

Reformed Worship: A Theology of Worship

Lesson 6: We Submit to God's Agenda & Meet on His Terms

In sum: God cares how we worship. In fact, He cares so much that He's given us specific instructions re: worship and He's shown us that He'll reject both us and our worship if we don't follow them.

The Trouble with Submission

- I. The cry of our entire generation is, "I don't want to!" We live in an increasingly me-centered generation in which nothing is more sacred than the self; and this mentality has taken over the church service. Rather than looking into the Word of God to see how we *ought* to worship God, we come up with our own methods based on *personal* preference. "Gone is any conviction that one liturgy is better than another because it conforms to revealed truth, or that one order of worship is more appropriate than another for the theology that a congregation confesses. Worship, like food or clothes, is merely a matter of taste." –D. Hart
 - A. But if it's true that worship is a meeting with God, then that means God runs the meeting, Ecc 5.2.
 - B. This means worship **can't** look like anything *we* want. We **can't** do what we want. We have to do what God wants. Christian worship isn't subjective. It's objective. And given the power and sovereignty of God, it's literally a matter of life or death.
 - C. Our default setting is to think that if our heart is in it, God is happy with it. But there's arrogance in that way of thinking.

God Cares How We Worship

- I. Two stories about two brothers prove the point that God cares how we worship.
 - A. Gen 4.3-5, Cain and Abel. Regardless of what made Cain's sacrifice unacceptable, two things become clear here: 1) there is a type of worship that is acceptable and a type that is not; 2) if we worship God in a way that displeases Him, not only our worship, but our very selves, will be rejected.
 1. If worship is left to us, we'll end up worshipping ourselves rather than God.
 2. But God is not a bigger me. He is God. And He calls the shots. He sets the terms of peace. If our worship isn't grounded upon Scripture, then it needs to change—no matter how much we like it.
 - B. Lev 10.1-2, Nadab and Abihu. Regardless of what the fire was, two things become clear: 1) there's a type of worship that's been authorized and a type that hasn't.
 1. God takes worship seriously, and so should we.
 2. Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*: "There's a twofold reason why the Lord, in condemning and prohibiting all fictitious worship, requires us to give obedience only to His voice. 1) it tends greatly to establish His authority that we don't follow our own pleasure; 2) such is our folly that when we're left to ourselves, all we're *able* to do is to go astray. And once we've turned aside from the right path, there's *no end* to our wandering."
- II. This teaches us that worship must be a God-ward activity and never man-ward. "There are only two options in worship. It can be people-centered or God-centered. It *can't be both*." –T. Johnson

Worshipping by the Word

- I. The Word of God must regulate what goes on in our worship services. We must do only those things which it commands and we must never do those things which it forbids.

- A. Those things which the Bible commands and prescribes are called *elements*. These are nonnegotiables (cf Acts 2.42; Col 4.16; 1Tim 4.13; 1Th 5.27; 2Th 3.14; Eph 5.19; Col 3.16; Rom 12.8, 13; 2Cor 8.19-21; 9.11-15; 1Tim 6.15; 2Tim 1.13-14; 2Th 2.15; 1Jn 1.8-10).
- B. Along with elements another category in worship is called *circumstances* (1Cor 14.40). These are those things which the Bible has not mandated and which it requires wisdom to implement in the right way. Part of proper worship is recognizing what things are elements and what things are circumstances. The elders are directly responsible to make this distinction and keep worship both biblical in its *elements* and decent and in order in its *circumstances*.

God Serves Us

- I. Is there a proper order to the liturgy? There must be a gospel logic to what we do: adoring God's greatness; confessing our sinfulness; hearing of forgiveness in Christ; and being built up into Christ through preaching, prayer, and sacrament. This is God's goal: that we be reminded each week through worship of the work He's done for us in the gospel.
- II. This reminds us that while we're not passive in worship, the primary work of worship is done by God Himself. When we come together for worship, we are meeting to have something done to us and for us. We are meeting with God to be changed.
- III. This doesn't mean that we primarily come to worship for what we get out of it. Our transformation is the *result* of worship not the *reason* for it. The reason is God and His glory.
 - A. We should lament the recent trend in many evangelical churches to give primacy of place to singing. Because when that becomes the majority of worship, it teaches us and shapes us into thinking that we have more to offer God than He has to offer us; that we and our feelings are at the center of worship; and that we are the active party in worship and God is the recipient.

We Submit to His Agenda

- I. We all agree that we should submit to what God commands of us in life; but why do we think of Sunday worship differently?
 - A. Why do we hear of God's agenda for worship and say "I don't want to"? But obedience through the week begins with obedience on at the beginning of it. Worship is where we learn and are trained in the disciplines that are crucial to the Christian life: humility, submission, obedience, and faith. In worship, we learn to surrender our wants and preferences and recognize that whatever God says goes. And when we do that, we reflect Christ.
 - B. And why wouldn't we submit to God in worship? He comes to do us good. He comes to serve us Himself, the Supreme Good. And He's doing a work in us for our everlasting good. And why wouldn't we want that?
 - C. It's literally a matter of life or death. Do it's God's way and live or die trying anything else.
 - D. Let us be sure that we *join* a church with biblical worship and then let us be sure that we *engage* in that worship, Ps 100