

Christ Centered Worship: Patterns for the Church (Sermon and ideas taken from Scripture, but helped by Bryan Chapell's book *Christ Centered Worship*.)

Let me begin by asking, "*What is our goal as we gather on Sunday mornings?*" Now, the big answer is clear. We gather to worship. And let me say from the outset that I believe we worship 24/7 which is what we do with our lives as Christians. Rom. 12:1 says, "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**" Brothers and sisters, we worship all the time, spiritually. This includes All of life.

But, from another perspective, we come together on Sundays to worship in a particular way. As a church, we gather. We sing. We pray. We read the Bible. We listen to preaching. We take the Lord's Supper. We baptize. All of this is worship. These are the things we do as a church. And, ONLY the church can worship in such ways. This is our goal from a larger perspective: to worship God. But today, I want us to consider certain patterns of worship (from B. Chapell: *Christ-Centered Worship*) that underly what we do. And by so doing, I hope we will get a clear picture about why and what we do when we gather, particularly for this weekly service. I have two truths about Christ-Centered Worship and then some applications.

1. Our Worship is Christian. In other words, what we do when we gather for worship is CHRISTIAN. Our worship is Christ-centered. Another way of putting this is to say our worship is Gospel-Centered. The Gospel is the good new of Jesus Christ. "**For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). We gather today; We worship today because we are Christians! We have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. We have received the Holy Spirit. We have been reconciled to God. We have been adopted; we are God's children. Our sins are forgiven, the wrath of God no longer resides on us. And, Yes, we still sin. But, we have a savior who intercedes for us. He does this because of his sacrifice on the cross and then his resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. These are Gospel Truths; truths that must be at the center of all our worship. This is the ONLY reason I am here. Otherwise, I would do something else on a regular basis. Now, I love all of you and like most of you. And I would gather with you to hang out and be with my friends. But, I would surely fall off over time. The reason we gather is because we are Christians. And it is our desire to be here! It is our desire to worship as Christians! And we are give instructions from the Word of God to "gather regularly."

This means when we do meet, our gathering must reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the rays of the sun display the sun, as the waves of the ocean flow from the mass ocean itself, so our worship displays the glory of God in the Gospel of Christ. We can say our worship is exclusive because Jesus is exclusive. There is only one way to God. "**For there is one mediator between God and man; the man Christ Jesus**" (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus says, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me**" (John 14:6).

Application: Only Christians worship this way. (If time speak to the worship of other religions)

Application: This means we cannot just speak of God and not include Christ. And further, we cannot assume folks are getting the gospel if we are not clear in the ways we present Christ,

WHO He is, AND WHAT He has done. (Many “churches” hardly mention Christ. And if they do, they don’t speak regularly about such things as the atonement in detail.)

Application: Also, we can’t merely have a service and say, “The Spirit will lead us” as we sing and get all excited about ourselves or the style of the music or the style of the preaching. We can rest assured the Spirit-led preaching is always about Jesus Christ.

2. Our worship can be distinguished in patterns of Christian worship. We may call this our “order” of worship, the things we do! We may call this our “liturgy.” Maybe it isn’t so clear to us as we do not print a bulletin. But, if we did, it would reflect our order or service. And there would always be certain elements, or pattern of our worship. So, what are these patterns? Before I give them, let me recommend a really good book that Caleb Youngblood and I just read together (which prompted this sermon – *Christ Centered Worship* by B. Chapell). In this book, Chapell traces patterns of worship through church history. He begins with Rome before the reformation and then moves forward to after the Reformation with Martin Luther, John Calvin, and then the Westminster tradition (modern Presbyterian), and then to more modern patterns of worship today. And it is very interesting! Though there are some differences as to style, the elements, or “patterns” of a typical Christian worship service are pretty much the same through them all. In other words, Christian churches throughout history have included the same elements in their worship.

It is interesting that in Chapell’s book, he shows that historically, Christian worship services have been separated into two main parts: The Liturgy of the Word . . . and The Liturgy of the Upper Room. In other words, part of the worship service is dedicated to the Lord’s Supper. The rest of the worship service is dedicated to the Word. We take the Lord’s Supper once a month. And on those particular Sundays, our service is separated into these two parts. But, every Sunday, our worship is centered around the Word of God and certain elements or patterns of worship. So, what are they. Chapell gives 6 patterns: 1) Adoration, 2) Confession, 3) Assurance (that in Christ God forgives our sins), 4) Thanksgiving, 5) Instruction, and 6) Our Response. Let me work through those again quickly.

i. Adoration. In our worship we “adore” God. Our attention, our affections, our minds, are immediately turned to God. For us, this is our call to worship. Tommy or Caleb begins our time with a song to focus our attention on why we are here. We might call this our “call to worship.” And it doesn’t have to be a song, it could be a Psalm or another part of Scripture.

ii. Confession. Throughout history, the confession of sins is always included in worship. This is usually expressed through a prayer or the reading of a particular part of Scripture, or even a song. (Now, there is always an understanding of this in our service. We know we are sinners, and we know we must confess our sins. But, besides my own prayer before I preach every week that God would work “in spite of me,” as elders we do not believe “confession” has been a big part of our worship. Therefore, sometime in February, we will be adding a time of prayer focusing on confession.

iii. Assurance. This may also be called an “affirmation of faith.” In other words, in Christ, we know God is with us and our sins are forgiven. I think this part comes out in our prayers and generally in our songs as well as the preaching.

iv. Thanksgiving. We see this throughout our service as we sing, we pray, and continually give thanks to God.

v. Instruction. This comes mainly through the sermon. But, I believe we see this pattern here at Grace also through the words of our songs.

vi. Our Response. This is in particular regard to the sermon. I think we see this pattern, particularly as I apply the sermon and ask questions of your own lives.

Let me also mention that in various ways, giving is also a pattern we see in churches, though this may vary from taking a time to give or just making it known that we are to give.

With these things in mind, I want to spend the rest of our time with some comments and applications.

Comment: It is good news to us that worship patterns have stayed the same and have not changed. It means as a whole the Christian Church uses the same standard, which is the Word of God. And tradition reflects this truth. In other words, we have the Word of God as our standard. And then we have tradition for more than two thousand years as we have see faithful Christians and churches follow the Word. This also means for us that tradition is not necessarily bad, particularly if the traditions we follow adhere to the Word of God.

Comment: The ways we worship as a Christian Church unites us and connects us with all Christian churches throughout history. Christ worship looks very much the same across cultures, histories, traditions, etc. This is good for us (even to read such a book for me and Caleb to see that we are on the right track with the history of Christian worship).

Application: The closer we adhere to the instructions and examples of the Word of God in our worship, the more faithful we will be to Christ Centered worship. In other words, worship in the right way keeps us accountable. Also, along with this truth, is what we call the “regulative principle.” This is a principle of worship that I, and our elders try to maintain. Let me explain. The regulative principle says that we must do our best to pattern our worship after what we see in the Bible, particularly the NT. In other words, if we do not see an example, we should not add it to our worship. The opposite of this principle is to say, “*the NT doesn’t forbid it, so we are free to add it.*” Personally, I think, over time, this leads to all kinds of problems, particularly in the area of music and drama and dance, as well as other additions and traditions that fill many churches today. I am convinced the more simple we stay, the more healthy we will be going forward.

Application: Christian Worship is comprehensive. It is not merely the sermon, or the Lord’s Supper. It is all of the above! In his book, Chapell tells the story of how he was invited to a church to preach when the regular pastor is out of town. And one of the leaders comes to him

before the service and says, “*I’ll take care of the opening stuff, so that you can do the sermon.*” This is interesting, and may reflect an ingrained way of thinking in many Baptist Churches, even including ours. To say, “*Ill take care of the opening stuff, so that you can do the sermon*” says a lot. The meaning is this: the “opening stuff” is in most people’s minds the assortment of hymns and prayers that we need to get through prior to the “*real thing*” – the SERMON. The “stuff” that fills the early part of the worship service is considered on the “prelude” to the sermon, the opening acts to the main “*meat of the matter*” (Chapell, 21).

Now, Yes, from one perspective, the sermon is the “main” part because it is clearly applicable to my your life as you hear instruction. But, when it comes to worship, what about the adoration, the praises, the giving of thanks, time of confession, the reading of the word, the singing, the closing song and contemplation of what you have heard in the sermon. This means we take EVERY part just as serious. This means we show up on time as we eagerly wait for our “service” to begin with a call to worship and a song. And we do this because EVERY PART of our liturgy, our worship, is about the Gospel (remember point 1). For this reason, we are trying to decide how to move “announcements” out of this liturgy (maybe to the very beginning – not sure). If you have any suggestions, let us know.

Application: Worship is not merely singing. In our current American “church” tradition, many people don’t see the sermon as worship. Singing is worship. And YES, singing IS worship. It comes from the heart as we give praise and adoration to God. But, singing is merely a part of some of our patterns of worship: Adoration and Praise, Thanksgiving, Contemplation, and even instruction.

Application: Worship is not merely a feeling about God. (Heart worship is displayed in adoration, praise, confession, instruction, etc.) We don’t always “feel” good about things when we gather on Sundays. But, at the same time, our hearts find joy and satisfaction and hope as we do these things on a regular basis. I also think of some experiences where a person is really moved “by the Spirit” to confess sins or a particular song moves some in the congregation to praise God. And when these kinds of things happen, I’ve often heard someone, or even the preacher say, “*God really moved among us today*” as if to say that “God doesn’t normally work like that in our service.” I can’t imagine not planning the service or not preparing for the sermon, and just waiting for “God to move by his Spirit.” I believe if we were to do this, we would not thrive as a church, and may even cease to be one over time (certainly unhealthy).

Now, I believe God does move in special ways by the Spirit through our gatherings. He does this in my life. Some sermons move me more than others during the week, and even when I am preaching. But, to say that God is NOT pleased with the ways we worship week after week as we lift up Christ in our praises our prayers our singing our confessions our preaching, our giving, is wrong. Brothers and sisters, this is not a sprint. This is a marathon! And so it goes with our gatherings. If we are faithful to the Gospel of Christ, holding fast to the Word of God in our instructions and our patterns, we are a faithful Church!

In fact, particularly from the Reformation, Christian leaders and theologians have debated the question: What is a church? What are the bare minimums that we must do as a church. This is still relevant today. Some may quote the verse “where two or three are gathered, there I am

among them” to say that where Christians meet, this is a church. But, we think this is incorrect. Now, YES, where Christians meet together in houses and in coffee shops, etc, Christ is there. He is always with his people through the Spirit. But, can we call such gatherings a church? I think not. From the Reformation onward, there have been at least two marks of a church, the Word and the Sacraments. In other words, Christians gather around the WORD of God. As we’ve seen and as we try to do at Grace, in our patterns, we reflect the Word of God in our prayers, our songs, our sermons, etc. This is why we say we “sing” the word, “pray” the word, and “preach” the word. At the same time we obey our Lord’s commands to take the Lord’s Supper and Baptize. If we cease to do these things, we cease to be a church. This means we MUST do these things well! These are the two “marks” of the church.

Application: We are made by God to worship. And these patterns we have seen are rooted in the Word of God, and more deeply, they are rooted in God Himself, who gifts us with such patterns of worship that correspond with us as creatures made in his image.

Application: Prepare yourself to worship on Sundays.

Application: Remind folks that the more we focus ALL our patterns of worship toward Christ, the more biblical and right our worship will be. These are thing things we must do in our gathering. And if we are doing these regularly and assuming we are getting the gospel right as we gather around the Word, we have the basics of a healthy church. We must keep doing these things as we gather!