

don't stick to the confession, because we want to make sure we're doctrinally sound. So the Westminster Confession of Faith, I'll use the larger and shorter catechisms. I'm going to use Chad Van Dixhorn's commentary on the confession that Jamie has used in the past and G.I. Williamson's commentary. They're very helpful in both ways.

There's two other books that I use. I'm not quoting them today. I probably could have if I but there's just so much material and I don't know how to fit everything in. But this book by Jonathan Landry Cruz, *What Happens When We Worship*, is really helpful, and I've read through it once, and I'm kind of working my way through it again to make it fresh. It's really helpful. It's approaching the subject matter different than I'm handling it. That's why I hadn't quoted it, because I hadn't quite figured out how to put it in there. But it's really good. I highly recommend Cruz's book.

And I read *Worshipping with Calvin* by Terry Johnson. *Recovering the Historic Ministry and Worship of the Reformed Protestants* is a really helpful book to understand why we worship the way we do, why it's historical, why it's biblical, why it's theological. And so, I mean, he does a lot of criticism with contemporary worship, which I don't really want to get into. I want to talk about what we do, why we do what we do, and the blessings of it. But these are two books that I would recommend and will be referencing.

I'm also using, I've got the handout, it's from our BCO, part three, it's chapter 47, *The Principles and Elements of Public Worship*. This is not binding. There's a study committee trying to work through the worship chapters, particularly this one. I hope they don't change this. This is excellent material, very biblical, very doctrinally sound with our confession. It's just really good, and so I brought it so y'all could read it. I think it's helpful, and so I commend it to you.

And with that, I wanna turn, well, I said I was gonna read it, but it's too long to read that chapter. I want y'all to read it yourselves at your convenience.

So the first question, what does it mean to worship? What is worship? Well, as always, my first thing to do is, okay, let's just Google or pull up Webster's and get some definitions. And so I got several definitions, and basically to honor, or show reverence for a divine being or a supernatural power. Ardent devotion, or to perform or take part in worship or an act of worship. The act of showing reverence, adoration, and honor to God. Praising God and thanking God. Those are all pretty good definitions, I think.

If you turn, well, You all know the first question of the Shorter Catechism, right? What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. What does that tell us? We glorify God and we enjoy Him. That is worship. God, our chief end, the main thing God created and saved us to do is to worship Him, give Him glory and to enjoy Him. So I think we could say that worshiping God is to glorify and enjoy him. I think this very simple definition is workable.

If we turn to Matthew 22, 37, Jesus says, the great commandment in the law is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. So if we take that verse, we say worship is love to our God. We're to love our God, we're to glorify Him, we're to enjoy Him.

Well, there's several types of worship, so what are we talking about? You know, according to Romans 12, one, worship can be all of life. As we live out our faith, as we walk according to God's Word, it's worshiping God by serving Him the way He tells us to. It can be personal worship, your daily devotions. As you meet with God daily by yourself, reading your Bible and praying, that's worship. It can be family devotions. As you gather with your wife, husband, children, and you gather together, you read God's word, you sing praises, you pray, we're worshiping. And it can be corporate worship. Corporate worship is what we're talking about today. It applies in some way to these other worships, but we want to focus on corporate worship.

What is corporate worship? This is my definition. I'm sure it's not sufficient. Corporate worship is the gathering of the body of Christ, the church. We gather to worship and honor God glorifying and enjoying Him with reverence, devotion, adoration, and praise with thanksgiving on the Lord's Day. And this is our focus. And I think it's going to be six weeks. We'll see how it goes.

So as we consider corporate worship, We also need, why do we need this? We do this every Sunday, right? Twice on Sunday we have corporate worship. It's very familiar to us, so why do we want to study it? I have three or four reasons, about three reasons.

One, in our modern church there's a wide range of worship styles and practices. You have contemporary worship, you have traditional worship, you have, you know, Hunter was talking about certain things like performance-based, where it's more of a stage and there's almost a concert. is the focus of worship. You have informational or TED Talk worship where there's an encouragement and how to solve your problems type worship. You have worship things like Cowboy Church where they're all at the rodeo and they gather together to worship in some way. So you have all sorts of things going on that is called worship. What do we mean by worship? What is the right way to worship? So I think we're kinda confused as modern church. Even our denomination, there's a variety of differences in practices. We're not even settled in the PCA. As I mentioned earlier, there's a study committee to look over the worship, parts of worship. How should we worship? What is proper worship? We're not even decided on what that is. So it's important for us to think through, Why do we worship the way we worship?

Another reason to study worship is because man is prone to false worship. We are prone to go our own way. You can think about Cain and Abel. Abel brought an acceptable offering. Cain did not. Do you think Cain didn't think he was worshiping God? Yeah, he thought he was. He was angry because God didn't accept it. but he wouldn't repent. You look at Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each one took a censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered it. Leviticus 10.1 says it was unauthorized in the ESV, strange in the NASB, or some interpret that as profane fire. Strange, unauthorized, or profane fire before the Lord. It was not what God had commanded. It was not according to the Word, and He killed them. They weren't shaking their fist at God. They worshiped Him falsely.

Uzzah. We all remember Uzzah when he reached out and put his hand on the ark. Well, he was struck down. Why? Because they didn't honor God as God. They did not carry the ark as God had told them to. And he presumptuously thought he had to help God. And God struck him down. False worship. In Mark 7, it quotes Isaiah 29. And it reads, well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, the people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. And so I fear that some of

a modern church are worshiping God in vain. And I don't want that to be us, because men's heart goes after what pleases us. We're prone to wander.

Well, let's look at us. In second prayers, I think most people would probably call our worship traditional. That's true. I think the session would probably describe it as a simple means of grace. What does that mean? That means that we, the means of grace, are reading and preaching God's Word, prayer, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another, and the sacraments. So we seek to put those things as the focus of our worship, the means of grace that God has given us in His Word. So traditional, simple means of grace, that's what we do here.

You know, as I've traveled around to different places, I've attended lots of other churches, most of them PCA, not all, and I've counted various worship styles and practices, and I'm gonna be honest, some of them bothered me. I get offended at some worship I find. And so I started, I wrestled with that. Okay, is this just a preference and I don't like it? Is it because I just don't like it? Is that? Is it a preference or is there a principle here? And so I've been, that's one reason I wanted to teach this is because is this a preference? Things bother us as preference or is it principle? Because if it's a preference, I just need to get over it and move on. That's fine, if it's pleasing to God.

And so, That's why we're reading confession and other sources on the subject. I've come to believe that there are some circumstances, and we'll define circumstances later today, that are preferences. There are some preferences that I might not like that are agreeable to God. Okay, there may be, there are some. But there's also some principles, there's some elements that must be in worship or it's false worship. And we're gonna look at that. And I want us to focus on these elements of worship and why we believe they're biblical, confessional, and in line with the apostolic church. We see them being happening in the epistles and in Acts. We see some patterns of worship. We can read some history about the apostolic church and we see that they are worshiping in these ways. So that's why we need to do it. So we know what we're studying, why we're doing it.

Now we're going to look, who do we worship? We've got to start with who do we worship. The object of our worship is God. And on page 860 of your Trinity Hymnal, you have chapter 21 of the Confession. I'm going to read paragraphs 1 and 2. And I'll be addressing the first half of one and all of two in the first part, and then we'll come back to the second half of one. I'm sure the Westminster Divines organized it better than I have, but this fits my mind better, so.

Chapter 21 of the Confession, paragraph one, of religious worship in the Sabbath day. The light of nature showeth that there is a God. who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But 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 imaginations and devices of men or the suggestions of Satan under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in His Holy Scripture.

Paragraph 2. Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to Him alone, not to angels, saints, or any other creature. And, since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other, but of Christ alone."

There's a lot there. We're going to start with who is God. In the first sense, we read that in the light of nature shows us there is a God who is sovereign and Lord of all. He is good and does good. Right out of Romans 1.20, we see, for since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse.

That first sentence of the chapter, of paragraph one, is telling us we don't have an excuse not to worship God. It is evident from natural revelation that there is a God and that He is good, and therefore we should worship Him. We have no excuse but to worship God. And the second half of that first sentence tells us to worship Him, because He is to be feared. Feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart. We know there is a God, we have no excuse, and we're to worship Him.

And our object of worship is God. Who is this God? Genesis 1.1, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. What does that tell us about who God is? He is our creator. He is our sustainer. He created all the earth, all the universe.

Exodus 34, 6, and 7, we see where God tells Moses about himself, the Lord. the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth, who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin. Yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.

What do we learn about who God is here? We learn that God has set his love on us because he's compassionate, graciously and patiently, and he's promised his covenant love to us in truth. We also see that God is just. God is just.

Our shorter catechism, question four, is helpful in knowing who God is. I find myself praising God through it because it's helpful to me. What is God? God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and is being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. We could spend all day studying who God is. Jamie spent, what, three Sunday school classes going over the attributes of God in the past four years? There's so much there about who God is. This is our God. Here we see who God is.

Hunter just finished a whole series of sermons on the holiness of God, on just one of these attributes, the holiness of God. And I want to focus on the holiness of God. Isaiah 6, verse 3 says, And one seraphim called out to another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory. And then we see it back in Revelation 4, verse 8. And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within, and day and night they do not cease to say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and is and who is to come."

In 1 Peter 1 15, we're commanded, be like the Holy One who called you. Be holy yourself also in all your behavior. Our God is a holy, holy, holy God. That means we're not like Him. Peter tells us we're supposed to try to be like Him, but we're not like Him.

Hebrews 12, 28 and 29, Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, Let us show gratitude by which we may offer to God an acceptable service, that could be translated worship, with reference and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." Our God's a consuming fire? What does that mean? That makes me think of the burning bush, but really it makes me think of Mount Sinai when he gave the Ten Commandments and there was lightning and fire and smoke. Our God is powerful, he is great, he is holy. That consuming fire makes you fear coming near him, but yet he tells us to come with reverence and awe. Our God is holy and he must be treated as holy.

Okay, in the paragraph two, we're looking at religious work be given to God as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and to Him alone. Well, we've talked about the holiness of God, but now we're going to talk about that He is a triune God. We're to worship Him as Father, Son, and Spirit. He is the one God in three persons.

Matthew 3, 16 and 17, we read that after being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened. And he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove, lighting on him. And behold, the voice of the heavens said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased. At Jesus' baptism, we see three persons, the Trinity.

Again, in Matthew 28, in the Great Commission, we read that we are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. In John 5, 23, we read, so that all will honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. So he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. We can only honor God the Father, we must honor God the Son. I and the Father are one.

We also see the Trinity and the Apostolic Blessing from 2 Corinthians 13-14, where Paul is blessing the Corinthians. He says, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. This is our God. He's a holy, holy, holy God, a consuming fire. He's the creator of all things, sustainer of all things. He's infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. He is one God in three.

Williamson says, true worship is dressed to God, and God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In Matthew 4.10, Jesus said to them, Go, Satan, for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only. We are to only serve God. Jesus is rebuking Satan. You know, Satan was trying to tempt Jesus to bow down and worship him. And he said, no, you are to worship. God says, you are only to worship him and him alone.

So we need to be careful that we're only worshiping our God. We're not, as the Confession says, we're not to worship angels, saints, or any other creature. Second Commandment tells us not to worship images. We are not to worship other gods, only the triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. You know, I love the Ole Miss Rebels. I love the sport. I don't really follow sports other than when the Ole Miss is playing. And I get excited when we win, and I get a little down when we lose. I've got to be careful. I can worship Ole Miss football particularly. We all have idols, we all have things we love, but do we love them more than God? Our God? Let us be careful of that.

Then Dixhorn writes, we are to worship God alone, but there is a sense in which we are not to worship Him alone. That is, we are not to worship Him by ourselves alone. Since humanities fall into sin, we must never come near to God without a mediator. And we must never pretend that there's any other mediator than the Lord Jesus Christ. So

we worship the triune God, this holy God, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. But we worship through a mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John 14.6, Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through me." Ephesians 2.18, for through him we both have our access in one spirit to the Father. 1 Timothy 2.5, for there is one God and one mediator also between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. In Hebrews 4, 14-16, Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace. so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need."

Remember Exodus 34, that God is just. Without the Lord Jesus Christ and His redeeming work, His meditatorial work, we have to die. We have to die for our guilt and our sin. But through Jesus Christ, He died for us. and we have access to the throne of grace because of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we worship our God through Christ.

Our God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. In his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth, he is the creator and sustainer of all things. He is a covenant-keeping God. His loving kindness endures forever. Our God is triune, one God in three persons, and we must have a mediator to worship him.

So how do we take all this we are talking about, and I know I'm going through this so fast. How do we take all this as we see who God is? How does that impact our worship? How do we apply this? Well, first things, we should expect his presence. Have you ever felt God's presence in worship? You left and said, God was with us today. We should expect that to happen. God commands our worship and he desires our worship. He's provided a mediator, Jesus, so that we can worship. And He's promised to give us His Holy Spirit to help us. God has given us all these things.

Luke 11, 13 says, then if you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? We need the Holy Spirit. We need to be asking Him. The session as we meet in there before worship, we're praying that God will send His Holy Spirit. When I was first converted, I grew up in Methodist Church, and worship there was pretty similar to the structure here. But when I came over here to worship at evening worship, there were people in the seat before worship praying and reading their Bible, asking that God would attend to the preaching of the word. And God came. God will answer our prayers. He said he will if we ask. He will send the Holy Spirit. And God has promised that he would be with us in worship. Matthew 18, 20 says, for there where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst. God is here. God is here. He says he will be here. Do we believe him? Are we coming, expecting to meet him?

Secondly, our understanding of who God is and what we expect, that we expect Him to be present, it affects how we approach Him in worship. Because of His holiness, we must come before Him in humility, eagerly, with fear and trembling, and in reverence and awe. We come to worship with reverence and awe.

So how do we decide what to include in worship, the elements? The second half of chapter 21, paragraph 1 of the Confession, and I'm going to reread it, but the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and the vices

of men or the suggestions of Satan or under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in his scriptures. This is what we call the regulative principle of worship. which means we believe that the true God, that true worship is instituted by God, limited by God, and prescribed by God. That when men worship in a way that is not appointed or commanded by God, they worship in vain. Williamson says, That which is not instituted by God is for that reason false worship." That's strong words. That's strong words, and so we should be careful. If that's true, we need to be careful that we worship according to the Word. Van Dixhorn says, as a principle, this attention to biblical prescription usefully keeps us from promoting in our churches any activity that sounds practical appears beautiful, smells wonderful, feels comfortable, or tastes vaguely theological, but that is not prescribed in the Bible. Everything can look good and practical and sound good, feel good, and it may make you feel great, but it's not prescribed by God's word. We need to be careful.

Earlier, when I was addressing false worship, We pointed out how Abel's worship was pleasing to God and Cain's was not. Nadab and Abihu brought profane fire and were struck down. Uzzah was struck down because he didn't obey God and he was presumptuous. did not treat them as holy. We read Mark 7 where God says, this people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, and in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandment of men. They were doing things not prescribed by God, all of them. They weren't doing what God said. God is serious about His worship. He gave the Israelites very strict instructions on how to worship Him. God does not change, He's unchangeable. He tells us what He wants in worship, how He wants to be worshiped. He is serious about worship, and He has instructed us in His word how to do that.

Williamson asked, does this mean that there is nothing that may be done in a Reformed church except what is commanded in the Bible? He answers, not exactly. Now that seems confusing, doesn't it? What does he mean? To answer, we must go back to chapter one of the confession in paragraph six. That's on page 849, starting at the second sentence. And it's in the middle, let me see if I can find it. Starting with nevertheless. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word. and that there are some circumstances, that's a key word, circumstances, concerning the worship of God and the government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.

Okay, so as we run the church, as the session makes decisions for the church, the government of the church, as we make decisions about worship, there's some things that God doesn't address. What are those things? Well, is it in God's word that we should meet at 11 o'clock to worship? No. Does God tell us what color carpet we ought to have in our building or what shape the building is? We don't read that. What about, when should we have prayer meeting? You know, a lot of churches have it on Wednesday night. Should it be on Wednesday night? What about, we'd have it on Sunday afternoon, is that right? We're not directed on every minute detail. These are circumstances. I mean, even do we use a piano, an organ, a guitar, no instrumentality? We're not really given those details. Are we free to do anything we want? Not really. These are circumstances.

What does the confession tell us? It tells us that we need the Spirit of God to direct us. We need to order it by the light of nature. What makes sense? Let's use our common sense. We need to do Christian prudence, wisdom. We need biblical Christian wisdom. And it need to be to the general rules of the Word.

It is my belief that when you come to circumstances that we need to take into account who it is we're worshiping. We're worshiping a holy, holy, holy God who created us and saved us from our sin, that gave us our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, that gives us the Holy Spirit, who has adopted us and will glorify us. In fact, he says we have been glorified. He commands our worship, and so we're coming here, we come with reverence and all, and as you're coming with reverence and all, I think that affects how you make those decisions. There can be disagreements, legitimate disagreements, but that should affect how we make those decisions. Who is it that we're worshiping? What is our manner of approaching our God is important. Those are the circumstances. Those aren't particularly written down in stone. Those are not in stone. But the elements are.

And so, I'm gonna close by just giving us a list of the elements that are in the BCO chapter 47, paragraph 9 that I gave you. These are the elements of worship, reading of the Holy Scripture, singing of psalms and hymns, offering of prayer, preaching of the Word, presentation of offerings, confession of faith, observing sacraments, and on special occasion taking oaths.

I'm going to... next week I plan on going to Let's look at prayer and probably singing, depends on how much I can get on prayer. That could end up being one lesson, but we'll see. But we're gonna go through these elements and then finish up on when do we worship. And that is on the Lord's day.

So, I know I feel like I've been running a race here, but I hope you've gotten something out of it. Let's close in prayer.

Lord, our God, our great God, we praise your name that we can call you Father, through the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for our Second Presbyterian Church. We thank you for your word that you have given us. We thank you for Mac, and we pray for Mac as he prepares to proclaim Christ to us from your word, that you would bless him. I pray that you bless our gathering, that we would give you all the glory and honor due to your name, for you are a mighty God, and we are your people. Bless us now in Jesus' name, amen.