

Meditations in Scripture and the Great Tradition of the Church

REFLECTING
ON WORSHIP

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Reflecting on Worship
Readings and Reflections in Scripture and Various Church Leaders
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Introduction

Few things are more important to “get right” in our churches than the worship of God.

Worship is the Christian’s highest calling and greatest privilege, as it is also for the local church. God has set forth a pattern of sound worship in His Word, and our duty is to learn and follow that pattern, for the glory of God, the edification of His Body, and the progress of His Kingdom.

We’ve drawn from various eras and leaders of the Church to put this study together, and I think you’ll find these meditations on worship helpful in leading you to reflect on this most important aspect of our lives as Christians.

Pastor to Pastor studies combine the resources of Scripture and great Church leaders from the past in a format agreeable to personal or group study. We are happy to offer these resources at no charge to pastors and church leaders, to help you in better grounding the work of ministry in the Word of God and the great tradition and heritage of Christian Church leadership.

Pastor to Pastor studies can be used by church leaders as a supplement to their devotional reading or as a resource for leadership training. Daily “Next Steps” and weekly Questions for Reflection or Discussion can help in bringing new perspectives and developing new skills for the task of leading and building the local church.

The entries in this *Pastor to Pastor* study are arranged for a month of readings, one reading per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord’s work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

T. M. Moore

Week 1, Day 1

The Function of Worship

The Soul of Worship

How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Corinthians 14.26

The Teaching of the Twelve

Anonymous (late first or early second century)

“Thou, Almighty Lord, *didst create all things* for thy name’s sake, and gavest meat and drink for men to enjoy, that they might give thanks unto thee, and to us didst vouchsafe spiritual meat and drink and life eternal, through thy son. Above all we thank thee because thou art mighty. Glory be to thee forever. Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver her from all evil, and to perfect her in thy love, and gather together from *the four winds* her that is sanctified into thy kingdom which thou didst prepare for her. For thine is the power and the glory for ever. Let grace come, and let this world pass away.”

In this prayer the writer of *The Didache* reveals something of the soul of early Christian worship, and gives us insight to the function of worship, what worship is supposed to do. Worship is for the glory of God, to celebrate His goodness in thanksgiving, rejoice in the safety of His sovereignty, submit to His Word for sanctification, join in His Body as a common participation in Him, build His people up in His love, and send them forth from worship to seek and advance the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Worship that does not strive to realize this function will end up striving only to please those who are in attendance, and will rob God of the glory which is His due.

How is it evident that the worship of your church, in all its parts and forms, is striving to bring glory and honor to God, and to build up the Body of Christ in Him?

Week 1, Day 2

The Function of Worship

Gathered in His Name

“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Matthew 18.20

Institutes of the Christian Religion

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Christ promises nothing except to those who are gathered in his name. Let us therefore define what that means. I deny that they are gathered in his name who, casting aside God’s commandment that forbids anything to be added to or taken away from his Word, ordain anything according to their own decision; who, not content with the oracles of Scripture, that is, the sole rule of perfect wisdom, concoct some novelty out of their own heads.”

Calvin’s advice applies to all kinds of gatherings – worship, meetings, Bible study groups, church courts, even family gatherings for a meal. We can only expect to know the presence of Christ in our gatherings, and to realize the promises of His covenant, when we follow His agenda and pattern, and not our own. The function of worship is not for Jesus to do something for us, but for us to honor and glorify Him. Jesus will not come to our gatherings in order to discover how we might like Him to do our business for us. He comes to our gatherings when we, submissive to His Word and one

another, enter together for the sake of the Kingdom, for the building-up of His Body, for the honor and glory of His Name.

How can we know when our various gatherings are beginning to swerve from what God has clearly revealed to us in His Word?

Week 1, Day 3

The Function of Worship

Outward and Inward Worship

“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4.24

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The outward worship of God consists in conversing about Him, in preaching and hearing His Word, in adoring Him on bended knee, in singing His praises in hymns, and in attending to the Sacraments and other services of the Church, public and private. The inward worship of God consists of continual meditation on the divine presence, of fearing and loving God, of abnegation and resignation of self, and of the ready will to do or to suffer all that God desires. These two forms of worship must be joined together...”

Piety is expressed, first of all and continually, in worship. Worship is to be a way of life for the believer, for as we grow in Christ and are increasingly mindful of Him, we cannot help but respond to His presence and provision with ongoing thanks and praise. Public worship is merely the amplification before the watching world of what every believer experiences and practices during the normal course of his daily life – living life to the glory of God. Worship fulfills its function of glorifying God when it engages us inwardly and outwardly for a life of piety in the Body and in the world.

What are some of the practices that promote inward and outward worship? Where are these taught in your church?

Week 1, Day 4

The Focus of Worship

The Work and Business of Ministers

Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” John 13.8

Christ the Example of Ministers

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“The work and business of ministers is as it were that of servants, to wash and cleanse the souls of men: for this is done by the preaching of the word, which is their main business, Eph. v.26. ‘That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.’...it is the duty of ministers of the gospel, in the work of their ministry, to follow the example of their great Lord and Master.”

The proper focus of worship is Jesus Christ, revealing Himself in His Word. Everything we do in worship, as in life, should touch base with, lead to, and lift us toward Jesus. It is typical of pastors today to model themselves and their ministries along the lines of whatever and whoever seems to be

the most “popular” or “successful” church and ministry of the day. The result is, increasingly, all worship services are starting to look alike – contemporary and theatrical – and all pastors are starting to preach alike – anecdotal and supportive. And those that aren’t, are trying to figure out how they can become like everybody else. But Edwards explained that the only proper model for a minister of the Gospel, and for the worship we owe God, is our Lord Jesus Himself.

Who is your model in ministry? And after what model is the worship in your church determined?

Week 1, Day 5

The Focus of Worship

The Object of Faith

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name... John 1.12

Christianity and Liberalism

J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

“The modern liberal preacher reverences Jesus; he has the name of Jesus forever on his lips; he speaks of Jesus as the supreme revelation of God; he enters, or tries to enter, into the religious life of Jesus. But he does not stand in a religious relationship to Jesus. Jesus for him is an example of faith, not the object of faith.”

It will do no good for people merely to admire Jesus as a good man, a shining example of pious and honorable living. Or to love Him because He cares about us and our needs, and promises never to fail us nor forsake us. In worship believers must refocus on Jesus by seeing Him in all His glory, by drawing on His strength and Spirit for worship, and by entering through Him into the glorious presence of His Father and ours. Unless we fall down before Jesus and worship Him, we have no part in Him or His Kingdom. No one ever had a higher regard for Jesus than the devil, but in refusing to worship Him, he condemned himself forever. Jesus is not merely our example; He is our Savior and King.

How does your service of worship point people to Jesus as the object of their faith, and not just an example of it?

Week 1, Day 6

The Focus of Worship

A Day for Jesus

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 1 Corinthians 16.1, 2

First Apology

Justin Martyr (ca 100-165)

“Sunday, indeed, is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, inasmuch as it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and matter, created the universe; and on the same day our Saviour Jesus Christ rose from the dead. For they crucified Him on the day before Saturday; and

on the day after, which is Sunday, He appeared to His apostles and disciples, and taught them these things which we have transmitted to you also for your earnest consideration.”

Sunday was considered the day of new beginnings by the early Christians, and all new beginnings begin in Christ. They moved their worship to that day in order to capture both God’s *original* design for the world and His *redemptive* work in our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus, obviously, the focus of Sunday for the first Christians was on the Lord and His creating and re-creating power. And this day of focusing on Jesus would begin in a service of worship where He was the focus for bringing glory and honor to God.

How does your church encourage its members to use Sunday as a day for focusing entirely on the Lord’s creative and re-creative power and promise? Does your church’s service of worship set a tone and provide guidance for using the whole day for Jesus?

Week 1, Day 7

The Flow of Worship

All Things in Proper Order

Let all things be done decently and in order. 1 Corinthians 14.40

1 Clement 40

Clement of Rome (fl. ca. 90-100 AD)

“These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behoves us to do all things in [their proper] order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable to Him.”

Paul taught that worship which was acceptable to God must be decent and orderly. It must follow the pattern God prescribes for glorifying His Name, and it must keep a focus on Christ and His work throughout. Further, worship should follow an order that is both complete, as to the forms of worship, and logical. Clement was using the pattern of sound worship as a kind of template for ordering the life of the community of faith. He suggested that what Paul had taught about worship and how it should be conducted applies as well to every aspect of the life of a church. If we don’t get the flow and order of worship right, therefore, how can we expect to get the rest of our community life in order before the Lord?

Do the people of your church understand the order by which you worship God, appoint leaders, make decisions, and carry out the ministries of the church? How are these things inculcated in the members of your congregation?

For reflection or discussion

1. How would you explain the *function* of worship? What is worship supposed to *do* or *accomplish*? How can we know when our worship is fulfilling this function? How does this function of worship apply to the *order* and *content* of worship as well as those who gather to worship?
2. Christ should be the focus of worship throughout. Suggest some ways that the different parts of a typical service of worship at your church should direct our minds and hearts to Jesus.
3. What constitutes a proper *order* for or *flow* of worship? Should some things come first, some next, and some last? Explain.
4. How would you evaluate the worship in your church as to its function, focus, and flow, based on what we've seen thus far?
5. What do you hope to learn from this series of meditations on worship?

Prayer:

Week 2, Day 1

The Forms of Worship

Worship and the Psalms

And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him. 1 Samuel 16.23

Basil of Caesarea: Homily on the First Psalm

Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329-379)

“A psalm is the tranquility of souls, the arbiter of peace, restraining the disorder and turbulence of thoughts, for it softens the passion of the soul and moderates its unruliness. A psalm forms friendships, unites the divided, mediates between enemies. For who can still consider him and enemy with whom he has sent forth one voice to God? So that the singing of psalms brings love, the greatest of good things, contriving harmony like some bond of union and uniting the people in the symphony of a single choir.”

The psalms were the earliest songs of the Christian Church and, while they have been continuously used in all the major branches of the Church, this is becoming less common in our day. It was perhaps one or more of his own psalms that David sang to soul-troubled Saul. Much of what we can learn about the function, focus, flow, and forms of worship is provided in the Psalms. Here all the emotions of the soul, the loftiest thoughts of the mind, the firmest convictions of the conscience, and the most far-ranging interests of humankind and the Kingdom come to expression, from the Lord’s own hand. How can we deny them in our singing to Him? And how can we fail to look to the psalms to help us understand the pattern of sound worship?

Does your church use the psalms to worship the Lord? If you wanted to do so, where would you turn?

Week 2, Day 2

The Forms of Worship

A Reliable Guide

Sing praises to God, sing praises!

Sing praises to our King, sing praises!

For God is the King of all the earth;

Sing praises with understanding. Psalm 47.6, 7

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

“From ancient times in the Church a special significance has been attached to the common use of psalms. In many churches to this day the Psalter constitutes the beginning of every service of common worship. The custom has been largely lost and we must find our way back to its prayer. The Psalter occupies a unique place in the Holy Scriptures. It is God’s Word and, with a few exceptions, the prayer of men as well.”

Bonhoeffer was big on using the psalms in worship and prayer. So was the early Church, as we see in Acts 4.23-27. The first Christians seemed to know the Psalter so well that, when one person led off, all joined their voices together in a psalm appropriate for the situation. The Psalter is a most reliable

guide for prayer and for worship. If you have not yet discovered the power and joy of praying the psalms, well, this may be an important week in your life.

Have you ever tried praying the psalms? Why not take one psalm – let's say, Psalm 8 – and start using it as a guide in your prayers for the next few days?

Week 2, Day 3

The Forms of Worship

Start with Gratitude

Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good!

For His mercy *endures* forever.

Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!

For His mercy *endures* forever.

Oh, give thanks to the LORD of lords!

For His mercy *endures* forever... Psalm 136.1-3

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

“In the Christian community thankfulness is just what it is anywhere else in the Christian life. Only he who gives thanks for little things receives big things. We prevent God from giving us the great spiritual gifts He has in store for us, because we do not give thanks for daily gifts...How can God entrust great things to one who will not thankfully receive from Him the little things?”

Thanksgiving and praise: This is the way to come before God in worship. Here is where worship begins, and this is the tone that should characterize our worship throughout. Moreover, perhaps this is a way to begin working at unity with other Bible-believing churches in our community: begin praying for one another. Pray with gratitude for other churches during your times of worship. Pray for your fellow laborers in the Gospel. Teach your people to pray for the rest of the Body of Christ in your community.

Will you begin praying for the other churches and pastors in your community? Will you teach the others in your church to do so?

Week 2, Day 4

The Forms of Worship

Confession of Sin

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”
Matthew 5:23, 24

The Teaching of the Twelve

Anonymous (late first or early second century)

“And on the Lord’s day of the Lord come together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But whoso hath a dispute with his

fellow, let him not come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not polluted. For this is that which was spoken of by the Lord. *In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice: for I am a great King, saith the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the Gentiles.*”

The anonymous author of *The Didache* draws back the curtain of worship in the early Church. Note the mention of confession of sins, and the firm exhortation to take care of any outstanding disagreements before coming together for worship. The first Christians seemed to understand that unconfessed sin could harm both the believer and the believing community. They made confession an integral part of their public worship. Was this part of the reason for their solid witness, even in the face of violent persecution?

What role does confession of sin play in your church’s worship?

Week 2, Day 5
The Forms of Worship

Consistent Preaching

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. 2 Timothy 4.1, 2

Against All Heresies

Irenaeus of Lyon (fl. 175-195)

“But it has been shown that the preaching of the Church is everywhere consistent, and continues in an even course, and receives testimony from the prophets, the apostles, and all disciples – as I have proved – through those in the beginning, the middle, and the end, and through the entire dispensation of God, and that well-founded system which tends to man’s salvation, namely, our faith; which, having been received from the Church, we do preserve, and which always, by the Spirit of God, renewing its youth, as if it were some precious deposit in an excellent vessel, causes the vessel itself containing it to renew its youth also.”

We can see how Irenaeus explained that preaching in the Church was grounded in the Word of God as understood by the teaching of faithful disciples in all places. The developing tradition of interpretation and teaching was itself always subject to renewal by the Word; nevertheless, no preacher in those early days would have thought of teaching anything other than what the Church had taught since the days of the apostles. Today’s preachers must make sure their preaching is guided by sound interpretation, including both the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of faith.

Do you think that much preaching today keeps in touch with the interpretive tradition of the Church? Does yours? How?

Week 2, Day 6
The Forms of Worship

Worship from the Heart

*“Offer to God thanksgiving,
And pay your vows to the Most High.*

*Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” Psalm 50.14, 15*

Jerome: Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians

Jerome (ca. 345-419)

“Let youth hear this, let them hear it whose office it is to make melody in the church: Sing to God, not with the voice, but with the heart; not, after the fashion of tragedians, in smearing the throat with a sweet drug, so that theatrical melodies and songs are heard in the church, but in fear, in work, and in knowledge of the Scriptures. And although a man be *kakophonos*, to use a common expression, if he have good works, he is a sweet singer before God. And let the servant of Christ sing so that he pleases, not through his voice, but through the words which he pronounces, in order that the evil spirit which was upon Saul may depart from those who are similarly troubled and may not enter into those who would make of the house of God a popular theatre.”

Ouch! That’s the problem with Church history – those who have preceded us have already wrestled with many of the issues with which we struggled today. We look to the wisdom and experience of our forebears to help us maintain right doctrine; should we not also consult them concerning right practice? In worshiping God, Jerome encouraged heart-felt singing, not entertainment, and called on even those who didn’t think they can sing to make a joyful noise to the Lord. Give me that old time cacophony over those carefully rehearsed performances any Lord’s Day. Whatever forms we use in worship, and however clumsy or incomplete we may be in using them, God is looking on our hearts.

Can people learn to worship from the heart? What is the pastor’s responsibility in teaching them to do this?

Week 2, Day 7

The Forms of Worship

Wholesome Pleasure and Recreation

*Sing aloud to God our strength;
Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob. Psalm 81.1*

John Calvin: Geneva Psalter

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now among the other things proper to recreate man and give him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the principal, and we must think that it is a gift of God deputed to that purpose. For which reason we must be the more careful not to abuse it, for fear of soiling or contaminating it, converting it to our condemnation when it has been dedicated to our profit and welfare.”

Singing to the Lord should be a source of recreation and pleasure. This, I suppose, is one of the reasons contemporary Christian singing has taken over most worship services: people genuinely seem to enjoy singing these new songs. This is good and a welcome addition to our worship; however, we must not dismiss the old hymns just because they don’t bounce to our familiar beats, and their syntax is more demanding than that to which we’re accustomed. Here again there is need for teaching. Like scribes in their teaching, worshipers in their singing should be capable and excited about singing from the treasure of Christian music songs old and new (Matt. 13.52).

How would you describe the pleasure that singing should bring to the Christian? In what ways are our souls and bodies “recreated” by singing?

For reflection or discussion

1. Does your church consult and use the psalms in its worship? In what ways?
2. Outline the “order” of service your church typically follows. Does this seem to be complete with all the required forms of worship, such as those we’ve considered thus far?
3. How would you describe the singing that takes place in your worship? Are the people instructed in singing, hymnody, or the role of music in worship?
4. Does the preaching of the Word in your worship make good use of the analogy of Scripture and the analogy of faith?
5. Can you see any ways your church’s service of worship could be improved according to what we’ve considered thus far in these meditations?

Prayer:

Week 3, Day 1

The Forms of Worship

Imparting Virtue

*Blessed are those who dwell in Your house;
They will still be praising You. Psalm 84.4*

Cassiodorus: *Institutiones*

Cassiodorus (ca. 477-570)

“Music is closely bound up with religion itself. Witness the decachord of the Ten Commandments, the tinkling of the harp, the timbrel, the melody of the organ, the sound of cymbals. The very Psalter is without doubt named after a musical instrument because the exceedingly sweet and grateful melody of the celestial virtues is contained within it.”

Anyone who doesn't believe that music has the power to shape moral character has not been paying close enough attention to the effects of pop music on young people. We should not underestimate the power of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to contribute to the outlook and heart-set of the virtuous person. The Holy Spirit inhabits such singing, and, since we must worship in Spirit and in Truth if we would worship truly, the more we sing in worship – praises, thanks, confessions, testimonies, recommitments, and much more – the more we should expect the Spirit to accompany our worship. But we shall have to more than merely sing if we want to gain this benefit. We shall have to teach God's people singing, and to sing.

What are some ways a pastor could teach his congregation to cherish the words of great hymns and other spiritual songs? Why should we do this?

Week 3, Day 2

The Forms of Worship

Christ Undivided

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 1 Corinthians 11.28, 29

The Teaching of the Twelve

Anonymous (late first or early second century)

“And concerning the Eucharist, give thanks in this manner. First, concerning the cup...And concerning the broken bread...As this bread that is broken was scattered upon the mountains, and gathered together, and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom: for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. And let none eat or drink of your Eucharist, but they that have been baptized into the name of the Lord; for concerning this the Lord hath said: *Give not that which is holy to the dogs.*”

The writer of *The Didache* saw a close connection between the Lord's Supper and the unity of the Body of Christ. How sad that, since the Reformation, Christians have allowed the Supper to be a source of division rather than a means of uniting together in Christ and bearing witness to the world of the oneness of His Body. Sadder still, how many Christians today really understand the Supper as a way of “participating” in Christ?

Is there any hope? Is there any way that churches in a local community might be able to express their oneness in a common service of worship, with the Lord's Supper?

Week 3, Day 3

The Forms of Worship

Approaching Baptism

“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 commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28.19, 20

The Teaching of the Twelve

Anonymous, (late first or early second century)

“And concerning baptism, baptize thus. Having first recited all these things, baptize *in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* in running water. But thou hast not running water, baptize in other water; and, if thou canst not in cold, in warm. But thou hast neither, pour water thrice upon the head in the name Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And before baptism let the baptizer and him that is baptized fast, and such others as can: and thou shalt bid the person to be baptized to fast for one or two days before.”

The writer of *The Didache* mentions baptism in the same context as the Lord's Supper, leading us to think that both sacraments must have been practiced as part of the worship of God's people. Just as folk were encouraged to prepare carefully for the Supper, so also for baptism – both the one to be baptized and the one who would baptize. Again, we note the seriousness with which the first Christians seemed to have approached all aspects of the worship of God.

How do you prepare people for baptism? How do you prepare yourself to baptize someone?

Week 3, Day 4

The Forms of Worship

The Power of Singing

“Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.” Deuteronomy 31.19

Commentary on Isaiah 5:1-7

John Chrysostom (ca. 344-407)

“Why do Isaiah and Moses make their accusations in a song? In their spiritual wisdom they wanted to implant a great a great thing in their listeners' souls. Nothing is more useful than to recall one's sins regularly, and nothing fixes something permanently in ones memory than a melody...He also uses the form of a song because people seem to be under some sort of compulsion to sing the words of a catchy tune again and again. As they repeat the words of this song, they will constantly be reminded of their sins, thus making it easier to teach them virtue.”

For all our contemporary Christian music and new worship songs, singing in the Church is on its way out. When a congregation cannot hear itself singing, when it is not instructed in singing and its role in worship, or when it is continually subjected to “new songs to the Lord” and not given the opportunity to settle into familiar hymns, they will give up on singing and turn instead merely to

listening. But there is no mandate in Scripture to listen to Christian music. Singing can do so much in worship – carry our prayers, voice our confessions, reinforce our testimonies, as well as offer praise and thanks to God. We must not fail to give singing the place in our worship which God gives it in His Word.

How would you describe the state of singing to the Lord in your church? Do the people appear to be gaining the benefit God intends for them from singing?

Week 3, Day 5

The Forms of Worship

Forms and Focus in Worship

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day... Revelation 1.9, 10

First Apology

Justin Martyr (ca 100-165)

“On the day which is called Sunday, all who live in the cities or in the countryside gather together in one place. And the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as there is time. Then, when the reader has finished, the president, in a discourse, admonishes and invites the people to practice these examples of virtue. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers. And, as we mentioned before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is presented and wine with water; the president likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability, and the people assent by saying, Amen.”

Reading of Scripture, preaching, prayer (and singing), and communion: these seem to have been the key forms employed in weekly worship among the people of God in Justin's day. The focus is entirely on God: hearing His Word, expounding His Word, making offerings to Him of prayer, and participating in Him through the Lord's Supper. We must not allow our own worship to lose this focus, or it will not accomplish its function in glorifying the Lord. Everything we do, and all that we lead God's people to do in worship, must direct their hearts and ours to the Lord.

What are some things that can cause us to lose this focus in worship? How should we guard against them?

Week 3, Day 6

Freedom in Worship

Most Obedient

But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” James 2.18

The Freedom of a Christian

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“So when the soul firmly trusts God's promises, it regards him as truthful and righteous. Nothing more excellent than this can be ascribed to God. The very highest worship of God is this that we

ascribe to him truthfulness, righteousness, and whatever else should be ascribed to one who is trusted. When this is done, the soul consents to his will. Then it hallows his name and allows itself to be treated according to God's good pleasure for, clinging to God's promises, it does not doubt that he who is true, just, and wise will do, dispose, and provide all things well. Is not such a soul most obedient to God in all things by his faith?"

Luther might wince a bit at my citing James ("a right strawy epistle" as he said) to support his point, but the two are saying the same thing. If we rejoice to possess the promises of God, we will rejoice to submit to His will and carry out the very obedience that allows us to lay hold on those promises and experience the freedom we have in Jesus Christ. Worship should fit us for such living. We must not teach the promises, or the joys of Christian freedom, apart from a clear, true, and compelling picture of the Lord Who offers the one and provides the other. Only in Him are we truly free, and only by knowing Him will we embrace the freedom He offers in Christ. Our worship should reflect certain freedom in such things as style, theme, use of forms, length, and so on. Such worship, focused on the Lord, will encourage and assist believers to grow in the truth that sets us free (Jn. 8.32).

In what ways do your preaching and teaching include regular exposition of the excellence and greatness of God?

Week 3, Day 7

The Fruit of Worship

The Fact of the Church

Walk about Zion,

And go all around her.

Count her towers;

Mark well her bulwarks;

Consider her palaces;

That you may tell it to the generation following.

For this is God,

Our God forever and ever;

He will be our guide

Even to death. Psalm 48.12-14

Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

"Wherefore do ye, who think that there are no proofs why ye ought to believe concerning Christ those things which ye have not seen, give heed to what things ye see. The Church herself addresses you out of the mouth of a mother's love: 'I whom ye view with wonder throughout the whole world, bearing fruit and increasing, was not once such as ye now behold me.' But, 'In thy Seed shall all nations be blessed.'"

Augustine points to the Church of his day as proof of Christ and His teachings and claims. The Church was a "wonder" in his day, having withstood violent persecution, overcome divisive heresies, evangelized the known world, established communities and centers of worship among all the peoples of the Empire, and demonstrated many good works such as the world had never seen before. The Church was living proof that Jesus is alive from the dead and His Word is true. And worship is the context in which that proof is forged and experienced, so that going forth to live for Jesus is the fruit of our worship.

What would you point to in your church as proof to your community of the reality of Jesus and the Gospel?

For reflection or discussion

1. Does “freedom” in worship mean we are free to omit anything God prescribes? Explain.
2. What might be some ways to teach people the value of singing in worship *while* they’re worshipping?
3. Does your church offer any formal training in worship, or any resources to help people learn why you worship the way you do?
4. What fruit do you expect from the worship of your church? How do you determine whether or not that fruit is present?
5. What are some thing you might do to improve your own practice of worship?

Prayer:

Week 4, Day 1

The Fruit of Worship

Visible and Invisible

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith... Hebrews 12.1, 2

Institutes of the Christian Religion

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name ‘church’ designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ. By baptism we are initiated into faith in him; by partaking in the Lord’s Supper we attest our unity in true doctrine and love; in the Word of the Lord we have agreement, and for the preaching of the Word the ministry instituted by Christ is preserved.”

Does it ever trouble you that there is so little visible unity among the churches in your community? So little sharing in life, worship, ministry, and outreach together? Or that, in many churches today, there is but little regard for the saints who have gone before us, those who have made it possible, by their faithfulness, for the Gospel to come down to us? Would we so easily forget our beloved forebears in the flesh? Or neglect our brothers and sisters, living in the same town? Should not our worship help us better to appreciate our participation in the larger Body of Christ, from every place and time?

In what ways does your church promote unity with other churches and an appreciation of the contribution of previous generations of believers?

Week 4, Day 2

The Fruit of Worship

Communion with God

*One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple. Psalm 27.4*

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival X

The Rev. Charles J. Brown, Minister of New North Kirk Parish, Edinburgh

“A third fruit of revival is a *high and loving esteem of communion with God, and all divine ordinances and means of grace...* Wherever there is a genuine work of God in the soul, there will infallibly be a high regard for the sanctuary of God, for the Sabbath of God, for the mercy-seat of God, for the word of God, for the holy table of God, for the very instruments employed and blessed of God to the soul’s eternal welfare.”

In times of revival people cannot get enough of the Lord. They clamor for more services of worship, and they linger long there. They are much taken up in prayer, both individually and with other believers. They talked excitedly about the Word and spend more time reading and meditating in it. The Lord's Supper becomes a true feast on the Lord's holy presence which increases the efficacy of His grace in the lives of His people. Worship comes alive! And worship that is alive encourages daily revival in the Lord.

How do you assess the "spiritual temperature" of your congregation? Do you have a good sense of where your people stand with respect to the means of grace?

Week 4, Day 3

The Fruit of Worship

Come Together

On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. 1 Corinthians 16.2

The Letters of Ignatius

Ignatius of Antioch (30-107 AD)

"Take heed, then, often to come together to give thanks to God, and show forth His praise. For when ye come frequently together in the same place, the powers of Satan are destroyed, and his 'fiery darts' urging to sin fall back ineffectual. For your concord and harmonious faith prove his destruction, and the torment of his assistants." *To the Ephesians*

Giving is an important form of worship, and it's also a significant fruit. Ignatius' letter to the Ephesians envisioned the various churches in that city coming together to give thanks to the Lord. How hard would it be – once a quarter? once a month? – for Bible-believing churches in a community to come together for a service of worship in a public facility? To give thanks together? To give gifts for the needy in their community? OK, it would be hard. But would it be worth it? Would such a united public witness of Christ's Body testify to the reality of His resurrection in ways our separateness cannot (Jn. 17.21)? Early house churches worshiped daily, but they came together – apparently weekly – to unite their voices in praise to God. Other than for pragmatic reasons, why shouldn't we?

How do you think your church members would respond to being called to worship with others churches in the community? Why not ask some of them?

Week 4, Day 4

The Fruit of Worship

Walking in Love

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. Ephesians 5.1, 2

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

"In the spiritual realm the Spirit governs; in human community, psychological techniques and methods. In the former naïve, unpsychological, unmethodological, helping love is extended toward

one's brother; in the latter psychological analysis and construction; in the one service of one's brother is simple and humble; in the other service consists of a searching, calculating analysis of a stranger."

We can't build unity with gimmicks and games. We need love, expressed first in worship with thanksgiving, then in various kinds of service. Words of encouragement are service. Meeting together to pray and worship is service. Joining hands for witness, diaconal ministry, and the fellowship of the Supper is service. But where does this happen? Hardly anywhere. Are we just too busy running our own programs to reach out in the love of Christ to the rest of His Body? True and spiritual worship leads to loving members scattered throughout the community, walking in love they have expressed and learned in worship.

What are some of the obstacles keeping the churches in your community from have greater visible unity?

Week 4, Day 5

The Fruit of Worship

Sing at Home?

*It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night... Psalm 92:1-3*

Claude Goudimel: *The Genevan Psalter*

Claude Goudimel (1505-1572)

"To the melody of the psalms we have, in this little volume, adapted three parts, not to induce you to sing them in Church, but that you may rejoice in God, particularly in your homes. This should not be found an ill thing, the more so since the melody used in Church is left in its entirety, just as though it were alone."

We are a generation who enjoy listening to music, but find singing an uncomfortable discipline. It seems clear from our psalm, however, that it pleases God for us to begin and end our day with singing, and, we might surmise, to spice up the middle with songs as well. What better way, given all we have seen about singing, to pervade our lives with the presence of Christ and His Spirit? Learn to sing in worship, then fill your home with singing to the Lord. How might that affect your daily life?

Will you make singing a more conscious and conscientious part of your walk with the Lord? How?

Week 4, Day 6

The Fruit of Worship

Spread Abroad and Practiced

*For God is the King of all the earth;
Sing praises with understanding. Psalm 47.7*

Martin Luther: *Wittemberg Gesangbuch*

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“That the singing of spiritual songs is a good thing and one pleasing to God is, I believe, not hidden from any Christian, for not only the example of the prophets and kings in the Old Testament (who praised God with singing and playing, with hymns and the sound of all manner of stringed instruments), but also the special custom of singing the psalms, have been known to everyone and universal Christianity from the beginning. Nay, St. Paul establishes this also, 1 Corinthians 14, and orders the Colossians to sing psalms and spiritual songs to the Lord in their hearts, in order that God’s Word and Christ’s teaching may be thus spread abroad and practised in every way.”

Singing is part of the Church’s witness to the world. Learn to sing, and sing with gusto in worship, and we may be more likely to sing as a witness to the Lord in our everyday lives. That being so, we need to make sure the lyrics we sing are consistent with the doctrine we profess. And we need to sing the whole counsel of God, and not just songs expressive of our own meager experience of the Lord. Let our music declare our convictions and put the world on notice that we believe *from our hearts* and practice *in every aspect of our lives* that which we sing with such gusto and joy.

Would you say that, in your church’s singing, you cover the whole broad scope of the Christian faith? Or is your singing more narrowly testimonies of God’s goodness?

Week 4, Day 7

The Fruit of Worship

Looking Ahead Together

Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4.17, 18

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

“So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world to share God’s Word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing.”

Next time you’re gathered with other believers for worship, look around: these are the people with whom you will spend eternity. So also are those who gather each Lord’s Day throughout your community, and from every nation, tribe, and tongue, not to mention denomination. These are our people, and God calls us to anticipate the day when all our differences will be as nothing and we will be united with Him always and forever – totally focused together on Him, and arm-in-arm with our brethren in Christ. Let us carry the unity, vision, hope, and lifestyle we practice in worship out into our community, looking ahead together to the coming of our Lord.

How might you use a part of the worship service of your church to point ahead to the eternal unity of the Body of Christ in the new heavens and new earth?

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you think it's feasible for Bible-believing churches to worship and work together in your community? Do you think it's a good idea?
2. We've talked much about singing in this series. How is singing both an excellent vehicle for worship and an effective bridge from worship to life?
3. What should we expect people to take away from our services of worship? Do we plan and conduct our services like we expect them to bear some fruit in people's lives?
4. What's the most important insight you've gained from these meditations about worship?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that insight to your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.