

Philosophy/Theology of Worship
When the Body of Christ Comes Together for Worship
First Corinthians 11:17-34

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Introduction

The definition of worship is the first place to start when developing one's philosophy of worship. Many definitions were given on the first day of class. The writer of this philosophy/theology paper's definition was "Worship is the act of thanking and giving adoration to God both for who He is and for what He has done by creating the world and sending His only Son to die for us and raising Jesus from the dead." The definition the students gave changed as they learned more about worship. The definition given concerns what God has done for people, but how should people act toward each other in their individual churches? And how should Christians respond to their brothers and sisters in denominations that worship differently than they do?

Christians should properly discern the body of Christ and act with love and acceptance toward other Christians that worship in different ways as long as they hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Chapell's book does well to point out that the New Testament does not give an example of how a service should be conducted. He does not believe this is an accident. The New Testament wanted the churches to implement New Testament principles to have their own identity ¹(Chapell p108). Some of these principles can be found in Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper found in First Corinthians chapter eleven verses seventeen through thirty-four.

1. Worship should make us better and not worse.

"But in following instructions, I do not commend you because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

¹ Bryan Chapell, Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice: Baker Book House 2019. p108.

And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 for in eating one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry and another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I command you in this? No, I will not". (1 Cor 11 17-22 ESV).

Paul has some stern words for the Corinthians. People who were rich or had better means could get to church early and start eating before the poorer members of the congregation who had to work could make it to the love feast or the Lord's Supper. In the second lesson, The Right Worship, Professor Amy Abdullah asked the question "With an increasingly globalized society in the midst of many cultures, how do Christians who create or facilitate worship experiences decide what is right?". (Lecture 2, The Right Worship). Here the people who had more money in the church were imposing their will on the poorer people. The rich could be those who sit on the board of a modern church or those who were more esteemed in the community. Everywhere in the Bible, the Scripture commends us to remember and do good to the poor. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God." (Luke 6:20 ESV). There are many promises in the Bible for those who help the poor, "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed" (Prov 19:17 ESV).

The class learned about the liturgical year in Lecture Three. The church should remember the poor all year long but especially during the season of Lent when Christians are asked to fast in order to devote themselves to the Lord. Christians are also asked to give alms to the poor during Lent. (Lecture 3, The liturgical year). Christians should take their eyes off themselves and focus on Christ. This is obviously what the more wealthy were not doing during the Lord's Supper at

Corinth. They were instead only thinking about themselves. Spiritual disciplines are a big part of Lent. The class learned to sacrifice and give up their time in prayer and fasting as well as other disciplines. This is where the class met Kevin Walker who would become a familiar face in future lectures. The class learned from Kevin what spiritual disciplines are, “not a checklist of dos and don’ts”. People cannot try and twist God’s arm into getting Him to do things for them. People should serve Him because they love Him and desire a closer relationship with Him. What are spiritual disciplines? “Spiritual disciplines are a means of grace through which makes space in your life to connect with God”. “There is a doorway that opens in order for us to have the kind of connection and relationship that we want”. (Lecture 4 Spiritual disciplines).

The Assurance of pardon after people have publicly confessed their sins in church is important. People need to know that God has forgiven them. The assurance of pardon by a minister has been debated in protestant churches because only God can forgive sins. “Still reacting to concerns about being too Catholic, but also being sensitive to Calvin’s desire to allow words of comfort after confession, the Westminster Directory is silent on the subject of an Assurance of Pardon after confession. Ministers could speak nor pray as they felt was most appropriate on this regard”.² Confession of sin with a pardon took place early on in Calvin’s Liturgy to prepare people to hear the sermon.³ Confession of sin is important to the next principle because it prepares people for communion.

² Chapell p61

³ Ibid p57

2 Worship should remind us of Jesus' example, vs 23-26:

23. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24. And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". 25 In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes". (1 Cor 11:23-26 ESV).

Paul says he received the ordinance of the Lord's supper directly from Jesus. Whether the Lord's Supper was observed in churches prior to Paul instituting it is not known. It was first observed with the disciples on what is now known as Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday. The historical church has always made the Lord's Supper a central part of their worship. The divisions come in how often the Lord's Supper is to be observed. Before the Protestant reformation communion was observed every Sunday.⁴

The word Eucharist means "to give thanks" from the Greek word. The celebration of communion is often referred to as the Eucharist. Some churches treat communion as a sacrament and others as an ordinance. (Lecture 11 Sacraments). Much older more historic churches have a higher view of the elements, the bread and wine, used in communion. The Roman Catholic church would fall into this category. The word sacrament does not appear in the Bible, but then again neither does the word trinity! Theologians give names to practices and doctrines found in the Bible. The protestants have two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist.

⁴ Chapell p65

The word sacrament is from the Latin word sacramentum and “was originally a military term describing the oath of allegiance and obedience that a soldier solemnly pledged to his commander. Tertullian (b. about 160) first prominently used this term and applied it to the pledge of faith and allegiance made by candidates for baptism to their Lord.⁵ It is not known how often Paul and the disciple eat communion. When the Bible says they broke bread, it may only mean that they ate together.

Some churches practice open communion and others closed communion. In an open communion congregants and visitors can partake in communion regardless of whether or not they are baptized or are members of that particular church or congregation. In a closed communion, the person who takes communion must be baptized and often be a part of a particular church or denomination. The view of this writer is that open communion should be practiced but that the person must be a believer. All denominations should be able to partake of communion together because as Paul says, they are the “body of Christ.”

Jesus said His church should “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:24 ESV). Besides Jesus dying for mankind, He came for a unified church. There are so many divisions in the church. Even who Jesus died for is debated. But with all the disunity it is the philosophy of this writer that the body of Christ is made up of believers from all denominations that believe in the fundamentals of the Christian faith. What is the gospel? It is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3 “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 that he was he was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,” (1 Cor 15:3-5 ESV).

⁵ Leonard J. Van der Zee. *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper. Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. P28.

The body of Christ is made up of people who approach the preaching of the gospel in many ways. Divisions are a part of being a Christian.

God's people are sometimes not accepted for who they are, and their gifts are often not welcome in the church. McElroy in his book, *Creative Church Handbook*, encourages such believers not to give up. The body of Christ needs them! When a person wants to start a dance ministry or a painting ministry there are sometimes barriers. Ignorance can often stop a church from reaching out with the Arts. "Christians (especially Protestants) sometimes have a hard time making the arts a legitimate ministry because they haven't been educated in how to understand or appreciate the arts.

Church leaders often have a "fear of emotion". Arts is often created through deep emotion, and that can make people uncomfortable. Many Christians are used to the three-point sermon, so abstract ideas can cause consternation. But, in fact, Jesus often taught in the abstract, not easily understood forms. Fear of metaphor and symbol. For some, the arts may seem too mystical. However, the Bible is full of story, ritual, rites, metaphor and mystery".⁶

3 Worship should cause a person to examine themselves.

"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why so many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

⁶ Dr. Colin Habinson, quoted by McElroy, p287.

31 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come". (1 Cor11:27-34 ESV).

Throughout this paper, the writer has endeavored to establish their philosophy and theology of worship. The main thrust of the paper has been the principle of unity of the body of Christ.

Every denomination has something the church can learn from. Some of these traditions are very old like Eastern Orthodoxy (Lecture 7 Christian Orthodox tradition). The beauty of their statutes and icons and the many majestic buildings. The care they take to incorporate the gospel into their liturgy. In the past, many churches were largely made up of a single culture. The original believers were almost all Jewish but soon they had to welcome the Gentiles into their congregation.

Today the church is dealing with a multicultural explosion! The church is forced to welcome the many worship traditions of people from all over the world that have come to the United States.

Sandra Maria Van Opstal in her book, *The Next Worship*, teaches Christians how to incorporate different styles of worship into their congregation. Today the multicultural church is where it's at. This is God's final move in the church. Christians must learn to accept and love one another. Jesus said 24 "A new commandment I give to you, love one another just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 25 By this all people will know you are my disciples if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35 ESV).

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