

LCC's Position on Corporate Worship

The uniqueness of corporate worship:

There are different dimensions of worship in the life of a Christian. A Christian will engage often in personal worship. This happens when God is encountered privately through common practices like prayer, Scripture reading and singing. A Christian may also participate in family worship within their home, probably looking similar to a church service, yet without the ordinances and some formalities. However, when it comes to the corporate worship of God's people, it stands unique from the others because of its direct calling and action of God to gather his people together in assembled, public worship¹ under the leadership and direction of qualified, called, and commissioned elders². As God gathers His people together in assembled, public worship, He has much to say in Scripture about the purpose and manner in which this is to happen.

The gatherers of corporate worship:

Corporate worship is primarily a local gathering of God's people³ for the purpose of worshipping God⁴. Through faith in Christ, we have been redeemed and are united to Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection⁵. Now, in Christ, we are God's people⁶, eternally adopted into his covenant family⁷, receiving every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places⁸. In response to this new reality, we gather locally – as God's people – to worship God for who he is and all that he has done⁹.

The purpose of corporate worship:

The purpose of coming together in corporate worship is twofold: to receive from and respond to God. First, we receive from God as we turn our attention to him and become freshly acquainted with truths of his greatness revealed in Scripture and his goodness working in our lives¹⁰. Then, as our minds and hearts are nourished and stirred with affection, we respond to God with praise and worship¹¹. Collectively, our praise and worship of God results in the building up of other believers¹² and, as a result, the evangelization of unbelievers who may be in our midst¹³.

The elements of corporate worship:

The regulative principle of worship refers to God's biblical design for corporate worship¹⁴. In Scripture, God explicitly instructs us to read the Word¹⁵, pray the Word¹⁶, preach the Word¹⁷, sing the Word¹⁸, and see the Word¹⁹ when we gather to worship corporately. While there is liberty regarding the way in which the elements of corporate worship may be practiced, they must be practiced in a way emphasizes both the *corporate* aspect and the *worship* aspect of corporate worship.

The form of corporate worship:

The nature of corporate worship requires us to be intentional when considering its form²⁰. While Scripture doesn't provide explicit instructions on how the service should be ordered, there is clarity on the purpose of corporate worship²¹ and the elements that should be included²². There is liberty in organizing the order of worship, to the degree that the Scriptural purpose and elements are incorporated. Additionally, Scriptural examples²³, historical patterns²⁴, and practical implications are important guides for healthy corporate worship form²⁵.

The participation of corporate worship:

Corporate worship is not a spectator event intended to be watched, but rather a family gathering in which to be involved²⁶. As we participate in corporate worship, it is helpful to consider both our participation *and* how we are encouraging the participation of those around us while we worship²⁷. The singing, public reading, and preaching of Scripture unite God's people as we hear, discuss, and apply the truth. Prayers are individually spoken yet join together as they are sent up to God like a sweet aroma of incense²⁸.

Endnotes

- ¹ 1 Corinthians 11:20 The first part of this verse assumes God's people gathering together for the Lord's Supper; Ephesians 5:19 & Colossians 3:16 These verses instruct God's people to address, encourage, and exhort each other through song; Hebrews 10:24-25 These verses are clear instruction for God's people to gather for the purpose of encouraging each other. The conclusion of these verses is that God has clearly instructed his people to gather together for corporate worship.
- ² 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9 These passages explain the qualifications for elders called to oversee the church; Hebrews 13:17 This verse describes the relationship and responsibilities between church leaders and the congregants; 1 Peter 5:1-5 This passage describes the responsibilities of elders shepherding the flock of God. The conclusion of these passages is that God has ordained elders to lead and shepherd the local church through teaching and spiritual oversight. This would include leadership and spiritual oversight in regard to the local corporate worship gathering.
- ³ The authors of the divinely inspired epistles to New Testament churches assumed that they were writing first and foremost to believers (See opening verses in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, etc.)
- ⁴ "And we (worship) together, as an assembled church. Cue the Psalms: 'Shout for joy, all you upright in heart!' (Ps 32:11). 'Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!' (34:3). 'Sing aloud to God our strength' (81:1). 'Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!' (95:2). 'Let the redeemed of the LORD say so' (107:2). We could go on and on. The point is clear: exaltation is the heartbeat of God's gathered people." Corporate Worship; 9Marks, pg 62
- ⁵ Romans 6:4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
- ⁶ Psalm 100:3; 1 Peter 2:10; 1 John 3:1
- ⁷ Ephesians 1:5 In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will
- ⁸ Ephesians 1 verse 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
- ⁹ Many passages speak of praising and giving thanks to God as a right and worshipful response (Psalm 150; Romans 15:8-13; 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 9:15; etc.) and we see this response of gratitude impacting corporate worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- ¹⁰ The foundational elements of corporate worship are designed by God to communicate the truth of God's grace and goodness to His people. Matthew 28:19-20 Great commission given to the Church, Baptizing and teaching as the means of making disciples; Cor 11:23-26 The Lord's Supper; Galatians 1:6-10 Paul's reminder that protecting the gospel of critical importance. Colossians 3:16a sets the Word of Christ as the center focus and motivation of our singing.
- ¹¹ From previous page under "Gatherers": Many passages speak of praising and giving thanks to God as a right and worshipful response to his grace and goodness (Psalm 150; Romans 15:8-13; 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 9:15; etc.) and we see this response of gratitude impacting corporate worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- ¹² Hebrews 10:24-25 along with Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 describe the encouraging and edifying nature of corporate worship.
- ¹³ 1 Cor 14:22-23 Paul speaks of the evangelistic opportunity present in a corporate worship setting
- ¹⁴ There are a lot of Scripture passages that churches go to for both the regulative and normative principle of worship. Most reformed churches would incorporate some variation of the regulative principle. See John Frame on liberty regarding the mode of elements in worship (the way in which the elements are practiced).
- ¹⁵ 1 Timothy 4:13 - 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching
- ¹⁶ 1 Timothy 1:1-2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.
- ¹⁷ 1 Timothy 4:13 - 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.
- ¹⁸ Many passages speak of praising and giving thanks to God as a right and worshipful response (Psalm 150; Romans 15:8-13; 1 Cor 15:57; 2 Cor 9:15; etc.) and we see this response of gratitude impacting corporate worship (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- ¹⁹ Matthew 28:16-20 Cor. 11:22-25 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
- ²⁰ Leviticus 10:1 (strange fire); Galatians 6:7 (God will not be mocked)
- ²¹ See the "purpose of corporate worship" explanation
- ²² See the "elements of corporate worship" explanation
- ²³ See "Corporate Worship" from the 9Marks pages 103-105 for explanation on how Genesis 2, Exodus 19, and 2 Chronicles 5-7 help us better understand God's design for worship.
- ²⁴ See "Corporate Worship" from the 9Marks pages 105-106 for information regarding enduring liturgical forms from church history, including a summary of the main movements these historical liturgies share in common.
- ²⁵ We also need to be ready to consider any practical implications based on our local context if necessary when developing the order of worship for our local church.
- ²⁶ We participate together in the elements of the worship service (1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:15-17; 1 Tim 2:1-8; 2 Tim 4:1-2)
- ²⁷ Hebrews 10:23-25 - we encourage each other as we participate in the elements together
- ²⁸ Revelation 8:4