

“Biblical Worship”
John 4:22-24
(Preached at Trinity, February 9, 2020)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. We've been reviewing what we call, the "Seven Distinctives of our Church."
These distinctives have become the heart of our mission. As I've stated, our distinctives are both descriptive and prescriptive. They describe our church, but they are also goals for our church.
2. It is important for us to continually evaluate our church. Whenever we discover a weakness it is imperative that we quickly make corrections. Jesus warned the Church of Ephesus: *Remember, Repent, Return*. The same is true for every believer and every church.
Revelation 2:5 NAU - "remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent."
3. So far, we've looked at the first two, "Christ Centered" and "Sound Doctrine."
These two are essential to the upholding of the other five. Jesus Christ must be the focus over everything in our church. He is our Head. And we must also base everything we do as a church upon sound doctrine. The Bible must be the rule of truth upon which everything else rests.
4. This morning I want to draw your attention to the third of our distinctives:
"Biblical Worship."
5. In John 4 we read about the dialogue Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well. She was religious and was convinced that her way of worship was the proper way. The response of Christ was shocking to her.
John 4:22-24 NAU - "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
 - A. True worshippers must engage in worship centered upon truth. It must be Biblical worship.
 1. True worship is Trinitarian - directed to the Father, through the Son, by the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit.
True worship is made possible through the Son. As our Mediator, access to the Father is only possible through Jesus Christ.
John 14:6 NAS - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."
 2. True worship is spiritual worship demanding hearts equipped to worship. Christianity is a relationship. This relationship is reflected in our worship.

3. True worship demands recognizing God’s infinite greatness, majesty, and glory and bowing in homage and submission to Him. In Scripture, coming before God was never a casual or common affair. Coming before God always demanded bowing in humble submission.
- B. Everything about our worship must be consistent with Biblical truth
1. Our singing must be theologically accurate.
Colossians 3:16 NAU - "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."
 2. Our preaching must be theologically accurate. This is why expository preaching is important – it allows the Biblical text to direct the sermon.
 3. True worship demands theological accuracy – In other words, true worship demands worshipping the true God; worshipping God as He is.
 - b. We must worship according to the truth of God. God is a Spirit and as a most Holy Spirit He demands spiritual worship.
 D. A. Carson – “God is spirit’ means that God is invisible, divine as opposed to human, life-giving and unknowable to human beings unless he chooses to reveal himself.” ¹
 - c. William Hendriksen – “Worshipping *in spirit and truth* can only mean rendering such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act, and in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in his Word. Such worship, therefore, will not only be spiritual instead of physical, inward instead of outward, but it will also be directed to the true God as set forth in Scripture and as displayed in the work of redemption. ²
 4. True worship demands including only the elements of worship that God commands – known as the Regulative Principle of Worship.
 1689 LBC: Chapter 22:1
 “The light of nature shews that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good, and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”
Chapter 22:5
 “The reading of the Scriptures, preaching and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, are all parts of religious worship of God”

¹ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 225.

² William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 1:167.

- I. By Biblical worship we mean that the Bible is the standard for ordering our worship – The Regulative Principle
- A. The Reformers and later the Puritans held that the acceptable way to worship God was instituted by God Himself. The Word of God provides the only authority for how we should worship. All worship must conform to the clear teaching of Scripture. God sets the parameters on what is permitted in worship, not man.
1. There are three positions that are practiced in churches today.
 - a. One is basically no position. They don't even consider the question. In our hyper self-centered, casual culture many feel they should be able to worship in any way that they feel appropriate. They use the music that is modern and upbeat and preaching that is evaluated primarily on whether or not it is entertaining.
 - b. The second position is more thoughtful. They don't want to do anything that is unbiblical. So, anything is permitted in worship as long as it is not specifically forbidden by God. Since drama, dance, puppets etc are not forbidden they are therefore permitted.
 - c. The third position understands that God determines how He will be worshipped. We must only permit those elements which He has specifically commanded. This is the Regulative Principle.
 2. The Regulative Principle is consistent with the principle of Sola Scriptura articulated by the Reformers. The regulative principle was an application of Sola Scriptura. A Reformed church will practice this form of worship.
 3. John Calvin – “We may not adopt any device [in our worship] which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of him who alone is entitled to prescribe. Therefore, if we would have him approve of our worship, this rule, which he everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed . . . God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word.”³
 4. The simplicity of worship styles of most of the evangelical traditions including Baptists and Presbyterians is the result of the application of the regulative principle.
Exodus. 20:25 NAU - "If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it."
- B. The regulative principle is clearly taught in Scripture.
1. God rejected Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground and accepted Abel's animal sacrifice not because He had *prohibited* man from offering fruit, but because He did not *command* it.
 2. Nadab and Abihu were killed because they offered strange fire which God “Commanded not.”
Leviticus 10:1-2 NAU - "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.² And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD."

³ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*. (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 19956), Pages 17-18.

3. God stated this principle clearly
Deuteronomy 12:29-32 NAU - "When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, ³⁰ beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' ³¹ "You shall not behave thus toward the LORD your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. ³² "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it."
 4. The first four of the Ten Commandments describe various aspects of our worship of God
 - 1st – forbids the worship of any other God.
(God shall be worshipped alone)
 - 2nd – forbids even the worship of the true God through the use of images. We are not allowed to worship according to our imagination
 - 3rd – forbids the improper or irreverent use of God's name. In other words, God shall be worshipped with holy reverence. God's "Name" is the expression of His Divine being.
 - 4th – commands the setting apart of one day for the worship of God.
- C. To reject the regulative principle is to allow our hearts and imaginations to decide the correct way to worship God.
1. The Bible makes a clear statement about the heart of man,
Jeremiah 17:9 NAU - "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"
 2. The human heart is prone to idolatry. When left to our imagination worship soon becomes idolatrous.
 3. The problem with most modern worship is it is dominated by the ideas and imaginations of men. They think they should be able to incorporate the music and methods of our modern culture and call it worship. Contemporary worship has even crept into many so-called reformed churches.
 4. Joe Morecraft – "Human beings neither have the right nor the competence to dictate to a sovereign God how He ought to be worshipped. Why not? Because of our creature hood and our sinfulness we are totally unqualified to determine how God is to be worshipped or to have any say or to make any suggestions in the matter. We are simply to find out what God wants and then do it. Only God has the prerogative to determine how He is to be worshipped and served by His creatures. It is the height of arrogance, superstition, and idolatry to think we have any prerogative to determine how God is to be worshipped. How dare the clay dictate or suggest anything to the Potter."⁴

⁴ Joe Morecraft, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him*. (San Antonio: Vision Forum, 2001), Page 10.

5. We are to worship God acceptably according to His commands.
Hebrews 12:28-29 NAU - "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire."

II. The Regulative Principle in practice – What are the Elements of Biblical Worship/
 Worship Ordinances

- A. Prayer
Acts 2:42 NAU - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
- B. The reading of Scripture
1 Timothy 4:13 NAU - "Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching."
- C. The singing of Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs
Ephesians 5:18-19 NAU - "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;"
Colossians 3:16 NAU - "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God."
- D. The receiving of an offering
Matthew 5:23-24 NAU - "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."
1 Corinthians 16:2 NAU - "On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."
- E. The proclamation of God's Word
1. The preaching of God's Word must take priority in worship
 2. Preaching is an essential part of worship
 The regulative principle was the guiding force in the pulpit being moved to the center in Protestant churches
 3. John MacArthur – "Preaching is an irreplaceable aspect of all corporate worship. In fact, the whole church service should revolve around the ministry of the Word. Everything else is either preparatory to, or a response to, the exposition of Scripture. When drama, music, comedy, or other activities are allowed to usurp the preaching of the Word, true worship inevitably suffers. Moreover, a 'church' where the Word of God is not regularly and faithfully preached is no true church."⁵

⁵ John H. Armstrong, General Editor, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), Page 182.

- F. The ordinances
Acts 2:42 - "They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."
Acts 20:7 NAU - "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight."
- G. The nonessentials of worship
Second London Confession of 1689, 1:6 – “. . . 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.”
1. The circumstances of worship refer not to worship content but to things incidental to worship. They are not dependent upon explicit instruction from God but rather on Christian prudence and those things “common to human actions and societies.”
 2. These incidentals include such things as furnishings, sound systems, buildings, times of meetings etc.
 - The Bible does not specify pews or chairs, carpet or tile, incandescent or fluorescent lights, etc.
 - The Bible does not command the use of air conditioning, yet air conditioning is common to our society and not excluded in the regulative principle of worship.
 - The Bible does not command the times of our services, but human prudence would prohibit us from scheduling the Sunday morning worship service at 5:00 a.m.
 3. These incidentals are not to be confused with Gods order for worship.

III. There is another important aspect of Biblical Worship

- A. Biblical worship is more than getting the details right
1. We must not dismiss the details – they are essential
 2. But after getting all of the details right we may not be worshipping
- B. Jesus used the words “Spirit and truth”
1. Our worship must be spiritual worship
 Worship is an activity of the saints
 2. Salvation is multidimensional.
 - a. There is the dimension of saving faith. This has a focus on the cross, upon Christ as redeemer. We become reconciled with God.
 - b. There is the spiritual dimension. There is the heart issue. The God with whom we are reconciled has become our Father.
 The Holy Spirit reveals to us our new relationship.
Romans 8:16 NAU - "The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,"
 - c. Worship is about a redeemed people coming before God expressing love and reverence.
 3. True worship is an extension of our relationship with Christ.
 Biblical worship reflects our life in Christ. We return to our first distinctive. Worship doesn't happen automatically. It demands hearts enflamed with love for Christ.

Conclusion:

1. As a church our great passion must be our worship. It is our highest activity. Nothing is more important than bowing before God in worship. It is the greatest activity of the redeemed.
Psalm 27:4 NAU - "One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall 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 meditate in His temple."
2. Worship is a heart matter. One of our distinctives is "Personal Holiness."
True worship is not disconnected with the condition of our heart. Our worship is a reflection of our life.
3. May we be a worshipping church. May our worship define us. May it be our identity—a church that worships God.
This demands a passion and love for Christ – a true desire to come before Him in holy reverence.