

# Reformed Worship: A Theology of Worship

## Lesson 7: We Commune with the Saints

“According to the arrangement of God, the Christian is more of a Christian in society than alone, and more in the enjoyment of privileges of a spiritual kind when he shares them with others, than when he possesses them apart.” James Bannerman

### Intro

The worship of God finds its fullest and truest expression in the called, corporate setting. We are wired for corporate worship, the great profit gained from worship is due, in part, to its corporate setting, and we are destined eternally for corporate worship. In this sense, worship was always meant to be corporate and will be forever corporate, Ex 4.22-23; 5.1; 8.1; Rev 5.13. Let’s explore two things that happen when we worship together.

### We are Separated from the World

- I. Many Christians have forgotten that there is meant to be a fundamental distinction from the church and the world (i.e. the kingdom of Satan and sin), Rom 12.2; Gal 6.14; 1Jn 2.15; 5.19. The will of God is distinct from the will and desires of this world so that Christians are to be dead to it, meaning that we are to have no living and active relationship with sin and evil.
  - A. We all know this as regards our daily lives; and should our worship practices be any different? So many churches have pushed for decades to transform our worship services into something that attracts the non-Christian. Modern church services can resemble anything from a movie theater to a concert venue, more than an encounter between God and redeemed sinners.
  - B. But when we capitulate our worship to the trends of the culture, we’ve lost something powerful that’s meant to be happening in worship: the church’s separation from the world. Worship is the time and place when God reminds us that we’ve been called out of the world and set apart unto Him, Col 1.13. “When the church loses its distinction from the world, the power of the church is gone—like salt that has lost its savor, good for nothing but to be trodden underfoot.” —Machen
  - C. The fear of not making the worship service comfortable and familiar to unbelievers is that they won’t like it. But that’s part of the point, Jn 15.19. We’ve been chosen out of the world and separated from its “wisdom” and “worship” and our worship services should reflect that. They should be, literally, otherworldly—after all, they *are* taking place *in heaven*, Heb 12.22-24. When we gather, we want it to be clear that we belong to God and not to the world.
- II. This doesn’t mean, of course, that unbelievers are not welcome. Indeed, we’re to go to the streets and compel them to come in, for everything has been made ready by God. The church is a place where sinners are converted, Rom 10.17, a place where sinners are transformed and redeemed from the kingdom of sin. All people are welcome to come, without any bias or prejudice.
  - A. But we can’t forget that God is doing something among His people that He’s not doing among the unbelievers. His Spirit is at work in the hearts of believers in a way that He’s not at work in the heart of unbelievers, 1Jn 3.1; 1Cor 11.27
    1. The church service is a collective separation of the redeemed people of the earth, a gathering of the remnant of Israel in an idolatrous world, an encouraging reminder to us all that we’re not alone, that God has reserved to Himself many more “who have not bowed the knee to Baal” (Rom 11.4).
    2. In worship we’re drawn away from the enemy and reminded of the brothers and sisters fighting alongside us. We’re drawn together to a place of refuge in a war zone. We’re let together to an oasis in the desert.

- B. So while we welcome the world into the worship service, the worship service is not for the world, it's for God and His people.
  - 1. The people of God will be built up and sanctified as they commune with God through Christ and drink deeply of the means of grace.
  - 2. The unconverted, who appear without Christ and His mediation, will be uncomfortable, convicted, and even terrified, as they come before God as Judge and His Law as the avenger of blood (Num 35; Dt 19)—that is, unless and until that conviction is the very means of working conversion, Acts 2.37-38; 16.30-31
  - 3. How terrible it is, then, to adjust the worship service so that the unconverted fit right in, thereby cutting off all means by which they would ever come to see their lost condition and repent and believe on Christ for salvation!

### **We are United to One Another**

- I. While God is reminding us that we do not belong to the world, He's simultaneously reminding us that we do belong to one another. The Christian worship service is not simply a display of camaraderie or even of our loyalty to one another and to our church. It's the place in which the Spirit of God draws us deeper and deeper into the fellowship of Christ, in whom we're all united, and therefore closer and closer to one another.
  - A. United as a Body
    - 1. The church is the Body of Christ, and when the Holy Spirit works faith in us and unites us to Christ, He also thereby unites us to everyone else who is also in Christ, Eph 4.4-6; Rom 12.4-5; 1Cor 12.12; Eph 4.11-16
    - 2. When we come together corporately we're built up together and enabled by the Spirit to live out our Spirit-given function within the Body of Christ. We experience the blessing God has for us through the hands of other believers and we in turn bless them, 2Cor 1.3-7
    - 3. Not belonging to a church, and forsaking the assembly, is tantamount to dismemberment or decapitation. God's wants neither for us. Instead, He wants us to find unity in diversity, to see the multitude of gifts He's given us, and to see that they all flow from Him, 1Cor 12.11.
    - 4. We come to worship to give and receive the Spirit's gifts from one another, WCF 26.1
  - B. United as a Temple
    - 1. The church is also called a temple, 1Cor 3.16; Eph 2.22, and this implies two things:
      - a) 1) that the primary role of the church is worship—the worship, not of us as individuals, but as a collective whole. We are being built up together in worship together as the one Body of Christ. When we worship together corporately, we are transformed by the Spirit into the worship center for God's glory.
      - b) 2) that the church on earth is part of the church in glory, Rev 21.2, 9, 22. We are being built up in this world as a part of the church of the world to come. We belong to something that will never pass away. We have begun our eternal and heavenly worship here on earth.
  - C. United across Space and Time
    - 1. Being united in Christ, who is omnipresent and eternal, we are united to all other Christians, regardless of where they are or when they lived, WCF 25.1. When we worship, the Spirit not only lifts our souls to heaven but He also binds us together in communal worship with all believers around the world and the ages. When we confess our faith, we do so with the universal, catholic church. When we say the Lord's Prayer, the "our" reflects this bond and unity. When we worship on the Lord's Day, we do so with the entire church across time and space, earth and heaven.
    - 2. This truth can help explain why we appreciate the psalms and traditional hymns and liturgy, viz. because when the church gathers for worship, she ought to *show her age* and *reveal her ancient roots* with the Church formed by God over all ages. "Any church that cuts itself loose from the stream of Christian worship throughout history is a church that risks severing itself from her heritage, her Head. For Christ is Lord of the Church's history and heritage." —Jonny Gibson
    - 3. When we keep our worship pure and true and faithful to Scripture, we lay the foundation for a future generation of worshippers, we guard the good deposit, 2Tim 1.14