

WHY WE WORSHIP THE WAY WE DO

Introduction

We are often asked this question by visitors: Why do we worship as we do? This little outline is intended to show that we are not simply doing it for the sake of being different – but rather we are self-consciously seeking to apply scriptural principles in our worship.

Worship Defined

Worship in its broadest sense is something we are to be doing in every area of life – everything we do is supposed to be for God's glory. Public worship is that declaring of God's worth that occurs whenever His people gather together under His Word. Biblical corporate worship then is **Word centred** worship, performed in "*spirit and in truth*" ([John 4:24](#)).

The Regulative Principle of Worship

We are to worship our Holy God only as He has stated in Scripture - all else is forbidden ([Deuteronomy 4:2](#); eg: [Hebrews 7:13-14](#)). Theologians call this the "Regulative Principle of Worship". This principle stands as a guard against the accumulation of traditions and practices adopted on the pretext that they do not explicitly conflict with Scripture. This principle defines what things (or 'elements') there are in New Testament worship.

The Elements of Public Worship

The New Testament clearly teaches that there are six things (or 'elements') that are permitted as part of corporate worship:

- **Reading the Word**
The public reading of the Scriptures is an essential part of worship (eg: [Nehemiah 8:1-9](#); [Luke 4:16-20](#); [Acts 13:15](#)).
- **Preaching the Word**
The preaching and teaching of the Scriptures are the heart of worship. This is entrusted to those men so gifted and called (usually the elders/pastors – [Ephesians 4:7-13](#); [1 Timothy 5:17](#); [2 Timothy 3:14-4:5](#)). Women are excluded from this authoritative public ministry, not because they are in any way inferior, but in order to display the diversity of God's created order ([1 Timothy 2:11-13](#)).
- **Praying the Word**
Corporate prayer is to declare the truths and claim the promises of the Word – as they apply to the congregation (A familiar pattern for prayer is ACTS: Adoration; Confession, Thanks, Supplication).
- **Singing the Word**
Congregational singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs that teach us about the truths and promises of the Word ([Ephesians 5:19](#); [Colossians 3:16](#)). These passages teach that the primary purpose for congregation singing is mutual instruction/edification. Consequently, the singing part of the worship should be under the oversight of the eldership, as much as other teaching part of the service. For the same reasons, songs should have a rich biblical content reflecting the full range of Christian theology and experience (such as modelled for us in the Psalms). Songs with poor musicality or shallow lyrics, or items that are short or highly repetitive, should be generally avoided as they do

not serve the aim of edification-through-understanding. In our songs we seek to draw on the rich hymnody of the past as well as the best of the present.

➤ **Seeing the Word**

Christ's commanded the 'visible Words' of Baptism ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)) and the Lord's Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)). These proclaim Christ's work in us through His Word in visual form. These are the only visual aids permitted in worship.

➤ **Supporting the Word**

Voluntary giving is commended as part of worship. ([1 Corinthians 16:2](#); [2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#)) The giving is distributed (often by the Deacons) to support the ministry of the word, either directly - or through practical assistance to those in need.

We see from passages like [Acts 2:41-42,45](#) that these various elements were a part of New Testament worship from the beginning:

So those who received his word were baptised, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ... And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

The Order of Worship

Corporate worship is to be done in an orderly manner ([1 Corinthians 14:33a,40](#)). However – Scripture does not specify how the elements in any particular service have to be arranged. This means that there is considerable freedom and flexibility depending on circumstances, the topic being preached, cultural context, etc. An sample service could have the following order: A Call to Worship (usually from a Psalm); Responsive song of Praise; Reading of the Law; Prayer of Confession; Song of Repentance; OT Reading; Collection of the Offering; Congregational Prayer; Song of Thanksgiving; NT Reading; Sermon; Lords Supper; Song; Closing Prayer or Benediction.

Our worship is responsive as God speaks to us through His Word and Spirit and the people respond in prayer and praise. This is why we generally have songs interspersed with prayer and the Word. This contrasts with the common mystical view of worship where a block of choruses lead to a mood, which is then misinterpreted as worship. Biblical worship rather aims to stir the heart through the mind as it comprehends the truths of the Word.

The Time of Worship

Throughout the Old Testament, God set aside the Sabbath as a day of corporate worship where the concerns of the normal routines of life were laid aside for this purpose ([Exodus 20:8-11](#)). This principle of weekly Sabbath worship continues in the Lord's Day Sunday in the New Testament ([Acts 20:7](#); [1 Corinthians 16:2](#); [Revelation 1:10](#)). This is part of the reason why we delight to meet together for worship on the Lord's Day.

The Lost Art of Corporate Worship

When one gifted person leads us in prayer – we all pray together endorsing their prayer. When we sing – we sing jointly together as one Body. When we hear the Word preached – we listen together. The Scripture commends corporate worship in a public service. We are not to be individuals each contemplating about Christ individually in our minds (mysticism) – but joint members of a local body that together worship our God and saviour. All are participating – we don't all have to be up the front to be involved in the worship.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following are some more common questions that people have asked about our worship

What About 'Open Worship'?

Some argue that worship should be 'open' – that is that anyone should be allowed to contribute as the Spirit moves. Arguments for this are generally based around [1 Corinthians 14:26](#) and the 'priesthood of all believers'.

- When 1 Corinthians 14:26 speaks of 'each one' bringing a hymn, etc. - this refers not to the whole congregation per se – but to 'each one' of those so gifted in the congregation (as is clear from the instruction to these gifted folk in the subsequent verses, and the fact that not all were gifted to bring a prophesy, revelation, inspired hymn, tongue, etc). These are to lead in an orderly manner ('one at a time') so the congregation can be edified corporately.
- The 'priesthood of all believers' refers to the high privilege we all have of each being able to come before God because of what Christ has done. This however cannot be used to argue for everyone contributing as Scripture clearly speaks of a variety of gifts.

Finally we believe the Spirit actively works through his Word in which we all participate corporately. We do not need a mystical prompting to validate its ministry, an idea foreign to Scripture.

What About the Gifts? Prophecy and Tongues? Prayer Languages?

The Scriptures teach that the risen Christ since Pentecost has poured gifts out upon His churches to empower them for service . Hence we are committed to the service being led by those so gifted and called to teach and preach ([Ephesians 4:7-13](#)). The many other gifts (eg: helps, administration, giving encouragement, etc.) are essential to the building up of God's people through day-to-day ministry.

The offices of Apostle (with their associated sign gifts – [Acts 4:29-30](#) cf [2 Corinthians 12:12](#) cf [Hebrews 2:3-4](#)) and Prophets were foundational ([Ephesians 2:20](#)) and have ceased. In Scripture the real gift of healing never failed ([Matthew 8:16](#); [Acts 5:15-16](#)). Genuine prophecy was infallible ([Deuteronomy 18:20-22](#) cf [Acts 11:27-28](#)). True tongues were prophecies in unlearned, yet actual languages ([Acts 2:4,6](#); [1 Corinthians 14](#) - esp. v10-11). The modern practices known as these today do not match the Biblical record. The failed 'healings', fallible prophecies and the meaningless 'tongues' practised today are not the Scriptural gifts.

What About Raising Hands?

Raised hands was the traditional Jewish stance for prayer and praise. In our culture – clasped hands is the traditional position of prayer. God is not so concerned with the position of our hands – as with the position of our hearts before Him. Sadly today a section of the church with mystical views of worship has become associated with the raised hands posture. Consequently we encourage people to express their praise in culturally appropriate ways as long as it is not viewed as a mystical or super-spiritual practice. (There is a danger of hypocrisy if one mistakenly thinks raising hands is inherently more spiritual - [Matthew 6:5-6](#).)

What About Music?

Music can be a helpful aid to uniting a congregation in worship. Yet many are confused over the role of music in worship. Some believe that the musical part of the service is worship. Biblically however, music has nothing directly to do with worship (the New Testament mentions only the music of the heart or of heaven). It is singing 'in spirit and in truth' that is part of worship. Any music should enhance or aid the worship (which is the singing) and not distract from or dominate it. Indeed music can be a distraction from worship if it stirs the emotions apart from the mind. This violates the Scriptural principle that 'without understanding there is no edification' (eg: [1 Corinthians 14:1-19](#)). There is a danger that the music comes to dominate worship, reducing it from edification to entertainment. As a result many become dissatisfied with the shallowness and superficiality of such 'worship'. Hence we aim to keep our musical accompaniment simple. We seek to be neither traditional nor contemporary for their own sake, but rather seek to draw on the best of the rich hymnody of the past with the best of the present.

What about Dancing, Dramas or Films?

These activities may be permitted in some contexts, but they have no place in corporate worship or evangelism. They are excluded on the basis of the Regulative Principle of Worship. This is our guide, not pragmatic considerations. The New Testament church and Apostles could easily have utilised the music and/or plays of the pagan culture around them, but notably did not. Instead Paul advocated the seeming foolishness of preaching ([1 Corinthians 1:21-25](#))

What about Fixed Formal Liturgies?

It is interesting that the New Testament does not advocate ritual or outward decoration of Old Testament Jewish worship. These outward trappings have passed away as part of the more spiritual worship brought about by Christ's fulfilment of the OT patterns. Fixed liturgies should generally be avoided as they so easily can develop into a rote rather than heartfelt response to God. There are many useful Scriptural responses that can aid worship however – such as the Lord's Prayer, benedictions, beatitudes, Psalms, etc.

For Further Information

- *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. [Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship](#)
- Waldron, Samuel E (1999) *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship. 3rd ed. Durham, England: Evangelical Press, p264-276
- Dever, Mark and Alexander, Paul (2005) Section 2: When the church gathers. In *The Deliberate Church*. Wheaton, Il.: Crossway, p77-130.
- Also see the FRBCNZ worship links: http://www.rbc.org.nz/links.htm#Theol_Ch_Wor

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