

Preparation and Participation in the Worship Service

Scott Aniol

Unfortunately many church leaders put little or no thought into preparing for a worship service, and many church services encourage members to maintain a “spectator” mentality. This workshop will develop principles for a methodology of congregational worship that flows from a biblical worship theology. Methodologies change. Congregational worship methodologies are not prescribed in Scripture, and it is not my intention to prescribe any here. My goal is simply to lay a biblical foundation and philosophical principles of congregational worship and to encourage pastors, music directors, and other church leaders to actively think through how the worship service is done.

Though methodologies can certainly change over time, we are still responsible to give careful consideration to our methodologies of congregational worship and the theology and philosophies upon which they are based. Unfortunately, many pastors and church leaders don’t consider what their worship services say about their theological and philosophical beliefs. They either put little thought into the service at all, or their methodology is completely inconsistent with their professed theology and philosophy.

I recently attended a workshop that was supposed to help church leaders plan the order of their worship services. Instead of focusing on objective factors in these decisions or asking how the order would best facilitate biblical worship, the speaker’s major determiner was how the order would appeal to the people. He passed out several service orders and then evaluated them based on what kind of effect they would have on members of the congregation. In reality, his method for formulating a methodology of congregational worship was rank pragmatism — little better than Hybels or Warren.

What I intent to do today is lay a solid theological foundation of congregational worship from which we can draw some objective philosophical principles. I will then conclude with some thoughts about how our methodologies of congregational worship can flow from that foundation. Again, I don’t intend to prescribe any particular service order or way of doing things. I would just like to stimulate all of us to make sure that how we are leading congregational worship in our services fits with what the Bible has to say about the subject.

A Theology of Congregational Worship

What is Worship?

Dozens of volumes have been recently written in an attempt to answer this question, and many of them are helpful. What I have found, however, is that most authors who attempt to define worship provide more of a description than a definition. Very few authors narrow their definition to the essential essence of biblical worship. Consequently, many of these authors end up arguing for a particular methodology of congregational worship instead of really defining what worship

is in the Bible. In order to narrow our focus to the essence of biblical worship, I'd like to take a brief survey of Scripture's language of worship in an attempt to arrive at a concise biblical definition.

1. Worship in the Old Testament

The most common word for worship in the Old Testament is *shachah*. The lexicons define this word, "to bow down, prostrate oneself." It is translated as "worship" 99 times, "bow" 31 times, "bow down" 18 times, "reverence" 5 times, and "fall down" 3 times. The general idea, therefore, is some kind of physical prostration in awe and reverence of someone or something. Looking at a few passages that translate this word will demonstrate this:

2 Chronicles 20.18 And Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground: and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the LORD, worshiping [*shachah*] the LORD.

Nehemiah 8.6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshiped [*shachah*] the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Job 1.20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshiped [*shachah*].

Psalm 95.6 O come, let us worship [*shachah*] and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.

In all of these instances, *shachah* is translated with a description of physical bowing or prostration. This comprises the most common concept of worship in the Old Testament—a physical response to something. A review of the passages listed above will emphasize the reason for the response.

In 2 Chronicles 20.18, Jehoshaphat and the people fell down in worship before the Lord because of the message they had received from Him:

Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation; 15 And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. 16 To morrow go ye down against them: behold, they come up by the cliff of Ziz; and ye shall find them at the end of the brook, before the wilderness of Jeruel. 17 Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD

will be with you (2 Chronicles 20.14-17).

The people bowed down and worshiped the Lord in Nehemiah 8.6 because they had heard His Word read to them:

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. 2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law (Nehemiah 8.1-3).

Job fell to the ground in worship after news of his family's death. His response was of trust and dependence in the sovereign control of God over the situation. The reason for the command to bow down in worship in Psalm 95 is clear:

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. 7 For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand (Psalm 95.6-7).

In every instance, the physical response of worship relates directly to an understanding of truth about God. In the case of 2 Chronicles 20, the people realized that the Lord was going to protect them. In Nehemiah, the people heard truth from His Word. Job responded with dependence on God's sovereignty even during a difficult trial.

When we consider worship in the Old Testament we often think of the physical manifestations of worship — the rituals, the bowing, the sacrifices, etc. And often authors who are attempting to define worship biblically do so in those kinds of terms. However, if we examine the essential essence of worship in these biblical references, it is clear that no matter in what form worship took place, Old Testament worship consisted primarily of two elements: a presentation of truth about God and a response to that truth. No matter if the worship was expressed actively through ritual and ceremony or if it was a spontaneous reaction, the essence of the worship was the same—response to truth about God.

2. New Testament Worship

In the Septuagint, *shachah* is translated with the word *proskuneo*, which means virtually the same thing as its Hebraic counterpart. It emphasizes a physical manifestation of worship. This same word, *proskuneo*, is common in the Gospels (26 occurrences). People would often bow down worshipfully before Jesus when they understood who He really was:

Matthew 28.9 And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshiped him.

This word is also very common in the book of Revelation (21 times) because the angels and elders in heaven often bow down before God because of who He is:

Revelation 4.10 The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that lives for ever and ever.

So in the Gospels and Revelation the concept of worship is very similar to that of the Old Testament. Worship is a response (often physical) to an understanding of truth about God.

What is interesting is that *proskuneo* virtually disappears in Acts and the Epistles, which is why we cannot tie the essence of worship to some kind of outward physical description. The word that replaces *proskuneo* in these books is *latreuo* which is usually translated “serve.”

Romans 1.9 For God is my witness, whom I serve [*latreuo*] with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.

Romans 12.1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service [*latreuo*].

Philippians 3.3 For we are the circumcision, which worship [*latreuo*] God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Paul de-emphasizes the physical manifestations of worship, which helps us recognize the essential elements of worship, namely, response to truth about God. For instance, the “therefore” in Romans 12.1 demonstrates that offering our bodies as sacrifices of worship is in response to the rich truths laid out in chapters 1-11.

3. The Essence of Worship

Christ emphasized this essential definition of worship in his discussion with the woman at the well in John 4. When Jesus met the woman at the well and confronted her about her sin, she tried to change the subject and in doing so, provided Christ the opportunity to address this very important topic of worship. The woman asked Jesus what the proper means of worshiping was:

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. 23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24God is spirit, and his

worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

Because of God’s strict commands concerning worship, the Jews at that time were very concerned with the outward forms—where, when, and how they should worship. The woman was asking what the proper outward forms of worship should be. Jesus replied that with His coming, the outward forms weren’t necessary anymore, and He emphasized the two essential elements of worship, namely response (spirit) and understanding of truth.

Therefore, worship can be defined as follows: **Worship is a spiritual response to God resulting from an understanding of biblical truth about God.** This definition captures the biblical essence of worship and can be expressed in countless ways through actions, attitudes, and affections. In reality, worship should encompass all of life as we have seen especially in the language of the epistles.

What is Congregational Worship?

Congregational worship is more narrowed. It is the gathering of the people of God in in order to corporately worship Him as a congregation. This form of worship is clearly commanded and exemplified in Scripture:

Psalm 111.1 Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.

Psalm 149.1 “Praise ye the LORD. Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints.”

In these passages, the psalmist exhorts the believer to praise Jehovah and to do so in the assembly of believers. It is clear that Old Testament believers recognized the importance of worshipping congregationally, and this carried over into the New Testament church as well. The New Testament portrays believers gathering together to worship on a regular basis. First Corinthians 14.23 speaks of the whole church gathering together. Acts 2.46 speaks of the early church attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes. Hebrews 10.25 commands believers not to neglect meeting together. Though no explicit command that the purpose of these meetings be congregational worship exists, we can be sure that worship did occur for several reasons.

First, early Christian gatherings naturally included many Jewish worship practices. Andrew Hill, an Old Testament scholar, insists this when he says, “It is only natural . . . that we seek the origins of early Christian worship in Jewish temple and synagogue worship.” Since the church began with Jews and the earliest believers were Jews, they naturally continued worshipping with Jewish traditions, adding to them new truth concerning Jesus the Messiah.

Second, it is clear from New Testament narratives that what took place at gatherings of the

church included acts of congregational worship:

Acts 2.42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 13.1-2 In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting . . .

Also, the New Testament describes gatherings of believers as the temple of God:

Ephesians 2.21-22 Now therefore ye [plural pronoun, "you all" as a local church congregation] are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple [*naos*, same word used for the Holy Place in the Temple] in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3.9 For we are labourers together with God: ye [plural pronoun] are God's husbandry, ye are God's building [*oikos*, "dwelling"].

1 Corinthians 3:16-17 Know ye [plural pronoun] not that ye are the temple [*naos*] of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you [plural]? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye [plural] are.

1 Peter 2.5, 9 Ye [plural pronoun] also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house [*oikos*], an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. 9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Both Old Testament command and New Testament example demonstrate that God desires that believers lift His praises together. He wants His children to gather for the purpose of honoring Him. This worship is still individual, heart-felt response toward God, but it is expressed publically in the presence of other believers. This brings God even more glory than if it were done privately.

For instance, a person receives more honor when he is praised in the presence of many people than if he were praised by one person privately. The great honor that comes with winning an Olympic gold medal is due to the fact that thousands of people are watching the event. A solo violin can be beautiful, but when it is combined with other instruments in a symphony, the glory of the music is even more spectacular. The same is true when God is praised publically in the presence of others. C. H. Spurgeon said, “Personal praise is sweet unto God, but congregational praise has a multiplicity of sweetnesses in it.”

Therefore, congregational worship could be defined as follows: **Congregational worship is a unified chorus of spiritual responses toward God expressed publicly to God resulting from an understanding of biblical truth about God.**

A Philosophy of Congregational Worship

Congregational worship must be God-oriented.

Because congregational worship is specifically designed to be a response to God because of biblical truth about Him, God must be the center of the service. Because the Bible is our only objective source of truth about God, Scriptural truth about God should be the content of congregational worship. Because worship is intended to be a response to God, congregational worship should be directed to God. Worship is a spiritual response to God resulting from an understanding of biblical truth about God. Worship is not about us—it is about God. It is therefore necessary that music used in congregational worship be God-oriented.

Yet much of congregational worship today is man-oriented. Services are designed for “seekers,” with music chosen that will appeal to unbelievers and entice them to attend church services. Revivalism and the mega-church movement have shifted the focus of congregational worship from God to people. But because congregational worship is specifically designed to respond to God because of objective truth about Him, God must be the center of the worship service.

Congregational worship must be Doctrine-oriented.

Because believers can respond only when they have understood biblical truth, congregational worship should be filled with doctrinal truth. Since worship requires understanding doctrine and understanding requires work, believers should not shy away from elements in the service that have deep, thought-provoking content.

Congregational worship must be Affection-oriented.

When we define worship as being a spiritual response to truth, we often speak in terms of emotional response. In present day culture all emotion is seen as an indivisible whole. Emotion

is judged only based upon what it is directed toward and nothing else. No matter how those emotions are developed, their only criterion of worth is their object.

However, eighteenth-century theologian Jonathan Edwards made a distinction within the broader category of emotional response. According to Edwards, “passions” are emotions that are immediately gratifying, shallow, and result from emotionalism that bypasses the intellect. It’s the kind of thing that happens when you see a Hallmark commercial that causes your eyes to well up with tears. Since understanding of truth is bypassed, this kind of emotionalism is not acceptable for congregational worship. Instead, service elements that develop God-honoring affections should be used for congregational worship. “Affections” are emotions that result from volitional acknowledgment of objective truth. They take work to develop and are more lasting and pleasing to the Lord. Affections toward God are the essence of true worship.

The difference between passions and affections is like the difference between laughing because you’re being tickled and laughing because you get a joke. If someone tickles you, nothing intellectual has to occur in order for you to laugh. Your response of laughing is simply an involuntary physical response to a stimulus. On the other hand, if you laugh because you have been just told a joke, you are laughing as a result of something that has occurred in your intellect — you got the punch line!

Emotions that are self-gratifying, involuntary responses to some sort of stimulus are not worship. In fact, they can hinder worship because they cause us to delight in the self-gratifying emotions themselves instead of the intended object of those emotions, namely, God. Instead, we should use only service elements that encourage truth-based affection for the Lord.

Congregational worship must be Congregation-oriented.

I attended a contemporary praise service recently on a Saturday night. In the midst of pounding rock music and emotionalistic praise choruses, the worship leader encouraged attenders to have “a personal encounter with God.” I saw people with their eyes closed swaying to the music, completely oblivious to the other worshipers around them.

This is very common in modern services. Even churches that don’t use contemporary music or encourage charismatic emotionalism propagate the idea that worship services are a time for individuals to encounter God. What these people have forgotten, however, is that congregational worship is not the time for believers to worship the Lord individually. It is the time for believers to worship corporately. This does not mean that it is simply a large gathering of people who worship individually, but it is a gathering of believers who worship God together.

The fact that the worship is congregational implies that believers will join in a unified response toward God. There is certainly a time and place for individual worship. It is necessary. Without it, congregational worship cannot take place. Therefore, when believers gather to worship the Lord corporately, everything in the service should encourage full, unified congregational

involvement.

Formulating A Methodology of Congregational Worship

We have seen that true worship has two essential elements — a presentation of truth and response to that truth. Both of these must be present in a worship service for biblical worship to take place. Therefore, every element in the service will facilitate one or both of these.

Establishing Purpose

The church exists for many reasons, some of which are worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, mutual assistance, and expansion. Local churches gather at various times during the week to accomplish these purposes. It is important, therefore, that church leaders decide which purpose or purposes they intend to fulfill at a given meeting.

Some purposes fit better with others. For instance fellowship and mutual assistance are both horizontal in nature and involve church members interacting with one another. Evangelism goes hand-in-hand with expansion. Some purposes, by their very nature, work better when they are the exclusive focus.

Worship is one of these purposes. Because worship is inherently vertical, other purposes that are more horizontal often hinder worship from happening. Does this mean that no horizontal activity will occur during worship? On the contrary, since congregational worship is intrinsically corporate, an awareness of others is important. However, a specific focus on fellowship during times of worship may draw people's attention away from God. Likewise, though discipleship certainly takes place during worship (especially during times when truth is presented), more in-depth discipleship can be accomplished when there is possibility for feedback and interaction between teacher and student.

Therefore, church leaders should determine what specific purposes will be addressed in particular gatherings. For instance, Sunday School may be used primarily for discipleship, a church may have a designated fellowship time, and many churches reserve Sunday mornings for congregational worship. The Bible doesn't explicitly tell us when or how churches should fulfill their responsibilities. The important thing is that local churches take time to determine when and how they will do it.

Preparation for Congregational Worship

Our lives are often hectic, and church members are frequently arriving at a church gathering at the last minute. They race their children to the nursery and quickly slip into their seat right as the service is beginning. Unfortunately, these people don't actually begin worshiping until well into

the service. They are so frazzled because of the morning's activities and their minds are so distracted that they cannot focus on God or His truth.

We need to keep this in mind when we plan our congregational worship services. We should plan a period of time when believers can simply calm their minds and prepare to worship the Lord. This could be as simple as dedicating the first five minutes of a service to be a quiet time. It is not a mystical time when believers are “ushered into the presence of God,” nor is it necessarily explicitly “spiritual.” It is simply a time when church members can collect their thoughts, forget about the cares of this world, and get ready to worship. Providing tools to stimulate biblical meditation such as a suggested Scripture passage or hymn may be helpful.

Some people may complain that this is too serious and stodgy and that it hinders friendship and fellowship. We certainly want fellowship to take place and scheduling time for fellowship is important. But if the service is to be an effective time of congregational worship, church members must be allowed a peaceful time to prepare themselves for worship.

The Service of Worship

Congregational worship is a unified chorus of biblical responses toward God expressed publicly to God resulting from an understanding of biblical truth about God. Therefore, every element in the service must fulfill this purpose. Remember, every element of a service should facilitate congregational worship — presentation of truth, response to that truth, or both.

1. The Congregation as Participants

Every member of the congregation is responsible to worship the Lord during a worship service. A “spectator” mentality of people in the pews is easy to develop but clearly anti-biblical. People should be engaged in worship at all times during the service. If there is a lag between “events,” use that time for prayer and response to the Lord.

As a side note, church leaders should not be afraid of “lag time” or silence between events in a service. How many times does a congregational bow for prayer, finishing to observe an ensemble that has “magically” appeared during the prayer. This kind of irreverence during what is supposed to be a time of unified supplication to the Lord is done simply out of pragmatism and a fear of “dead time” as an individual or group gets into place. Congregations should be taught to use silence as a time to respond to the Lord.

Congregational singing is one of the most important aspects of a worship service. It is the one event where every member of the congregation can verbally worship the Lord together. Congregants should make good use of this time to understand the biblical truth expressed in the hymns and respond to the Lord with their affections.

2. Worship Leaders

The purpose of the music director, orchestra, choir, and other musicians is to lead in the worship of God. Their purpose is not to entertain or perform. Their purpose is to lead the rest of the congregation in worship. The congregation should participate with the worship leaders.

During an instrumental number, congregants should meditate on the words of the music and notice how the musical arrangement strengthens the message of the text. If you don't know the words, open your hymn book and meditate on the text.

During vocal numbers, strive to worship along with the group or soloist by understanding truth and responding with them. The music will aid in the learning of truth and the expression of response. If the song teaches primarily doctrine, strive to understand its implications and respond to the Lord accordingly. If it primarily expresses a response, strive to join with the musicians in your heart.

3. Word from God

We should view preaching as the primary time when God speaks during the service. This is the time when believers are confronted with clear, biblical truth from God. Every attempt should be made to be sensitive to conviction from the Lord. Worship occurs only when you acknowledge truth and respond with change, affection, or consecration to God.

Since every believer is responsible to respond to biblical truth, pastors should provide a time for response after the Word of God is preached. Responding to truth is not the responsibility only of those who "feel convicted" or raise their hands in an invitation. All believers should respond in some way every time they are confronted with Scriptural truth. Giving the congregation a few moments of silence at the end of the message could facilitate this.

4. Does Order Matter?

There are no prescribed service orders in the New Testament. Unfortunately, however, this fact has led many churches to view their service order flippantly or simply pragmatically. Church leaders should put time into thinking through their order of service. An order of service should accomplish two goals. First, it should be used to make sure that true worship is taking place. Since worship is response to truth, the service should facilitate this. Second, a service order that helps the congregation be actively involved and readily recognize what they are doing is important as well.

This could be accomplished a number of ways. One way might be to group service elements that predominantly present truth separately from elements that predominantly offer response. Notice the following service order:

Affirmation of Truth

Hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy

Vocal Solo: I Know a Fountain

Hymn: God Moves In A Mysterious Way

Scripture Reading

Response to Truth

Hymn: Praise Ye the Lord

Brass Quintet: I Sing the Mighty Power of God

Choir: Crown Him With Many Crowns

Giving: O Jesus, I Have Promised

Hymn: It is Well With My Soul

This kind of order may help the congregation understand what they are doing and motivate them to actively participate. Using a bulletin or overhead projectors to indicate what a service element's function is would help with this as well.

5. What Music Should Be Chosen?

Only music that fits a biblical philosophy of congregational worship should be chosen. Churches should use only music that is primarily objective in content, that is Godward as opposed to man-centered, and that expresses a response applicable to all believers as a congregation. Sentimental, individualistic music, no matter how true, should not be chosen for congregational worship.

6. "Special Music"

Fundamentalists levy weighty charges against contemporary worship styles. They charge that those who use such styles are more concerned with drawing attention to a performer than to true, biblical worship. Unfortunately, however, those who point out such offenses often fail their own charges with their modern practice of "special music." These churches, while avoiding such offensive elements as drums and clapping, have musical events within their service traditionally termed "special music." These are usually solo or group events that have been scheduled ahead of time for a particular service. This practice, however, is usually no less performance oriented than more contemporary practices.

An examination of the term "special music" itself suggests a "featured event" in the service. It's almost as if the congregational hymn singing and other events of the service are secondary. The "special music" is the highlighted event of the service.

Churches make this mentality even more prominent by how they order their services and select music. The congregation knows that certain "special music slots" are more prestigious than

others. Those who perform for the offering or directly before the message stand more prominently than those more toward the beginning of the service. Musicians who are accustomed to performing in the morning service are insulted when they are scheduled for the evening. Additionally, clarity of truth and undistracting excellence are sacrificed for virtuosity and showmanship. The fault here lies on the part of worship music composers and arrangers along with performers who choose “showy” music. The musicians strive to demonstrate their great musical abilities, showing off their every skill and ultimately drawing all attention to themselves. Conversely, the congregation views those who play a simple melody as inferior compared to the virtuosity of others.

The fault for this kind of mentality lies not only with the musicians. Many churches have special instrumental music with texts that are unfamiliar to the congregation (at least past the first stanza). When a church makes no provision for the congregation to follow along with the text of a hymn that is played, they encourage a spectator mentality. The congregation has no option for understanding and responding to truth if they cannot read the truth anywhere. Those performing “special music” should avoid music that is flashy or that draws the attention away from the truth and to himself. Most sacred music that emphasizes the performer’s skills leads the the focus away from the truth of the text and to the performer himself. One wonders who is really being worshiped in these instances.

“Special music” in a congregational worship service should not be performance-oriented. It should facilitate true worship in spirit and truth. It should provide the congregation with ample opportunities to understand and respond to biblical truth. Maybe the term itself should be replaced. Perhaps a term such as “prepared worship music” (as opposed to spontaneous congregational singing) or something similar would better describe these service events.

7. Offerings

Offerings are often one of these “featured event” times, and rarely do people really consider what is happening. People “pay their dues” and then enjoy the show. This could be solved a number of ways. One might be to have an instrumentalist play a simple hymn of consecration straight from the hymn book, letting the congregation know the hymn number ahead of time so that they can meditate on God’s blessings to them and how they should respond in worship with their giving. Even having the ushers wait until the second stanza would give the congregants time to consider these things before they are distracted with the passing of a plate. Whatever solution is utilized, people should understand that giving is one important biblical response of worship they every believer should enjoy.

Conclusion

Methodologies are not inspired; they are derived from biblical theology and philosophy. Our goal should be that our methodology be driven by our theology. Personal preference or taste is

not the primary criterion. Our methodology of congregational worship should come from our understanding of the Word of God.

What is important is that church leaders put time and effort into preparing their services of congregational worship. They should do everything they can to facilitate true worship. It is also very important that every believer sees his responsibility to be an active participant in every moment of the congregational worship service.

Recommended Reading:

Godfrey, Robert. *Pleasing God in our Worship*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1999.

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