

What Unites Us in Worship at Cornerstone Baptist Church

A Philosophy of Word and Music in Worship

Every church struggles with keeping the tail from wagging the dog. We have to make certain that disputable and debatable issues are not elevated to the position of fundamental issues. God in his mercy and wisdom gave us Romans 14 and 15, which helps us to be able to look at this issue with a view toward making certain that we understand what really matters and on those issues, taking the ground, building a fort, planting a flag and refusing to budge. But on the issues where the Bible provides flexibility, we will not only allow for freedom, we will embrace that freedom as a means of demonstrating to our world what they long to do but are incapable of achieving and that is, true fundamental unity, even while celebrating surface diversity. Romans 12 and 1 Cor. 12 make it clear there is diversity in the body of Christ, but it is not theological diversity over the gospel. It is diversity in giftedness. Colossians 3 makes it clear that there is racial diversity, and socio-economic diversity, but at the foot of the cross there is a fundamental unity that is based upon the foundational truths that we are all sinners who are equally sinful and in equal need of an infinite Savior. Therefore, when we come to faith in Christ, are baptized by the Spirit into one body, now, in the body of Christ there is a core identity that is more important than my background and my cultural preferences.

I. The Exaltation of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) (Psalm 95; Ephesians 5.18-20)

We will exalt and worship the Triune God, because He has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We recognize that worship is all that I am responding to all that God is and does. God is Triune and His glory is the sum total of His attributes. We cannot approach a gloriously, holy God, except on the basis of Jesus Christ. Nor can we understand and participate in real worship apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the exaltation of God will include by theological necessity the exaltation of Christ and the cross, and a dependence upon the Holy Spirit to continually reveal these truths to our hearts and enable us to understand their significance. The exaltation of God will naturally lead to a growing awareness of His holiness and sovereignty. We will respond to that with confession of sin and humble submission to his authority and rule. Our worship must be centered upon Christ and his life, death, resurrection and rule of the church. And we must acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit who enables us to worship God by drawing the affections of our hearts to the Father and the Son.

You can expect in every worship service for the attention to be drawn to God. And while we may focus on one of the persons of the Godhead, and at times on one of His attributes in a given service, we will over a period of time, seek to draw attention to all that God is and does, and what our responses ought to be. Faithful, expositional preaching will help promote and protect that balance.

II. An Emphasis on Transcendence and Immanence (Psalm 29.10-11)

God is Sovereign over all, and God is with us. God is the Creator, and God is our Savior. God is our Ruler and God lives within us. God is holy and God is our guide. God is a consuming fire and Christ is our High Priest. The name of the LORD is majestic in all the earth and the Lord calls us by his name. The LORD reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment and the LORD is my shepherd I shall not be in want. The LORD God Almighty is Holy and the LORD God Almighty is the Friend of Sinners. The LORD thundered from heaven, and the LORD spoke to Elijah in a still small voice. The voice of the LORD is over the waters, the God of glory thunders. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon and strikes with flashes of lightning and shakes the desert, and twists the oaks,

and strips the forest bare and in His temple all cry glory! And the Lord prepares for me a table in the presence of my enemies.

Therefore, since God is majestically transcendent and ethically pure, it is important in our worship to draw a circle of holiness around him that keeps us from barging into his presence unannounced and unprepared. Understanding and responding to His transcendence, guards us from presumption and arrogance. While God is transcendent, He is also immanent, that is, God is also here with us. He is not distant. He is near. He is not uninvolved. He is present. He is not disinterested. He knows every detail. He knows the way of the righteous. The Lord knows the way that I take. Therefore, our worship services will focus on both the transcendence of God and the immanence of God.

III. Bible Centered and Bible Saturated (John 17.17)

Every part of our worship must be driven by the Word of God. Attention will be clearly given to God's Word. We will seek to govern every prayer, every song, and every sermon by the Word of God. We will seek to measure our goals, purposes and desires by the Word of God. We will seek to look at the spirit of issues in light of the spirit of the Word of God. If you could take a knife and cut our worship, we want it to bleed the Bible. It is not enough for us to stand for the reading of the Word; we have to apply the truths of the Word. Word-saturated worship must be taught and caught.

IV. An Expectation to meet with God (Psalm 42.1-2)

Worship is a serious and sacred subject that far too easily becomes treated lightly or even sacrilegiously due to our repeated exposure to the topic, or due to its needful repetition in our lives. It takes great diligence and ultimately dependency upon God to guard our hearts. We recognize that without preparation, our worship will degenerate to something else other than a time to meet with God. If we do not come with an expectation to meet with God, we will slink into thinking that we have come primarily to meet with others. We do meet others here, that is necessary and needful, but it is not primary. Primarily, we come even as we meet others, to meet with God. If we do not guard our hearts in this matter, we will also slink into the thinking, that we have come to do something for God in the sense, that our activity of church-motion puts us into a more deserving position for the favor of God for the coming week. However, if we come with the expectation to meet with God, then we will be faced with the truth that we cannot presume upon this encounter, but we must approach God through the merits of Christ.

V. A Focus on the Essence of Worship over the Form of Worship (Matthew 15.8)

Warning: Form usually becomes the idol of the heart that replaces the real function and heart of worship. There are so many forms of worship that rightfully understood and practiced are exceedingly beneficial for the believer.

For example, the reciting of a creed can be a great tool to help people remember good theology and remember some of the battles that the church has fought against heresy. It was on the anvil of heretical challenges that the great creeds of the church were hammered out. However, if the reciting of the creed becomes more important than the creed, then the point is lost. If the habit of the Lord's Table and the details of how it is served become more important than the actual meaning of communion, then it is in vain. We must focus on the essence and the true purpose of worship as being more important than the forms and styles through which we choose to express these, unless of course, there are cases in which the actual forms are mandated in Scripture.

VI. Wholehearted (spirit) worship and Theologically accurate (truth) worship (John 4.24)

Genuine Intensity must characterize our response to the life-altering truths of God's Word. Genuine worship demands my all, but it must be driven by genuine truth that is understood so that it can be embraced. We will intentionally seek to keep both of these mandates in view. We must have accurate theology, but we must also have opportunity to respond wholeheartedly to that.

VII. Honest-to-God Communication (John 14.6; 1 John 1.6-9)

We renounce the use of words, images, styles, forms, sermons, prayers and songs that are done to impress, manipulate, coerce, or hide the truth. The One that we worship called Himself the Truth. In 1 John 1, God is called Light. There is nothing hidden in him. We will communicate in our services in an honest way, which involves doing things with Him in view as the audience, not seeking to do things that have as their intent a desire to enhance or promote the image of our church or a personality.

VIII. A spirit and setting of Excellence (Psalm 8.1; 1 Cor. 14.40)

Our God is the standard of excellence. Our God is the standard of value. Our God is the standard of perfection. He is the goal of our lives. We seek to grow in grace and in Christ likeness in order to make Him known. Our worship needs to be characterized by a standard of excellence that is fitting the God we have gathered to worship. Therefore, we will seek to eliminate needless distractions, while not becoming stuffy and vain. We will seek to do things regarding the environment of our worship, with respect to lighting, sound, sight and temperature control that will facilitate what we are doing, without undue attention given to these matters. All of these matters need to be done in a way so that they do not draw attention to themselves, but rather, be tools that help the attention to be given to the message.

IX. A pursuit of the common good (1 Cor. 12.7)

One of the purposes of spiritual gifts is for the good of all who are in the body. In this matter of worship, we will seek to continue to learn and grow together and to do so in a spirit of love.

X. The integrating of historic and contemporary music.(Colossians 3.16; Psalm 96.1)

Our intentional pursuit of singing historic music is driven in part by the need of the younger generation, to understand the story of the church. The good, theologically accurate historic music of the church is a great tool to remind us of the historic truths of the church and of the shoulders of the men and women of faith upon which we stand. We will also sing the good, theologically accurate contemporary music of the church. This we will do, not so much for the benefit of the young people, even though they will benefit from it in a sense. We will do it, because the fresh ways in which the great truths are captured and communicated should be a tremendous joy to the older generations who want to know that the message is going to go on.