

**Christian Worship**  
**Class 2: Which Worship?**  
TPC CE, Fall 2023  
August 27, 2023 (and probably September 10)

**I. Recap from Week 1**

- This class is about Christian Worship, focusing on what is essential (even while talking about some distinctives)
- Worship is ascribing worth to something or someone, but that always has activities connected to it—devotion, service, etc.
- Worship is what we were made for
- Worship is inevitable—no one ceases to worship, they only choose/exchange the true and living God for a substitute object
- Idolatry is de-forming, true worship is re-forming... into the image of Christ

**II. Which Kind of Worship Are We Talking About?**

**a. Implicit Worship and Explicit Worship**

**Romans 12:1-2**, I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**1 Corinthians 10:31**, So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

**Colossians 3:22-24**, Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

**Psalms 95:1-2**, Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

**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.

**Example:** Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). There is a hum of prayerfulness that you should have in your life. But if that hum never turns to a focused, set aside time to pray attentively and for some length, then we won't fulfill the kind of prayer much of the Bible describes (e.g., Phil 4:4-7; 1 Pt. 5:5-7; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Mk. 1:35).

Implicit worship is only possible because of explicit worship. We must have a foundation of focus upon learning about God in order for our minds and hearts to have the capital to live our lives in worship toward God.

## b. Corporate Worship, Private Worship, and Household/Family Worship

Israel had several feasts that they must travel to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate (see esp. Lev. 23)

**Hebrews 10:23-25**, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not 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.

**1 Corinthians 11:17-22**, But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (See also 1 Cor. 14)

**Matthew 6:5-6**, "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

**Psalms 63:5-6**, My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,  
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,  
when I remember you upon my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night.

**Psalms 1:1-2**, Blessed is the man  
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9**, And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (see also v. 20-25)

**Psalms 78:1-4**, Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;

incline your ears to the words of my mouth!

I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings from of old,  
things that we have heard and known,  
that our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children,  
but tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.

All three types of worship are taught and commanded in the Bible. The problem is that we often think of them a bit wrongly. We tend to think of these as a spectrum of one thing instead of three distinct things. In our minds (shaped by a culture that prioritizes the individual over the community), corporate, public worship as just a bigger version of private worship—the same thing but in a group instead of alone.

But the truth is that corporate worship is fundamental in the Bible, and our private worship is based upon that. Our private worship and family worship is derivative from worshipping as the church.<sup>1</sup>

**Westminster Confession of Faith 21.6**, Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by his Word or providence, calleth thereunto.

### III. The Goals of Corporate Worship

- a. The glory of God
- b. The building up of the body of Christ

**Book of Church Order 47-3**, The end of public worship is the glory of God. His people should engage in all its several parts with an eye single to His glory. Public worship has as its aim the building of Christ's Church by the perfecting of the saints and the addition to its membership of such as are being saved -- all to the glory of God. Through public worship on the Lord's day

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<sup>1</sup> See the treatise by Puritan David Clarkson, "Public Worship to be Preferred before Private" (this is in the public domain and you can find it easily by searching the title online)

Christians should learn to serve God all the days of the week in their every activity, remembering, whether they eat or drink, or whatever they do, to do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

**1 Corinthians 14:5-12, 26, 40** <sup>5</sup> Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up. <sup>6</sup> Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, <sup>11</sup> but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church... <sup>26</sup> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up... <sup>40</sup> But all things should be done decently and in order.

#### IV. How Do We Know What True Worship Is?

- a. **False worship is all over the Bible** (not just worshipping the wrong God, but worshipping the right God wrongly)
- **False hearts in the midst of right action (hypocrisy)**

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, <sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

**Isaiah 29:13**, ... this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me. (quoted by Jesus in Matt. 15:8 and Mark 7:6)

**Psalms 50:7-15, 23** “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;

O Israel, I will testify against you.

I am God, your God.

<sup>8</sup> Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

<sup>9</sup> I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.

<sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.

<sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

<sup>12</sup> “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.

<sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
or drink the blood of goats?

<sup>14</sup> Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and perform your vows to the Most High,  
<sup>15</sup> and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” ...

<sup>23</sup> The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;  
to one who orders his way rightly  
I will show the salvation of God!”

**Psalm 51:15-19,** <sup>15</sup> O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

<sup>16</sup> For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;  
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

<sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

<sup>18</sup> Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;  
build up the walls of Jerusalem;

<sup>19</sup> **then** will you delight in right sacrifices,  
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

- **Wrong actions in worship (even when we claim right motives)**

**Leviticus 10:1-2,** Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. (see also 1 Samuel 15; 2 Samuel 6)

### **There is a wrong way to worship God**

**Exodus 20:1-5,** And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God...”

“If the first commandment is against worshiping the wrong God, the second commandment is against worshiping God in the wrong way... Most generally, the second commandment forbids self-willed worship—worshiping God as we choose rather than as he demands.” – Kevin DeYoung, *The 10 Commandments*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> DeYoung says “most generally” because the second commandment has been understood to forbid much more specific things as well, namely, any image/depiction of God. It was absolutely intended to do this for Israel (Deut. 4:9-24), who subsequently broke the command in Ex. 32 (notice Aaron says that the golden calf is “the LORD,” v. 4-5). The more difficult question is whether the second commandment forbids making images/depictions of Jesus. The Westminster Larger Catechism (109) and the Heidelberg Catechism (96-98) both say it is forbidden, though there is disagreement in the Reformed tradition as a whole on the nature of this prohibition. See DeYoung, especially page 50.

- b. Right worship is determined by God.** It is his prerogative, his right to determine how he will be worshipped.

One of our tendencies, because we know how frequently God charges his people with *right actions* but *wrong motives*, is to assume that there is no such thing as right actions. Instead, we assume that the controlling factor for worship that is pleasing to God is worship that has the right motives (regardless of our actions).

**But this is to misunderstand the God’s critique of false motives. Just as with all of his law, hypocrisy isn’t answered by us creatively coming up with new ideas for how to please God. Instead, hypocrisy is answered by turning our hearts to God in faith and humility and love, and continuing in obedience to his commands.**

- We don’t start from “God wants me to worship him with my whole heart. What do I do that I feel like engages my heart the most? I’ll worship God with that.” (Golf, singing alone in my bedroom with the music blaring, watching the sunrise on a hike, etc.) Instead, we start by being attentive to what God commands of both our actions and our hearts, “God has commanded me how to worship him, and he commands me to do it with my whole heart, mind, and strength. How do I engage my whole self in the way God has told me to worship him?”

- c. God’s Word directs us differently in the different “pieces” of our worship**

#### **Content, Elements, Forms, Circumstances<sup>3</sup>**

- **Elements are the actions we are doing**
  - They are expressly commanded in Scripture
  - In new covenant worship these are primarily the reading & preaching of Scripture, prayer, singing, and the sacraments, as well as giving of gifts, confessing the faith, on occasion the taking of vows (see WCF 21.5, BCO 47-9)
- **Content is what we are saying in the elements** (lyrics of our songs, things we are thanking or asking God for in prayer, content of our sermons, etc.)
  - Notice that someone could do all of the actions commanded by God, but preach incorrectly, sing songs that have false doctrine, pray prayers that are out of step with Scripture, and have wrong explanations of what is happening in the sacraments

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes these are unhelpfully summarized as “Elements and Circumstances.” The problem is that the purveyor of that idea will take our category of “forms” and either attach it to “circumstances” (making it something that God doesn’t care about that much and is really up to us to figure out with our human wisdom) or attach it to “elements” (making it something that God clearly prescribes in the Bible and so anyone whose forms don’t match ours is being unfaithful to God’s commands). The acknowledgement that “forms” are their own thing helps us to be both humble toward God (recognizing that the structure of our worship ought to come from the Bible in some sense) and humble before others (recognizing that the structure of our worship isn’t found in explicit commands from God, but in using human wisdom and Christian prudence to understand and reflect the flow of Scripture). For more on these, see Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship* (P&R, 2020).

- The content of our elements should be “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), “the words of the faith and of the good doctrine” that we are taught in God’s word.
- Additionally, we must strive for this content to be comprehensive (over time). We need to fill our worship services not just with the parts of the Bible we like, but with “the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27)
- **Forms are:**
  - **The shape an individual element takes** (reading Scripture as an assurance of pardon, or call to worship, or benediction; having a prayer of confession or a song of sending)
  - **The shape of the whole service, the way the different elements relate to one another** (singing a song about communion with God while we are celebrating the Lord’s supper, having our corporate prayer confessing sin follow after our song of praise of God, praying for illumination before reading the Scripture for the sermon, etc.)
    - We do not have a line-for-line order of worship given to us in Scripture
    - Though we do have general patterns that are evident in places like Exodus 19-24, 2 Chronicles 5-7, the book of Hebrews (this shows us logical sequence instead of chronological sequence), and Revelation 1-22.<sup>4</sup>
    - These forms, the shape or ordering of our elements in worship, should go “with the grain” of the teaching of Scripture (WCF 1.6)<sup>5</sup>

**Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6**, The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. 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 concerning the worship of God, and 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.

- **Circumstances are the practical details about how these things are accomplished** (what time to meet, where to meet, temperature of the room, lights, microphone, printed liturgy or screens, sit or stand or kneel, etc.)
  - We shouldn’t pretend these have no theological implications; so we do need to use sanctified Christian wisdom, but these also need worldly wisdom (see language on WCF 1.6)

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this, see the amazingly helpful chapter titled “Worship: On Earth as It Is in Heaven” in *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present*, ed. by Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey (New Growth Press, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Bryan Chapell very helpfully shows this to be the case in his book *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Baker, 2009). Part 1 shows that there are various stories told in the ordering of the elements of worship through various traditions (the medieval Roman catholic church, Luther’s liturgy, Calvin’s liturgy, Westminster, modern evangelicalism, etc.).

- But we also need to be humble about these decisions because they are not expressly laid down in Scripture, and so churches with much in common may make different decisions about these<sup>6</sup>

So, we see that the actions we take (**elements**) in Christian worship are prescribed to us by God's word, and the shape or order of our worship (**forms**) should go with the grain of the message of God's word. But we also need to remember what is most fundamental to what we are doing—the **content**. We sing, pray, read and preach Scripture, and observe the sacraments, but we aren't told to fill those elements with whatever we'd like. Instead, the revelation of God in his word is to be the content of everything we do (see Col. 3:16-17). We sing God's word, pray God's word, hear God's word, and see God's word.

#### d. Scripture and Tradition, or Where Do We Find "Christian Prudence"?

Scripture must prescribe the **elements** of our worship, but we've already acknowledged that Scripture does not say everything about the **forms** or the **circumstances** of our worship (WCF 1.6). But that doesn't mean that those are free-for-alls. Instead, we are to use "the light of nature" and "Christian prudence" according to "the general rules of the Word" to make decisions about those things.

Because we are products of the Reformation, we rightly assert that we are "sola Scriptura" Christians. As the Westminster Confession says, "The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." (1.10) In other words, God's word is our supreme and final authority.

However, we are not "nuda Scriptura" Christians—those who profess that Scripture is our only authority and stripping away all other lesser authorities. We don't close our eyes and pretend no one before us has ever read the Bible or sought to live as a Christian in this world. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) and are joined to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). We are "catholic" (i.e., universal) Christians, not innovators and Johnny-come-lately's. And so we seek to worship as the true Church has worshipped throughout her history.

**"Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name." – Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*<sup>7</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> We also need to humbly recognize our "situatedness" or perhaps our biases on these questions. For instance, the length of our services is something that is pretty common where we live and in our general evangelical/reformed tradition. But other times and other traditions have had no problem worshipping for 3-4 hours each Sunday. We may think standing is a posture of reverence, but many previous eras saw standing as a posture of confidence and sitting or kneeling as a posture of humility. Technology has made a worship service without screens seem odd, but for the first 1500 years of the church, having more than one printed Bible in the room (let alone a whole book of hymns, or a freshly printed bulletin with all the prayers, songs, and footnotes) would have been unheard of.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *Reformation Worship*, ed. by Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earney, 48.



We never lift tradition over Scripture. Nor do the two sit side-by-side, as equal authorities. But we also don't ignore the Christian prudence of our brothers and sisters who followed Christ before us.

So, at Trinity we happily confess the Apostles' (c. 215 A.D.) and Nicene Creeds (381 A.D.), as well as parts of the definition of Chalcedon (451 A.D.), Heidelberg Catechism (1563), and Westminster Shorter Catechism (1646). We sing songs from many eras of the church, and pray corporate prayers written by the church Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, etc.

We do none of these things slavishly—if a line in a song or prayer doesn't conform to the true teaching of God's word, we won't sing it, or we will change it if that seems wise. We also won't use old things just because they are old or reject new things just because they are new. As C.S. Lewis said, "People were no cleverer [in the past] than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the same mistakes."<sup>8</sup> We will also not slavishly drop Calvin's Geneva liturgy or the Book of Common Prayer in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Those were written at a particular time and place and we believe that our worship should reflect the history of the church, but also translate that history to our time and place. So, we want to work at retrieving parts of the past for help worshipping God and building up the church in the present.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> C.S. Lewis, Introduction to Athanasias of Alexandria's *On the Incarnation*. This introduction is one of the best encouragements there is to read old books.

<sup>9</sup> Much more can be said on this. This is the whole argument of the book *Reformation Worship: Liturgies of the Past for the Present* ed. by Gisbon and Earngey. See especially chapters 2 and 3.

## Books

### Basic:

- *Does God Care How We Worship?* by Ligon Duncan
- *What Happens When We Worship* by Jonathan Landry Cruse
- *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, discussed by Mark Dever and Sinclair Ferguson
- *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K. A. Smith
- *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* by Tim Keller

### More Specifically-Focused:

- *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship* by Michael Horton
- *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* by D. G. Hart and John R. Muether
- *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* by Bryan Chapell
- *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* by Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey
- *The Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* by Charles W. Baird
- *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* by Hughes Oliphant Old
- *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* by G.K. Beale

## Audio

- Reformed Theological Seminary class, “Theology of Worship” taught by Ligon Duncan, [https://rts.edu/resources/?fwp\\_resources\\_series=theology-of-worship](https://rts.edu/resources/?fwp_resources_series=theology-of-worship) (you can also access this on the free Reformed Theological Seminary app)