

# Biblical Worship

## Week 9 – Preparing Christ-Centered Services

**Introduction:** There are many different elements to a Christ-centered worship service. Sometimes we can get caught up in things that are secondary and so it is worth asking, what is the heartbeat and lifeblood of our worship? When we organize ministries and pursue programs it should all be out of an effort to know Christ and to make Him known. Jesus said to the apostles after appearing to them and spending time with them for 40 days: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* (Acts 1:7-8) The apostles spent time with Jesus and communed with Him. After some time with the Lord, they went out as witnesses of what they had seen. Our worship services must equip believers to be witnesses in their homes, their jobs and every other aspect of life. To be faithful to Jesus, the believer must grow in their love for the truth of who He is. This love motivates their service.

### I. How do we design a worship service that pleases God?

#### 1. A Strong Theological Foundation

- A. Worship is not Christian, unless it is Christ-centered. We only worship in spirit and in truth when we apprehend correctly the God of the Bible. The job of a worship leader and the pastors/elders that are organizing a worship service is to facilitate an atmosphere where people can encounter the Lord Jesus Christ. **PTQ**
- B. Scripture is central to every aspect of the service because people need to know God in order to worship Him and obey Him correctly.
  - † **Acts 8:30-31** - <sup>30</sup>*So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”* <sup>31</sup>*And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.*
- C. The Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8 needed Philip to assist him in his understanding of the prophet Isaiah. This is just one example in scripture where we see someone needing assistance in understanding the Word of God. In a similar way, the goal of a well-structured service is to guide men and women to the truth.
- D. Indeed, this is where we lay the foundation for our worship services. The first goal is for God to be glorified in the truth of what is spoken and proclaimed about Him.
- E. “The worship of those you are leading will be richer if you teach them the riches of the One they’re celebrating.”<sup>1</sup> – Michael Bleecker
- F. The second overarching goal is the edification of the saints and the primary way that we do that is by magnifying Christ, the One that they are celebrating and the One who has redeemed them.

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<sup>1</sup> Bleecker, Michael. “The Worship Leader and Scripture.” Essay. In *Doxology & Theology*, 31. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013.

## 2. A United Vision When Gathering

A. With the vision of the great commission in mind, we come together to worship the Lord, to hear from His word and then to go tell others about Him. **PTQ**

† **Matthew 28:18-20** - <sup>18</sup> *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> 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."* Amen.

† **Acts 1:8** - *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*

† **Acts 2:42-47** - *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. <sup>43</sup> Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, <sup>45</sup> and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. <sup>46</sup> So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. **PTQ***

B. In addition to Christ commissioning the witnesses to go, we see the early church continuing in regular practices together that are reflective of what we have seen from historic church liturgy.

C. The 8 elements that we have discussed previously that have often been included in worship services are:

1. Adoration (recognition of God's greatness and grace)
2. Confession (acknowledgment of our sin and need for grace)
3. Assurance (affirmation of God's provision of grace)
4. Thanksgiving (expression of praise and thanks for God's grace)
5. Petition and Intercession (expression of dependence on God's grace)
6. Instruction (acquiring the knowledge to grow in grace)
7. Communion/Fellowship (celebrating the grace of union with Christ and his people)
8. Charge and Blessing (living for and in the light of God's grace) ♪

D. Having a proper placement of all of these elements helps us to bring our hearts back to Christ and to hear from Him so that we can effectively minister to others and show the love of Christ to them. **PTQ**

## II. The Beneficial Gathering

1. What should our gatherings consist of?

A. Congregational Singing **PTQ**

† **1 Corinthians 14:7-8** - <sup>7</sup> *Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be*

*known what is piped or played? <sup>8</sup> For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?*

- At times this passage has been used to argue that instruments should not be used in worship. But the more important point being made here is that if an instrument is used, it should be used skillfully so that the congregation is edified by it.
- It seems evident that the voice of the people ought to be the primary instrument in our services. Primarily because God says that He wants the people to praise Him and we are exhorted to “make melody in our heart to the Lord.”

† **Psalm 67:3** - *Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You.*

† **Ephesians 5:19** - *speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord*

1. Opening Songs – In Acts 2:47 above, we see that the believers were “praising God” and “having favor with all the people.”
  - We begin with adoration because we recognize that we are wholly dependent on the Almighty and what He can do.
  - Example – “Praise to the Lord the Almighty” or “Hosanna (Praise is Rising)” by Paul Baloche
2. Closing (Response and Invitation)
  - Depending on the congregation and the teacher leading the service, there are different philosophies on a closing song.
  - Some prefer an invitation that would be similar to an altar call (asking people to come forward, etc.).
  - Others prefer a song in response to the sermon that has been heard and sometimes it is a blend of both approaches.
  - Stylistically these approaches and the song choices made can vary. Examples – “I Surrender All” and “Awake my Soul”
3. What songs do we choose?
  - Because the gospel shapes our worship, we choose songs that best communicate the gospel message. This should not be mistaken to mean that the words must be overly simplistic. On the contrary, they can speak deep gospel truths in them, but the songs should give us a picture of the biblical gospel. **PTQ**
  - Of course when we do this, Christ will be central to those themes.
  - An example of following the flow of gospel shaped worship while including the 8 elements of the worship service would look something like:
    - a) Across the Lands – Praise to Creator God
    - b) Christ the True and Better – Praise to Christ the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets.

c) All I have is Christ – A testimony to how I was once lost and have been saved by grace.

- You could choose however many songs you and the other elders agree to for a church service, but the goal should be to communicate the contours of the gospel through the songs.
- At times we may need to ask the question of “is there a better song to communicate a particular emphasis in the gospel message?”

4. Should we sing specials?

- This is an element in modern worship services that we don’t see a lot throughout church history.
- However, what we do see is a flexibility in the liturgy that allows for elements that edify the body in accordance with a Christ-centered and gospel shaped structure.
- Some churches have decided to do away with specials and sing an additional congregational song. Others (like Lighthouse) have continued to use the Special music as a way to implement songs and messages that benefit the congregation in a unique way.
- So long as the Special music helps to support an overarching goal within the worship service, it can be a helpful tool in the edification of the body and the equipping of the saints.

B. The Word of God Read **PTQ**

1. Responsive readings – These have been referred to also as antiphonal readings where the Pastor or Worship Leader may have the congregation repeat back a specific line or phrase. This can help encourage congregational participation.

† **Psalm 136:1-4:**

Leader:

<sup>1</sup>*Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good!*

Congregation:

*For His mercy endures forever.*

Leader:

<sup>2</sup>*Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!*

Congregation:

*For His mercy endures forever.*

Leader:

<sup>3</sup>*Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!*

Congregation:

*For His mercy endures forever:*

Leader:

<sup>4</sup>*To Him who alone does great wonders,*

Congregation:

*For His mercy endures forever*

2. Transitional readings – These are scripture or passage readings that help bring the worshiper from one idea to the next. For example, between songs a worship leader might read scripture that helps to connect the ideas of one song to the next song.

Example:

- Christ the True and Better Adam
- **Ephesians 2:4-7** - <sup>4</sup> But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), <sup>6</sup> and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- All I Have is Christ

3. Supportive readings – These are texts that support the overarching theme of the sermon or help to introduce the main preaching text.
4. Benediction readings – These are scripture readings that exhort the beloved to live out what they have just heard. To preach the good news to all the earth and to live as faithful stewards.
  - “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began <sup>26</sup> but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—<sup>27</sup> to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” (Romans 16:25-27) Go serve the Lord this week! We love you guys.
  - We have just heard about what it means to know Christ and then to go make Him known to others. Let us go and apply that this week! To God be the glory. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. <sup>24</sup> My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (1 Corinthians 16:23)

#### C. The Word of God Preached **PTQ**

1. Main text read – This would be whatever text that the Pastor/Teacher is speaking on.
2. Other texts cited – This would be support texts to defend a particular point within the main passage (where we see that idea presented elsewhere in scripture).
3. Exposition of the text – The Pastor/Teacher’s primary duty when preaching the Word is to exposit the Word of God. One author says that exposition is “accurately interpreting and explaining the text of Scripture and bringing it to bear on the lives of the hearers.”<sup>2</sup> **PTQ**

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<sup>2</sup> Jason K. Allen, “[Pastor as Preacher](#),” in *Portraits of a Pastor: The 9 Essential Roles of a Church Leader* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 62.

**D. The Opportunity to Give an Offering PTQ**

1. Giving generously – In Acts 2:45 above it says that the believers *“sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.”* It is worth noting that this is not only in reference to the church offering but to those in need. We are to care for one another within the church body and be considerate of one another’s needs.
2. Giving as a sacrifice of praise – When we give, it is good for our hearts because we learn to let go of a material possession and entrust the resources we have been given back to the Lord.
3. How should we collect the offering?  
† **1 Corinthians 16:2** - *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.*
  - Many churches today have stopped passing offering plates. The trending model is more online giving or a box at the back of the sanctuary.
  - While the method of collection is not explicitly stated in scripture, there should be a time in the service dedicated to almsgiving or giving in general. The model given in scripture is that the early church would have collected the offerings on the first day of the week. **PTQ**

**E. Prayers in the Service PTQ**

1. Opening – Prayers that offer praise and thanks to God as well as confession of sin and the assurance of pardon. The opening prayers for the service should follow the objective of the opening songs and preceding service elements.
  - Giving thanks, asking for the Lord’s help (petition) and hearing from His word are all ways that we live in the light of the gospel. We are new creations that walk daily with our God.
  - The flow from Confession to Assurance reminds us of our sinful nature and the relationship that is to be renewed day by day with our Savior. This renewing is enhanced and completed by an assurance of the provision that God has given us in Christ.
2. Offertory – Prayers of thankfulness for the blessings that God has given us and asking the Lord to use the gifts that are received to bless others and advance His kingdom.
  - This prayer helps us to acknowledge the Lord as the giver of all good gifts and to focus our attention on Him as we give.
3. Communion – Prayers that help to center our attention on Christ’s atoning sacrifice and the purpose of partaking in the Lord’s Supper.
4. Closing – Prayers of benediction and exhortation. This prayer should affirm all that we have learned today and encourage the believer to go and be faithful stewards of the truth they have received.
  - Chapell notes that “In many churches the Benediction is voiced only by an ordained pastor with the understanding that the words (1)

convey the official endorsement of the church on all that has proceeded and (2) carry Christ's own Blessing on his people for the work he now calls them to do."<sup>3</sup>

**F. The Ordinances of the Church PTQ**

**1. Baptism (use and frequency)**

- Identifies the believer with Christ
- Is the true act that signifies a believer uniting with Christ. An outward sign of an inward reality. This is the way that Christ commanded us to show our fidelity and allegiance to Him, despite what other cultural influences might attempt to add to this (the altar call, etc.)
- Because we are called to be fishers of men, baptisms should be a regular part of our services in so far as there are new converts coming to faith in Jesus Christ or those that have believed and have never made a public profession of their faith through believers baptism.

**2. The Lord's Supper (use and frequency)**

- This ordinance should be taken seriously and intentionally scheduled into our worship services on a regular basis.
- The Lord's Supper and the fellowship of the saints, gives a sweet time of remembrance and a deep sense of belonging to the body of Christ. This is shaped by the gospel because it is the gospel that brings us to perfect union with God in Christ.
- The communion meal is an opportunity for believers to remember their Lord's death until He comes.
- Jesus said "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, do in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) Frequency seems to be left open for local churches to determine how often they will celebrate the Lord's supper, but it does appear that the early church would have practiced it weekly.
- There are views that hold to a weekly partaking of the supper, a monthly, a quarterly and occasionally a yearly frequency.
- Most protestant traditions celebrate the supper at least annually and generally more frequently because scripture indicates that the early church seemed to be taking the Lord's supper at least weekly.

**G. The Benediction PTQ**

1. "Go and tell others" is the exhortation that follows our worship. The elements of the service should help us to savor Christ and to grow in our love for Him so that we can reflect the light of Christ to those outside the doors of the church building and the gathering of the saints together. This is the role of the charge and blessing (the benediction).

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<sup>3</sup> Bryan Chapell, [\*Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice\*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 252.

2. Charging believers to remember the grace they have received in Christ and to show forth God's love to the world through faithfulness in service and the proclamation of the gospel to our neighbors.

**Conclusion:** When we gather, all of our activities are a response to the work that the Lord has done in each of our lives. We are the body of Christ. We gather to exhort one another to love God, remain faithful to the gospel call and to serve with good works. Christ must be at the center of all of this! We will be continually striving to remain faithful to God's Word and to "make His praise glorious" (Psalm 66:2) until the day we meet Him face to face. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" as we seek to worship our Lord together (2 Corinthians 13:14).

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