man's words, but must additionally be *proclamation* of judgment and salvation and *exhortation* to repentance and faith.

Within the NT itself there appear to be well-known doctrinal statements & creeds Paul refers to as *"faithful sayings"* (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:8-9, 2 Tim 2:11-13; Tit 3:3-8), *"the pattern of doctrine"* (Rom 6:17) & *"traditions"* (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

¹¹ 1 Timothy 4:13

¹² 1 Timothy 3:15

¹³ 2 Timothy 4:1-2 (see also 2 Timothy 2:2, 15, 4:2 and Titus 2:1, 7-8)

Thus faithful historical **Confessions & Creeds** that give the true meaning of scripture rightly form part of teaching in gathered worship.

God also instructs us to sing His Word together as He calls us to gather together to worship Him.

be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,¹⁴

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.¹⁵

The Psalms are songs & we are to specifically **sing**, not just read the psalms as the inspired songs God's given us in His Word. Further we are also to sing songs & hymns that contain & reflect the development of salvation history, laid out in Scripture, in the birth-life-death-resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus.

As our worship begins with God graciously commanding us to gather together as His people before Him, so it is fitting that we are sent out into the world with the words of God's blessing in the gospel. Such blessings upon God's people are seen in both the OT & NT

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying,

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:18–19

¹⁵ Colossians 3:16

Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴ *The LORD bless you and keep you;*

²⁵ *the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;*

²⁶ *the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

²⁷ *"So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, & I will bless them ¹⁶*

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever & ever. Amen. ¹⁷

Prayer

Because we meet at God's call & are dependent on Him to bless us, thanksgiving & prayer are a fitting response to hearing God's word & a means of God's grace. Prayer was central as the early church meet

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.¹⁸

In the context of the church gathering Paul exhorts Timothy,

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly & dignified in every way.¹⁹

¹⁶ Numbers 6:22–27

¹⁷ Hebrews 13:20–21 (also see Ephesians 3:16–21, Romans 15:13, Colossians 3:15–17, Jude 24–25, 1 Timothy 1:17)

¹⁸ Acts 2:42

¹⁹ 1 Timothy 2:1–2

*I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;*²⁰

As part of prayer, it is fitting to **corporately confess** our sins before God. We see this occur in the OT as the people are gathered in Ezra 8-9 and in Nehemiah 9 we're told

*Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. ² And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers*²¹

The psalms, which are intended for corporate worship contain many confessions of sin. The in the NT as James exhorts the church to pray in the face of suffering says,

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another & pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*²²

And as Jesus writes to the seven churches, in the book of Revelation, He calls on the church in Ephesus to

*Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*²³

²⁰ 1 Titus 2:8

²¹ Nehemiah 9:1-2

²² James 5:16

²³ Revelation 2:5

Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The 2 sacraments the Lord Jesus has given to His church are signs and seals of the covenant of grace as markers of the visible church and means of grace to His elect. They speak of our union with the crucified, risen Christ and access to them is to give assurance for believers, and therefore they are to be carried out only by recognized elders in the context of the church, until the Lord Jesus returns.

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper apply God's Word to believers and require the explanation of God's Word in order to fulfill their intended function. So God's Word should always accompany their practice. So with baptism Christ commands His disciples,

*Go therefore & make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to **observe all that I have commanded you**. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*²⁴

And for the Lord's Supper

*When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God & humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. ... For as often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*²⁵

²⁴ Matthew 28:19-20

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:20 -26

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper serve to demarcate the visible church where the Lord Jesus Christ is proclaimed and seen to rule as Lord and therefore are to take place within the context of the gathered assembly of God's people.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. ²⁶

Giving

Paul also instructs that as the community of God's people gather for worship they should take collections to support the work of the church as it proclaims the gospel and as he states in 1 Corinthians 16:2, to care for the needy and poor within the wider church.

Now concerning the collection for the saints: On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come²⁷

Giving is to be considered part of our worship to God because it is a response of praise to God where we give Him thanks for what He has generously provided for us in Christ.

Things to think over this week:

Think more of why we gather and what worship that is *centered on God, biblical, simple, spiritual, reverent* and intended to *transform us*, will look like.

What are the dangers of worship that is *superficial, ritualistic, sentimental* or *entertainment*.

Supplementary reading (available online):

D Thomas, *Regulative Principle of Worship*, www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/regulative-principle-worship/

T Challies, *Worship: Elements & Circumstances*, www.challies.com/articles/worship-elements-and-circumstances/

D Macleod, *The Regulative Principle*, www.donaldmacleod.org.uk/dm/christian-worship-the-regulative-principle/

J Frame, *A Fresh look at the Regulative Principle*, frame-poythress.org/a-fresh-look-at-the-regulative-principle-a-broader-view/

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 (also see Galatians 2:10)