

Having considered how we are to hear sermons, read and meditate upon Scripture, and pray to God, we come this week to, How to worship God, and in particular—the nature, activity, purpose, and attitude of public worship—I think I would be right in asserting, that fewer things have become a source of contention within the western church as has the subject of worship—in fact it's not uncommon today to see many churches providing several kinds or styles of worship in an attempt to satisfy or appease it's membership—perhaps at 9:00 we have traditional worship, at 10:00 contemporary, and at 11:00 radical or ultra cotemporary worship—all which I find very difficult to harmonize with Ps.133:1—“how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity...”

Public worship has become a free-for-all where everything goes—some in a desperate attempt to become “relevant” have turned to all forms of entertainment, standup comedy, and cheap gimmicks—but my friends, as I am very anxious to show you—such things as these are not worship...

CHS described a similar trend in his day—“By semi-dramatic performances they make houses of prayer to approximate to the theater. They turn their services into musical displays, and their sermons into political or philosophical essays. In fact, they exchange the temple for the theater, and turn ministers of God into actors, whose business it is to entertain men...”

Now before I go any further let me clarify what I mean by worship—essential to both the Hebrew and Greek words translated “worship” are the concepts of bowing down and rendering service, Ps.95:6—“oh come, let us worship and bow down...” Ps.100:2—“serve [worship] the LORD with gladness...”—put together, at its very heart, worship entails a bowing before God for the purpose of offering Him heartfelt homage and sacrificial service...

Thus according to this broader definition there are various kinds of worship offered to God by the people of God—there is [1] personal worship [what we typical refer to as personal devotions], [2] family worship, Josh. 24:15—“as for me and my house, we will serve [worship] the LORD...” and [3] chronic worship [as we continually offer our bodies as living sacrifices, Rom.12:1—“which is your spiritual service of worship...”—CHS—“All places are places of worship to a Christian. Wherever he is, he ought to be in a worshiping frame of mind...”—but the kind of worship I want to consider today is that specific or narrowed worship often referred to as public or corporate worship...

- I. Its nature
- II. Its activity
- III. Its purpose
- IV. Its attitude [considering the latter two this afternoon]

#### I. Its nature

##### A. It takes place within the church

1. Here again I must clarify that I am referring to a specific kind of worship typically referred to as public or corporate worship...
2. Public, corporate, and formal worship takes place on the Lord's Day and in the Lord's house—it is only known within this context...
3. Now this is not to deny that when we come together on Wednesdays we worship God—and that in a public sense...
4. But it is to distinguish between all other gatherings of the church and that formal, commanded gathering on the Lord's Day...
5. You see, nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to come together on Wednesdays to read a Psalm and pray together...

6. But we are told to keep the Sabbath Day holy, and to gather together on a specified day of the week, to conduct public worship...
7. I think no small amount of confusion stems from an inability to rightly define what the Scriptures refer to as a church...
8. A local church is a group of believers who are governed by the Scriptures and thus come together to do what those Scriptures command...
9. That is—they are governed by officers, they administer discipline, they partake of the sacraments, and they worship God as prescribed...
10. This is found in the very term “church”—the Greek word is “ekklesia” which literally means—“out from for the intent to gather...”
11. The word refers to more than being “called out of the world” but it equally means “to be called out for the purpose of being assembled...”
12. John Murray—“the word for ‘church’ in the NT means ‘assembly’. It is not so much the called-out ones as the called-together ones...”
13. Joe Morecraft—“...the term for church [ekklesia] often denotes a society of professing Christians who constitute a local church that meets together for public worship in a particular location...”
14. For example, 1Cor.11:18—“when you come together as a church...”—that is, when you gather as an assembly of called out individuals for the purpose of worship...
15. Thus the word “ekklesia” is at times translated “assembly” or “congregation” both of which describe a group of people gathered for a specific purpose...
16. Heb.2:12—“I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation [ekklesia] I will sing Thy praise...”
17. We find “ekklesia” throughout the Greek OT applied to the assembled saints who have gathered within the courts of the temple for the purpose of worship...
18. For example, Ps.35:18—“I will give you thanks in the great assembly; I will praise you among many people...”
19. Thus in summary—it is within the church that God’s people are to assemble for the purpose of public or corporate worship...
20. Or put another way—public, corporate, and formal worship takes place in the midst of the gathered church on the Lord’s Day...

B. It enjoys God’s special presence

1. By this I mean that when the church gathers together to worship, she should expect the special and unique presence of God...
2. Now if our Old Testaments teaches us anything, it underscores the fact that God’s special and unique presence dwelt in the midst of the Tabernacle and then later Temple...
3. Ps.26:8—“I love the habitation of your house [the house where you live], O LORD, the place where your glory dwells...”
4. And if our New Testaments teach us anything, the church is God’s House wherein His specialized presence resides, 1Tim.3:15—“the house of God, which is the church of the living God...”
5. Thus I suggest the church when gathered together for worship is the special focus of God and enjoys the unique presence of Christ...
6. Ps.87:1-3—“His foundation *is* in the holy mountains. The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God! Selah...”
7. Notice two things [a] the Lord loves the dwellings of Jacob—this is byway of inference—if the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob, then of necessity He loves the dwellings of Jacob...
8. The phrase “the dwellings of Jacob” simply refers to the individual dwellings [or tents] of the people of Israel...
9. It no doubt has special reference to them gathering together within those tents in family and private worship...
10. Notice [b] God loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob—by “gates of Zion” is referred to the city of Zion—the city of God...

11. This has reference to the collective gathering of God's people at the Temple, that was build upon mount Zion...
12. The point is simply this—the Lord has a peculiar interest in the public formal gathering of His people as they comprise His church...
13. Barns—“Much as he might be pleased with their quiet abodes...the fact that his worship was daily celebrated in those happy families, yet he had superior pleasure in the multitudes that crowded the ways to the place where they would publicly acknowledge him as their God...”
14. Rev.2:1—“to the angel of the church of Ephesus write, These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...”
15. These are the words of our risen and glorified Savior, 1:17b-18—“do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore...”
16. Beginning in 1:12 John is given a vision wherein he sees—“seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man...”
17. In 1:20 we are told what these lampstands represent—“the mystery of the seven stars which you say in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches...”
18. These seven churches were literal churches located in Asia Minor to which John would write seven letters throughout chapters 2 and 3...
19. Christ is here portrayed as the prophet to His gathered people, for it was then that this letter was to be read in their respective assemblies...
20. But what I want you to notice is that Christ is expressly said to dwell or walk “in the midst of the seven lampstands” (1:13; 2:1)...
21. This of course has reference to His special and gracious presence—He is uniquely and specially present in the midst of His gathered churches...
22. The phrase “in the midst of” is repeatedly used of His special presence, Matt.18:20—“for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them...”
23. Ps.46:4-5—“there is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved...”
24. Thus I suggest that when the new covenant temple gathers together for public worship, Christ dwells in her midst in a unique and powerful way...

### C. It is to be regulated by Scripture

1. By this I mean that what we do in public worship, is to be regulated by no other source but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments...
2. This is at times referred to the “Regulative Principle of Worship” and was coined by our reformed and puritan forefathers...
3. In fact at the very core of the reformation was the conviction that Scripture alone was the standard for faith and practice and this included public worship...
4. 1689 [of religious worship]—“...the acceptable way of worshipping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures...”
5. Simply put—we offer nothing to God in public worship, but that which He has expressly commanded us to bring...
6. Again I must stress the fact that I am here describing public or corporate worship, not private or family worship...
7. When it comes to private and domestic worship, there exists a greater degree of liberty in terms of what's to take place...
8. For example, it might be that in family worship you participate in some sort of dramatized reenactment of a Bible story...
9. Something that would be very appropriate to family worship but is not commanded or regulated by Scripture with reference to public worship...

10. But to be more specific, notice three proofs for the regulative principle of worship—[1] it is imbedded in the second commandment...
11. If in the first commandment we are told who to worship, and in the fourth commandment when we worship—in the second we are told how to worship...
12. Ex.20:4—“you shall not make for yourself a carved image—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; you shall not bow to them nor worship them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God...”
13. My friend, it only seems logical that God would possess the right to dictate how He is worshiped by His beloved people...
14. Notice [2] it is typified in the old covenant—by this I mean, the construction and operation of the tabernacle/temple was closely regulated by God...
15. Let me put it this way—Tabernacle and Temple worship was not left to the whim nor innovation of the people...
16. Thus we read throughout the book of Exodus—“and he did just as the LORD had commanded Moses...”—that is, Moses constructed the tabernacle just as he was told...
17. And then within the book of Leviticus the Lord gives Moses exact and detailed specifications for conducting worship within the tabernacle...
18. Deut.12:32—“whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it...”
19. They were to do, exactly as God had commanded, neither adding or taking away from His express commands...
20. Joe Morecraft—“God was saying, in effect, Build the tabernacle just like I tell you; establish the priesthood just like I tell you; establish the sacrificial system and all the rituals of the tabernacle just like I tell you. Do not add to the details, and do not take away from them. Just follow everything that I tell you...”
21. Thus we find as we come to the NT Scriptures, that the tabernacle and temple were types of shadows of the church...
22. So if God regulated the worship of the OT type, then it should not surprise us that He regulates the worship of the NT antitype...
23. 1Cor.3:16-17—“do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are...”
24. It is important to notice that within the context, beginning from v5, the apostle is referring to ministers as builders, commissioned to build the new covenant temple...
25. Thus they [like Moses who built the tabernacle and Solomon the temple] must be careful to build just as they are told...
26. Notice the latter part of v10—“but let each one take heed how he builds on it...” and then through v15 he provides various reasons to take his exhortation serious...
27. Verses 15-16 are a final motive—the church is the new covenant temple of God, and if we defile it—“God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are...”
28. How can ministers of the new covenant defile God’s temple—basically two ways—false doctrine and false worship...
29. John Gill—“God is not only an avenger of all acts committed against his righteous law, but of all false doctrine and false worship, and of everything that is contrary to the Gospel, and to the order and ordinances of it...”
30. Notice [3] it is taught in the New Testament, 1Tim.3:14-15—“these things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth...”
31. Here we find the purpose behind the apostle writing his two letters to Timothy—“I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God...”
32. In other words, as a leader in a local church Timothy was given these letters to know how he was to act in church—both with reference to its ordering and worship...

## II. Its activity

As we read through our Bibles, and especially our New Testaments, there are five activities that immerge, which are essential to public or corporate worship...

### A. Reading

1. By this of course I refer to the public reading of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, a necessity for public or corporate worship...
2. For example, 1Thess.5:27—"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren..."—that is he was to read the letter when the brethren were gathered together...
3. Thus we find that the apostle exhorted young Timothy, 1Tim.4:13—"till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine..."
4. He was to give himself—"to the reading, the exhortation, the teaching..."—the Greek text implies these were definite activities associated with public worship...
5. That "the reading" refers to "the public reading of Scripture is evident from the NAS—"give attention to the public reading of Scripture..."
6. The reading of Scripture has long been associated with public worship for the past several hundred years in the Synagogues...
7. Acts 13:15—"and after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them..." Acts 15:21—"for Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath..."
8. Thus it ought not to surprise us that reading became an essential element of new covenant worship, as early churches were largely patterned after synagogue worship...

### B. Praying

1. Isaiah prophesied in Isa.56:7 concerning the Gentiles—"even them I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices *will be* accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations..."
2. That is to say—God's house will be characterized as a place where all men [Jew and Gentile] will together call upon His name...
3. 1Tim.2:1-2—"therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence..."
4. Notice several things—[a] the importance of prayer—"therefore I exhort first of all..."—that is, prayer is of utmost importance to public worship...
5. If God's house is to be "a house of prayer for all nations" then the first thing Timothy needs to ensure is that prayer is a part of that worship conducted within this house...
6. Phillip Ryken—"Many evangelical churches have abbreviated the pastoral prayer or eliminated it altogether. The apostle Paul would have been shocked by this trend because he considered prayer of first importance in the public worship of God..."
7. Notice [b] the matter of prayer—"for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence..."
8. We are not only to pray that these men would rule within their respective spheres with wisdom and equity but that they would be converted...
9. Verses 3-4—"for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth..."
10. We are to pray for all kinds of men for God would have all kinds saved—we are to pray that His kingdom would come and His will would be done...
11. Notice [c] the manner of prayer, v8—"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere [in every place], lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting..."

12. Men are to pray lifting up holy hands—that is hands free from wrath and doubting—hands free from all that would hinder their prayers...

#### C. Singing

1. A third element essential to public or corporate worship is congregational singing—the lifting up our voices in song and praise...
2. Ps.27:6—“I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD...”
3. Col.3:16—“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...”
4. Notice [a] singing is to be doctrinal—“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...”
5. Notice [b] singing is to be heart-felt—“singing with grace in your hearts...”—we are to sing with gracious hearts...
6. Notice [c] singing is to be Godward—“to the Lord...”—singing is primarily to the Lord, it is to be Godward...

#### D. Preaching

1. If you recall Timothy was not only to give himself to the reading, but—“the exhortation and the doctrine [or teaching]...” (1Tim.4:13)
2. That is, he was not only to publicly read the Scriptures, but expound, exhort, and instruct by and with that Scripture...
3. In fact as we read through 1 and 2 Timothy it becomes evident that preaching and teaching are to have a dominant place within the public worship of God’s people...
4. 2Tim.4:1-2—“I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...”
5. Notice several things—[a] the context of preaching, v1—“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom...preach the word...”
6. The word of God is to be preached mindful of God’s presence, the return of Christ, and the universal judgment of all men...
7. Notice [b] the nature of preaching, v2—“preach the word...”—the Greek word translated “preach” means —“to verbally proclaim in an authoritative manner...”
8. Thus “to “preach the word” entails a verbal pronouncement of God’s word in a commanding and absolute manner...
9. It is not a discussion or sharing time—it’s not speaking in an uncertain and open fashion—but it is one man speaking the oracles of God in God’s name...
10. Thus essential to biblical preaching is the verbal authoritative declaration of God’s word, and nothing can replace it—not videos, mimes, dancing, or puppets...
11. Notice [c] the manner of preaching, v2—“be ready in season and out of season [that is preach it when it is accepted or not]. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching...”
12. The word of God is to be preached in such a way that it will convince, rebuke and exhort—and this is to be done with all longsuffering and teaching...

#### E. Sacraments

1. Before I move any further let clarify what I mean by “sacraments”—this word is from the Latin meaning “something sacred...”
2. Historically the church has identified two new covenant sacraments—baptism and the Lord’s Table—these are to take place within the church as public worship...

3. Now concerning baptism, within the New Testament this no doubt took place outside and not within a baptismal tank...
4. But that baptism is an ordinance to be administered by the local church, is evident from Matt.28:19—“go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commaded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age...”
5. In other words—the command to baptize converts, is given to the church as much as the command to teach them all things...
6. When it comes to the second sacrament [the Lord’s Table], it is even more apparent that it is a local church ordinance...
7. 1Cor.11:33-34—“therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, least you come together for judgment...”
8. V18—“for first of all, when you come together as a church...” v20—“therefore when you come together in one place...”

Obs.1—behold the folly of many professing Christians

1. By this I refer to those people who profess to be Christian but fail to gather with God’s people in churches on the Lord’s Day...
2. Have you ever heard someone say—I worship God in my own way; my church is the great outdoors, where I worship God by while fishing or golfing...
3. A group of disgruntled families who meet together on Sundays is not a church and thus whatever they do together, they do not participate in public or corporate worship...
4. Thus a person who refuses to gather with the church and enter God’s special presence, refuses to do what Christians were called to do...
5. Edmund Clowney—“Reverent corporate worship, then, is not optional for the church of God...Rather, it brings to expression the very being of the church. It manifests on earth the reality of the heavenly assembly...”
6. If the primary activity of heaven is worshipping God collectively and corporately, what does this say of that person who refuses to worship corporately on earth...

Obs.2—behold the confusion of many Christians

1. Here I refer to a very large percentage of Protestantism, that has all but abandoned their reformed and protestant heritage...
2. Doug Phillips—“When it comes to worship, the sad truth is that most Christians have sold their New Testament and Reformation heritage for a mess of pottage. Opting for the hip, the trendy, and the marketing savvy, they have dispensed with the simplicity and beauty of New Testament worship...”
3. Let me suggest two reasons behind this confusion—[1] doctrinal ignorance—that is, its ignorance of our Bibles that produces faulty worship...
4. Because so few people care about what the Bible teaches on any subject, there are precious few who care about its teaching on worship...
5. Let me ask you my friend—have you asked yourself, What do the Scriptures teach concerning the nature and activity of public worship...
6. If we think it’s important to know what the Bible teaches concerning, God, Christ, sin, salvation, heaven and hell...
7. Then it seems logical we would desire to know what that same Bible teaches about the nature and activities of public or corporate worship...
8. Notice [2] pride and arrogance—I fear this is as much a cause behind the confusion about worship then doctrinal ignorance...
9. And let me tell you why—for the last 200 years in this county there has been relatively little deviation from a regulated public worship...

10. But within the last 30 or so years, and especially in the last 15-20 years, we have reared a prideful and arrogant generation...
  11. A generation that wants everything their own way—a generation that rejects everything their fathers and grandfathers have believed...
  12. So what are we to do in light of this approaching tidal wave—we stand our ground and we commit ourselves that we will offer nothing to God but what He commands...
- Obs.3—behold the privilege of true Christians

1. Oh my friends, if we were thinking rightly, we would view public, corporate worship, as a privilege unmatched for the people of God...
2. Ps.27:4—“one thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple...”
3. We should look forward to the Lord’s Day with great anticipation—we should long for the courts of God that we might entire those courts with praise...