

Bryan Chapell's text explores the traditions of Christian corporate worship from the early church onward through the framework of the gospel, which has- and, he argues, *ought to* (loc. 1551)- shape and guide such experiences. While many evangelical churches seem to couch their worship gatherings in consumerism behind performances that rival those of large concert venues, Chapell's study takes one into the church's carefully crafted customs that follow the gospel "because the content of the gospel forms the worship that best expresses it" (loc. 1027). This content is divided into sections of "Adoration, Confession, Assurance, Thanksgiving, Petition, Instruction, Charge, and Blessing," which also traces "the progress of the gospel in the life of an individual" (loc. 1505). From the early church to the Reformers and modern pastors, these components and practices form liturgies that do not merely exalt Christ; they nurture the worshiper (loc. 1927). Chappell's work is at once a handbook of sample liturgies and orders of service, an anthology of content from all eras of ecclesial hymnody, prayers, creeds, and readings, and a commentary on the church's worship through the ages, all within this well-established gospel-centric structure that inspires today's saints to worship God in both ancient and modern ways.

Because the gospel is utterly essential to the Christian's life and faith, it must be "the frame and focus of our worship, [lest] our ceremonies possess only a form of godliness without the power of God (2 Tim. 3:5)" (loc. 2074). While creativity can arouse contemplation and celebration, Chapell cautions against practices that foster "uncertain and muted praise by demanding highly sophisticated expression from an unprepared congregation" (loc. 2373). So with the abundance of new songs of worship, worship leaders must select those closely tethered

¹ All citations herein use the e-book locations in: Bryan Chapel, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), Kindle Edition.

to the gospel (i.e. one of the aforementioned sections) *and* the ability and needs of the congregation, which includes both the lost and saved (loc. 2167). Worship leaders must help their congregations experience the gospel without doing so merely for their approval. In a consumeristic culture, it is a common but dangerous temptation to orchestrate gatherings for people to opine that they “like[d] it a lot” (loc. 2628). Instead, “We design our worship to proclaim the gospel so that others can see [God’s] glory dancing in our hearts—and join the dance” (loc. 2659). Therefore those who lead worship have the sacred duty of representing God to people (loc. 2685), not as formal priests per se, but as agents of God’s grace and reflections of His character (loc. 3421). Thus one must live with integrity off the platform if one leads on the platform (loc. 4181).

Chapell takes the reader deeply into the theology of worship within the gospel framework he so richly extrapolates through historical comparisons (e.g. Rome- pre-1570; Luther- 1526; Calvin- 1542; Westminster- 1645; Rayburn- 1980) (loc. 1152). Broader still, he employs the age-old, two-fold division of the “Liturgy of the Word” (that includes preaching) and the “Liturgy of the Upper Room” (that includes Communion). “No church true to the gospel will fail to have echoes of these historic liturgies” (loc. 262). For today’s evangelical worship planners, such a division will likely match their overall format of a worship gathering but understanding the purposes of each will reveal why this format seems natural for church services: it tells the story of the gospel (loc. 179). Often the culmination of a gospel’s weight in a service is the Lord’s Supper. While no church can claim to match the first-century churches’ practice of this sacrament (loc. 5146), the practice is undeniably vital to gatherings of Christ’s family. In fact, Communion may need to find its rhythm again as a weekly observance as younger Christians look to the church for a praxis and theology more ancient than the ephemeral mores of today’s

society. But this ancient custom, evinced by the early church's practice, was a "meal and not just a ceremony" (loc. 5193), and it must become as saturated in gospel meaning and interactive experience as it once was if today's believers are to enjoy the same enduring gospel potency. To this end, worship leaders should frame the Lord's Supper in varying ways, "sometimes...formal, triumphant, or celebrative; other times...informal, familial, or intimate" (loc. 5207). Moreover, citing Hughes Old, Chapell argues that Communion so models the gospel that it has "a strong communal" function for the believer and a robust "evangelistic dimension...[useful] not simply to caution, but to woo the unbeliever" and perhaps even spark a revival (loc. 5236).

One vehicle for the worshipping church is, of course, music. Chapell apparently prefers more traditional musical expressions. A younger worship leader may find his book to be mildly old-fashioned if not for his invitation of all styles into the sanctuary out of the need to contextually incarnate the gospel. His caution against offering multiple styles within one body, though, is prudent since this can tend to divide, not unify, the church (loc. 5263). What does unite the church is the gospel, so Chapell welcomes gospel-infused expressions from every generation. "If a church makes no place for new contributions, it will lose the enthusiasm and participation of those who must ensure its continuing ministry" (loc. 5292). Songs written for worship, then, must be tethered to the gospel. One helpful method in crafting such songs is to leverage the segments of the worship service (Adoration, Confession, etc.) and then locate appropriately themed songs within them. Similarly, instead of arranging a worship gathering by emotion or energy (e.g. from fast and upbeat to slow and reflective) as often occurs, leaders should move the congregation into and along the gospel through the components of the gathering *besides* just the sermon, which ought to "confront the mind and heart with biblical truths in order to conform the will to Christ's purposes" (loc. 4270).

One often under-thought and over-looked component of worship gatherings is the “rubric,” or the “the instructive transitions that tell the congregation what to do and why” (loc. 3581). These brief statements need not be that creative but they do need to bring coherence to the meeting’s flow so that worshipers fully engage in the various segments. Without these transitions, worshipers may misunderstand or entirely miss the holistic gospel, which takes one from the greatness of God, to one’s fallenness, and then into restoration and relationship with Him. Chapell brilliantly writes,

“Without rubrics, a worship service is just a spill of spiritual vegetables (we know the individual pieces are good for us, but they have no apparent order or purpose). With rubrics, a worship service becomes a gospel feast carefully prepared and sequenced to communicate the grace of God” (loc. 3592).

Another section that may be anemic in modern services is the Benediction. These final words have the power to move the people with joy and purpose, having experienced their soul’s and even body’s movement through gospel, into the world zealously carrying the same gospel (loc. 4712). Hence, church services that have too often become occasions for congregations to serve only themselves in the name of Jesus can become catalytic moments in the church’s mission.

What Chapell so masterfully does in *Christ-Centered Worship* is redeem the worship gathering from mindless ritual and restore it with the ancient but equally modern movements of the gospel in the people of God for the sake of the world (locs. 1945, 2429). The book reveals how corporate worship is a two-way stream, with God as “the chief audience [*and*] the true speaker, singer, and prayer,” and people as the ones who offer- but also benefit from- worship rightly set in the gospel’s waters (loc. 1927). Services planned around the gospel and not only the sermon’s topic will communicate and incarnate the church’s message far more effectively. If readers do not employ Chapell’s many examples and templates, they will certainly appropriate the gospel themes that have come to us through the centuries so that the next generations will worship Christ with relevance and orthodoxy.