

David Cheong

Book Review- Chapell

Bryan Chapell's book is a must read, foundation for worship principles, and a timeless classic on top of the Bible because it is a book that roots itself on the gospel. Christian worship has been founded upon tradition, leaders' preferences, or the majority vote, but worship must be founded upon the Words of God only, the gospel. Chapell argues the gospel must be the pioneering factor behind structuring worship. The Bible does not give an exact order of service, but the gospel itself has a timeless structure that gives the foundational structures for Christian liturgy. This "gospel understanding is not only embedded in physical structures, but it is also communicated in the worship patterns of the church" (17). This pattern always starts with who God is, and humanity's response is true worship. Worship never begins with what people can do but who God is and what He has done.

This gospel story of God's initiative is shown throughout both Old and New Testaments. Isaiah confesses his sinfulness when encountering God's holiness, and Simon Peter also confesses he is a sinner when realizing who Jesus Christ truly is. "The Bible mercifully denies us the worship detail we may desire, keeping our worship focused on heavenly themes rather than earthly proprieties" (107). This forces God's people to focus heart and lives upon who He is and relationship with Him above all else. Even in the New Testament, "the apostolic writers are more content to describe what most traditions call the "elements" of worship rather than their precise order or content" (107). Both the Old and New Testaments have elements of worship but nowhere is a specific order of these elements commanded. Again, making God's people focus on

why and who they worship rather than a religious order of things to do. The doing is always a means to an end and not the end to itself.

Chapell states, “we love God because he has revealed the gospel to us, so it is natural that our expressions of love would be framed by the contours of his redemptive work” (117). This “content of the gospel shapes our response to it” (116-117). Worship is never a way to earn God’s presence, grace, or approval. Worship is always a response to who God is and what He has done. It does not stop there though. The gospel also teaches that God is “concerned for the good of his people”, and if He wasn’t, then “his glory would be diminished” (119). So, the gospel must also drive worship to glorify God and also care and minister to the needs of His people. The gospel must drive all liturgies in these ways, and on top of this, studying tradition and worship history can also help maximize gospel effectiveness because “God does not give all of his wisdom to any one time or people” (16).

Reflecting on these considerations, worship in the body of Christ today must have the Word of God, the gospel as the foundation behind cultural relativity, traditional roots, peoples’ needs, and similar factors because it is only God who can touch and save His people at the end of the day. Chapell argues a phenomenal stance in not only explaining the heart of worship and what worship should ultimately be driven by but also giving practical and realistic applications in how this looks like. The only critique in his book is he should go deeper in what a gospel-less liturgy looks like and the consequences behind that may arise from it. Providing examples of churches that have failed to be driven by the gospel would strengthen his argument of allowing the gospel to shape worship. Explaining and going deeper into worship outside of order of services would fortify Chapell’s book on worship too. Nonetheless, this is an essential resource for proper worship.