

SERMON: BIBLICAL WORSHIP

We will return to Matthew next week. Because of the changes we are making in our worship order, I wanted to teach on biblical worship today.

Most evangelical worship services consist of several activities that are more or less disconnected from each other. Every church is liturgical; every church has a prescribed and expected order of worship.

Our own “liturgy” has been:

COB

- Welcome and announcements.
- A reading from Psalms (whatever Psalm is next in line).
- Two songs.
- Reading a Bible text that is parallel to the sermon text.
- Two songs.
- The sermon.
- The Lord’s table on the first Sunday.
- Congregational prayer.
- Reciting a historic creed.

OHF

- Welcome and announcements.
- Reading from the London Baptist Confession (whatever passage is next in line).

- Two songs.
- An Old Testament reading (whatever is next in line).
- Two songs.
- Congregational prayer.
- The sermon.
- The Lord's table on the first Sunday.

Through no one's fault but my own, these have all been largely unrelated to one another. I am not criticizing anyone here but me; I do the planning for the services. The truth is that while I typically spend 15-20 hours each week in sermon preparation, I have spent very little time planning our services, and for that, I apologize.

The Lord convicted me of my laziness and convinced me of the need to be deliberate in our public services.

Let's pray together!

How blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of Yahweh.

How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
they seek Him with all their heart.

They also do not work unrighteousness;
they walk in His ways.

You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.

O, may our ways be established to keep Your statutes!

(Psalm 119:1-5, 2022 LSB)

Pastoral Prayer

Father, we want to be the blessed, blameless ones!
Help us today to observe Your testimonies,
seek You with all our hearts,
walk in Your ways,
and keep Your word.
Conform us today to the obedience of Christ!
Amen!

ONLY GOD IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

The first thing to say about worship is that it belongs to God alone. Period. End of discussion. First Chronicles 16 records a song of thanksgiving from David. David's song explains what it means to worship God. I encourage you to follow along with me in your Bible.

8 Oh give thanks to Yahweh,
call upon His name;
Make known His acts among the peoples [That is, unbelievers.]
9 Sing to Him, sing praises to Him;
Muse on all His wondrous deeds.
10 Boast in His holy name;
Let the heart of those who seek Yahweh be glad.
11 Inquire of Yahweh and His strength;
Seek His face continually.
12 Remember His wondrous deeds which He has done,
His miraculous signs and the judgments uttered by His mouth,
13 O seed of Israel His servant,
O sons of Jacob, His chosen ones!

14 He is Yahweh our God;

His judgments are in all the earth.

15 Remember His covenant forever,

The word which He commanded for a thousand generations,

(1 Chronicles 16:8–15, 2022 LSB)

David then goes on to do exactly that in First Chronicles 16:16-22.
Then he returns to his instructions.

23 Sing to Yahweh, all the earth;

Proclaim good news of His salvation from day to day.

24 Recount His glory among the nations,

His wondrous deeds among all the peoples. [And again, “nations”
and “peoples” mean unbelievers.]

25 For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised;

And He is more fearsome than all gods.

26 For all the gods of the peoples are idols,

But Yahweh made the heavens.

27 Splendor and majesty are before Him,

Strength and joy are in His place.

28 Ascribe to Yahweh, O families of the peoples,

Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength.

29 Ascribe to Yahweh the glory of His name;

Lift up an offering, and come before Him;

Worship Yahweh in the splendor of holiness.

30 Tremble before Him, all the earth;

Indeed, the world is established, it will not be shaken.

(1 Chronicles 16:23–30, 2022 LSB)

David speaks of the earth's response to God. Then he closes this way,

34 Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good,

For His lovingkindness endures forever.

35 **Then say, “Save us, O God of our salvation,**

And gather us and deliver us from among the nations,

To give thanks to Your holy name

And revel in Your praise.”

36 Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel,

From everlasting to everlasting.

Then all the people said, “Amen,” and praised Yahweh.

(1 Chronicles 16:34–36, 2022 LSB)

If a worship service were an awards show, there would only be one award, and there would only be one recipient. Every song, every proclamation, every retelling, every reckoning, every attribution, every confession, every appeal, every thanksgiving, every cry for help, and every shout of praise would be to God and God alone.

There would be no other awards.

No “Best Supporting Preacher.”

No “Best Special Song.”

Worship given to anyone else is idolatry. Yahweh alone is worthy of worship.

That's the first truth of worship.

GOD IS SPECIFIC ABOUT WORSHIP

The second thing to say is that God is specific about the worship given to Him.

From Adam to Moses, God spoke to individuals directly or through dreams and visions. They had no written Scripture to follow, but nevertheless, God instructed them.

In Genesis 26:4-5 the Lord said to Isaac,

**5 Abraham listened to My voice
and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My
laws.”**

(Genesis 26:5, 2022 LSB)

With just one or two exceptions, none of these charges, commandments, statutes, and laws are recorded in Scripture. But God gave them to Abraham, and Abraham kept them.

After Moses came, God instructed him to *write* His Word. Among other topics, the Scriptures include detailed instructions for worship. What Yahweh had previously established with a select few in Genesis is now clearly outlined in His Word for all of humanity to follow. And we see He will only accept worship that He has commanded.

By way of example, Leviticus 8-9 describes the ordination of Aaron as

the high priest and his sons as priests. In those two chapters, there are 33 references to the commands of God. Eight times we see the phrase, “just as Yahweh had commanded.” Moses and Aaron went through a very specific series of steps, just as Yahweh had commanded.

At the end of Leviticus 9, we read,

23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting.

Then they came out and blessed the people.

And **the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the people.**

24 Then **fire came out from before Yahweh and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar.**

And all the people saw it and shouted and fell on their faces.

(Leviticus 9:23–24, 2022 LSB)

So God revealed Himself, and the people worshiped.

This was the result of Moses, Aaron, and the others following God’s commands: “Just as Yahweh had commanded.”

So what happens next?

1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron,

took their respective firepans and put fire in them.

Then they placed incense on it

and offered **strange fire** before Yahweh,

which He had not commanded them. [“Strange” does not mean weird, but foreign, unauthorized, uncommanded.]

2 And fire came out from the presence of Yahweh and consumed **them,**

and they died before Yahweh.

(Leviticus 10:1–2, 2022 LSB)

God accepted the worship given as He had commanded. He rejected worship that He had not commanded.

We are called to worship God in accordance with His Word. His Word reveals that the worship that pleases Him has a specific order and content.

THE BIBLICAL ORDER OF WORSHIP

No one passage of Scripture outlines an order of worship for the church. That doesn't mean there isn't a biblical order. The doctrine of the Trinity isn't explicitly taught in one location, either. Instead, we understand God's triune nature through the Bible's teachings that there is only one God, and that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all God. The conclusion that God is Triune is the only one we can draw when we allow Scripture to speak for itself.

The same holds true for a biblical order of worship. A specific order is not commanded in a single place, but a pattern appears throughout the Bible.

Much of evangelical worship follows the **Normative Principle**, which says that whatever a person is inspired to do in their heart is acceptable

to God as long as it's sincere. But why were Nadab and Abihu rejected and executed? It wasn't for idolatry. They were worshiping Yahweh. It wasn't because they invented a brand-new way to worship. They simply offered to God what He had not commanded. They followed their hearts.

Following the Reformation, the Reformers had their work cut out for them. They didn't invent anything, but they did have to rediscover what the Word of God taught about many things. As they studied, they came to understand that the Word of God regulates the worship of the church. It defines both the order and content of our worship. The Lord does not say to us, "Do whatever seems right to you, and I'll appreciate the effort." He says, "I have shown you in My Word what I desire; do that." The Reformers called that the **Regulative Principle** of worship.

Order matters to God. He is logical and orderly. His creation is logical and orderly. We practice logic and order every day.

- Farmers clear, till, plant, irrigate, cultivate, and harvest. The order matters.
- Couples meet, court, commit, marry, and have children. The order matters.
- Socks before shoes. Underwear before pants. The order matters.

And so it is with worship.

The order that emerges in Scripture is this.

1. God reveals Himself to sinners in His Word.
2. People respond to God's revelation with worship.

3. They also respond with confession of their sin.
4. God forgives their sin and takes away their guilt through Jesus Christ.
5. God instructs His people through His Word.
6. They trust Him and promise to obey.
7. They bring their needs and concerns to Him in prayer.
8. God joins His people to Himself in peaceful fellowship.
9. He sends them to do His will.

Notice that this is what the Gospel does. A biblical order of worship is Gospel-shaped. The Gospel provides the order of our worship. In fact, the worship service is a depiction or reenactment of the Gospel.

THE BIBLICAL CONTENT OF WORSHIP

The content of worship matters as much as the order. There are five elements of worship that we are commanded to do.

First and foremost, God's Word is preached.

1 I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom:

2 **preach the word;**

be ready in season and out of season;

reprove, rebuke, exhort,

with great patience and teaching.

(2 Timothy 4:1–2, 2022 LSB)

The Word of God is central to the worship service. Preaching is literally at the center of the service. And the teaching text provides the theme for the entire service. The other elements of the service are chosen with the sermon in mind.

Second, the Word of God is to be read.

13 Until I come, give attention to the **public reading of Scripture**
(1 Timothy 4:13, 2022 LSB)

Don't tell stories or jokes. Don't read poems. Don't throw the service open as a talent show. Read the Word of God to the people. It is what God has given us for life and godliness. We cannot control what the Spirit of God might do in our lives today, but we can saturate ourselves with His Word.

By the way, that Scripture was the Old Testament. The apostles did NOT unhitch the church from the Old Testament. They proclaimed that Jesus had fulfilled the Old *Covenant*. They did not teach that the Old *Testament* had been set aside.

Third, the Word of God is to be sung.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, [and how do we do that?]

with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another [and how do we do that?]

[singing] **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,**
with gratefulness in your hearts to God.
(Colossians 3:16, 2022 LSB)

There is an inseparable connection between the truth of God's Word and singing. It's why I reject the songs of apostate groups like Hillsong, Bethel, and Elevation Music. Those songs are written and performed by people who are steeped in false teaching and deception.

You see, God has given us a wealth of biblically faithful, Scripture-filled music. We can sing the Psalms, of course. The historic hymns of the church have stood the test of Scripture and the test of time. And faithful people today continue to write worship songs that are filled with biblical truth and glorify God.

Fourth, we are to pray.

6 Be anxious for nothing,
but in everything by **prayer and petition with thanksgiving**
let your requests be made known to God.
(Philippians 4:6, 2022 LSB)

These words are spoken to the church, not just individual believers. We are to pray together in worship.

Fifth, we are to celebrate the Lord's Table.

I will read First Corinthians 11:23-26 when we come to the Lord's

table this morning.

The corporate worship service really builds to the Lord's Table as a picture of eternity. We are not just forgiven. We don't just have eternal life. We are seated in the heavenly places with Christ. We probably think of that seat as sharing His throne, but the point, I believe, is that we are, even now, in intimate, peaceful fellowship with Him.

Why depict that fellowship as a dinner table? Because that's where the family gathers to be family. That's where close friends are welcome.

So, who sits at Christ's table? His family. His friends. Not His enemies. Not those who reject Him. Those who have trusted Him, obey Him, and live for Him. Those whom the Father has adopted by His blood. Those for whom He prays constantly in heaven.

Even if we don't celebrate the Lord's table each week, we need a weekly reminder that because of Jesus Christ, God is at peace with us, and we have peace with Him.

I want you to leave the service saying, "God has spoken to me in His Word. I have worshiped Him. I have admitted my sins. He has forgiven me. He has instructed me. I trust Him, and I will obey His instructions. I brought the burden of my life to Him in prayer. And He sat me down at His table and fed me on His own life. What else can I do but serve Him this week?"

BRINGING IT HOME

What do we do with this as we bring it home?

We need to take our weekly worship seriously because our Lord and Savior does.

We should prepare ourselves for worship before coming. Ask the Lord to prepare your heart. Read the sermon passage ahead of time. Read a hymn and contemplate the words. For instance, the first stanza of *At The Cross Of Jesus* says,

*At the cross of Jesus, I would take my place,
drawn by such a measure of redeeming grace;
fill my eyes with sorrow, lift my eyes to see
Jesus Christ my Saviour, crucified for me!*

Be filled with gratitude for God's goodness, and prepare for worship.

When you come in on Sunday, come with the expectation of honoring and serving your God. The word *liturgy* means "the work of the people." The Sabbath day is a day of resting from our daily work in order to engage in our spiritual work. Greet others, but then sit and pray. Listen to the readings. Sing the songs with joy and energy. Absorb the Word preached. Pray with faith. And trust that the Lord has seated you at His table.

And then, go and serve Him for the next 6 days and 22 hours. Devote those days to Him. We begin our service with God speaking to us in His Word. We end our service with God speaking to us in His

Word. He has the first word. He has the last word. Throughout the service, God is speaking and we are responding. How do we respond to His closing word? By going and serving Him through the week.

Stand with me, and let's sing a prayer of response to the Lord.

Be Thou My Vision

*Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me save that Thou art;
Thou my best thought by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word,
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son,
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

*Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance now and always;
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art.*

*High King of heaven my victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun;
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.*

Pastoral prayer

- Thanks for the Word!
- Help us to live for Your glory!
- Amen!