

We Come To Worship

A STUDY OF CORPORATE WORSHIP FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

LESSON 7: Reformation of Worship

Reasons for the Reformation?

- › The corruption of the papacy was well known.
- › Departure from the Word of God.
- › Worship itself had its own categorical errors:
 - The worship was conducted in Latin.
 - The Mass was seen as largely a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ.
 - Hebrews 7:27 - He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.
 - The service was done by the clergy with no participation of the people.
- › At the heart of the Reformation, it began as a recovery.

How the Reformation Affected Worship

- › **Worship is governed by Scripture over human invention.**
 - Matthew 15:8-9 - This 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. (c.f. Colossians 2:20-23)
 - Calvin states: “Moreover the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application, so that we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunction of him who alone is entitled to prescribe”¹
 - Reformers: acceptable worship required divine authorization, not simply sincerity or custom. Luther took a similar approach, still based on the Word, allowing greater freedom in non-binding forms.
 - **Principle:** God declares His own worship through His Word.
- › **Centrality of the Word in Worship**

¹ John Calvin, The Necessity of Reforming the Church (1543–1544), in Tracts Relating to the Reformation, translated by Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), vol. 1, pp. 128–129.

- The Reformation moved the public reading, exposition, and preaching of Scripture back to the center of gathered worship.
- 1 Timothy 4:13 - *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.*
- 2 Timothy 4:2 - *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*
- Calvin wrote: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”²
- **Principle:** God Himself speaks to His people in the service through His word.

› **Intelligible Worship.**

- The move toward common language worship was theological, not merely practical: if corporate worship exists partly for the edification of the church, the congregation must understand what is being read, prayed, preached, and sung.
- 1 Corinthians 14:9 - *So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air.*
- This is not just a matter of convenience; rather, it is a matter of the Gospel. There is a clear understanding that Worship should communicate the gospel in language the congregation can understand, so that hearers can learn, believe, and respond—not merely witness an unfamiliar ceremony.
- **Principle:** Worship must be understood by the people who are participating.

› **Congregational singing.**

- Luther especially sought hymns in the language of the people so that the entire gathered church could sing biblical truth together. His concern was consciously rooted in texts such as Colossians 3:16.
- Colossians 3:16 - *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. (c.f. Ephesians 5:19)*
- Even though there were divergences among the reformers, the kernel of the Reformation still held that they were looking for the Word of God to dictate their worship. In a lack of clarity there. became an apparent freedom, within bounds.
- **Principle:** The church body worships together when they worship in song together.

› **The Lord's Supper as Christ's instituted meal rather than a re-sacrifice.**

- Hebrews 9:25-28 - *Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of*

² John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, final Latin edition, 1559, IV.1.9.

himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. (c.f. Hebrews 10:10-14, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

- All reformers move clearly away from the mass' re-sacrifice of Christ.
- **Principle:** In the Lord's Supper, we offer remembrance, not a re-sacrifice.

› **We worship directly to God through Christ.**

- 1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
- Hebrews 4:14-16 - Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
- Zwingli insisted, "That Christ is the only mediator between God and man." And also "That when we pray for each other on earth, we do so in such manner that we believe that all things are given to us through Christ alone"³
- The principal argument here is about mediation. Reformers did not attack the nature of the church, or the offices. Yet they did assault the claim of a righteous mediation that those priests held over the people as having no biblical warrant.
- Yet this all stemmed from the crisis of the indulgences. This was the spark of the Reformation, which drove Martin Luther to nail those 95 Theses to the castle of Wittenberg in 1517.
- What emerges grander from this controversy is the doctrine which now is generally known as the priesthood of all believers.
- **Principle:** Christ is our only mediator, giving us direct access to God without an earthly mediating priesthood. And in our worship, we all worship God directly.

Applications

- › **Reformation shows us the pattern of reform.** In any matter of doctrine or practice, all movement is towards the Word of God. In many ways, the Reformation can be thought of as putting the church back under the Word of God.
- And I believe the great opponent to this is not flat-out heresy, **but rather, our preferences.**
 - You may favor shorter Scripture readings or enjoy the longer ones. Maybe you would like to see more prayer in the service, or no special music, or more special music; the list goes on and on.

³ Zwingli, *The Sixty-Seven Articles* (1523), article XIX; Jackson, ed., *Selected Works* (1901)

- The principal and difficult application for us is to reverse the question. Not if we enjoy the worship of God, but rather, if God enjoys our worship of Him.
- Let us strive to put all of those under the Word of God. Pray for those leading, creating, and setting up our worship to lead us in the right worship of God.
- › **Worship is a congregational act.** As we see, the Reformers changed the language to be that of the common tongue. It comes under the understanding that all the people of God should worship together. This is a subsequent theological development of the priesthood of all believers.
 - 1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
 - **The principal call is for all of us to participate.** While one speaks, others listen. All are called to sing in unity, pray in unity. All things done orderly.
 - This is a necessary context for understanding the importance of congregational singing. In congregational response in readings or prayers. The Reformation brings it back to the people, true worshippers of God, worshiping together.
- › **Gospel-Shaped Worship.** The Reformation is not simply the reclaiming of elements of worship, but the form of worship as well.
 - It's in the Reformation that we see a gospel-shaped pattern emerge of: confession, forgiveness, assurance, Scripture, prayer, and communion.
 - The shape of the service is in the shape of the gospel.
 - All of this drives us to the fundamental question: **Is our tendency of worship traditional, or Biblical? We're more interested in only what "we've always done", or are we open to being shaped by forms of worship that fall inside of Biblical lines for our own edification?**
 - This is the type of question that we all must wrestle with in our hearts as we approach the launching of our own church.
- › Hebrews 12:28-29 - ²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for our God is a consuming fire.
- › Let us desire to be a people wholly dedicated to acceptable worship, biblical worship, not the traditions of man, as we seek to worship together.