

## Does God Care How We Worship? Part 5 of 5

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02/10/2017

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Good evening, I would invite you to turn in your copies of the Scriptures to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 14, I want to read this chapter and then will have prayer before we launch into our final study on worship.

This is perhaps the most defining instructions about worship that we find in the New Testament in the terms of the scope of it, there are other places where we pick up some instruction here and there but this has an awful lot of instruction put together in one place so let's read first Corinthians 14.

### 1 Corinthians 14:1-40

Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy. <sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit. <sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. <sup>4</sup> The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. <sup>5</sup> Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up.

I'll just pause here and note one thing that language of building up the church is a key part of this instruction to us pay attention to it as we go along.

(Verse six)

<sup>6</sup> Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? <sup>7</sup> If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? <sup>8</sup> And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? <sup>9</sup> So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. <sup>10</sup> There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, <sup>11</sup> but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. <sup>12</sup> So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church. <sup>13</sup> Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. <sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. <sup>18</sup> I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. <sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue. <sup>20</sup> Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. <sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written, "By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen to me, says the Lord." <sup>22</sup> Thus tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers. <sup>23</sup> If, therefore, the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are out of your minds? <sup>24</sup> But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, <sup>25</sup> the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. <sup>26</sup> What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. <sup>27</sup> If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. <sup>28</sup> But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be

silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, <sup>34</sup> the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. <sup>35</sup> If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. <sup>36</sup> Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? <sup>37</sup> If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. <sup>38</sup> If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. <sup>39</sup> So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. <sup>40</sup> But all things should be done decently and in order.

Let's pray together.

Our Father we come to you this evening and we recognise that this is your word that you have spoken to us, you have given us instructions about order in the services and about your desire to see believers built up and so help us as we look now this evening at worship in the church and how it can be best done and practised, help us to keep in mind your purposes, help us to keep in mind your character and your nature so we can worship you in spirit and in truth in this we pray in the name of Jesus our blessed Redeemer, Amen.

Now this week we have walking through a series of explanations about worship about corporate worship especially the worship of God's people as we gather together and we have observed what I believe is found in Scripture it is called the regulative principle of worship that is that God has commanded how we are to worship him we are not free to invent our own worship we must worship him in the ways He has commanded us.

Now I would note that he has not seemed to give the same kind of instructions for private worship and even in this text there is the distinction made between the church worship and other worship and he is saying basically when you come together worship in ways that build each other up if you are not going to do that than keep it to yourself and God and go basically worship privately, that's what he saying. So there is a distinct difference between public worship, gathered worship, and private worship, it doesn't mean that one is more important than the other perhaps but there is a distinction there and God it seems is most concerned with how we worship especially when we are together with others of God's people.

Now this evening we are going to do a little bit of application, we're going to try and take everything that we have looked at this week were going to try to actually do something with it in terms of what should our worship look like, what should our worship look like?

Now I would make a disclaimer here a bit of a disclaimer, this is the kind of thing that the local church must deal with on the local level because our contexts are different, there are some principles I think that apply everywhere but we must flesh them out in ways that are sometimes different from another local fellowship so I want to make sure you understand I am not here to tell the folks here at Center Amish Mennonite church exactly how their worship ought to look like, you all are going to have to deal with that yourselves, I am here to give you some ideas and hopefully some examples of what I think I things we should be reaching for and looking for and maybe thinking about.

So I don't want to hear that so-and-so went to Brother David here and said you know we really must change this worship because Linford Berry said that we need to do this, I don't want to be hearing that, okay.

Now if you really think that you ought to take a fresh look at worship I'm sure Brother David will be glad to listen to you okay, but you all need to do that together, I cannot do that for you.

Alright, just so we're clear!

We also noted by the way that worship has changed with the covenants, so acceptable worship the kinds of ways in which God is worshipped have changed from old covenant to new covenant and then again to

the new heavens and new earth there will be some changes there and so as we look at this as far as what our worship should look like we are obviously going to need to take our cues primarily from the new Testament, we don't neglect or ignore the old Testament those principles many of them are universal and do translate over, but the specifics and the forms are replaced many times by Christ.

So let's take a look at this.

When we talk about worship we're actually talking about a number of different things.

We are talking first of all about the elements of worship, the elements of worship are what I would refer to as the kind of practices or activities of worship, these would be things like singing, praying and preaching in Scripture reading and administering the ordinances, those would be the kind of parts of worship the elements of worship and I would say that those things should be regulated directly by biblical command, in other words we should not introduce new elements that are not authorised by God. We have been authorised to do certain things in worship let's do them well.

But elements are not the only thing we need to be concerned about, we also have a concern about forms and this is basically how we go about singing and praying and preaching and reading Scripture, the form that takes, forms of worship.

And I would say that these things need to be informed by biblical principles, so the Bible might not spell out all the forms in detail for us, it does spell out the elements and a few of the forms that we are given clues about but the forms in other words how we do these things need to be biblically informed, we don't just do it anyway we please and these forms of worship must serve the elements, in other words they must fit with the elements of worship and maximise them or help them to be done well.

And then there are circumstances of worship.

Now circumstances of worship are incidentals things like whether you are going to sit in pews or stand-up or what time your services are going to be or whether you are going to use a bulletin or whether you are going to use an overhead projector or all kinds of things like that, those are incidentals, they are not integral to the worship itself but even those things, even those things should be maximally helpful in assisting us to do what the Bible calls us to do in worship, they should be helpful in building each other up, they should not be distracting from the worship of God rather they should be contributing, they should be geared towards maximum mutual edification.

So those are the three parts of worship, the elements of worship that should be regulated by the biblical commands, there are forms of worship what form those elements take should be informed by biblical principles, and then there are circumstances of worship the incidental kind of details and these things also should all serve for maximum edification and should serve the glory and honour of God.

We believe that all true worship must be biblical, that is both the form and content of our corporate worship must be ruled and guided by the Bible.

Jesus said those that worship the Father, true worshippers, will worship him in spirit and in truth.

Jesus also says that the word of God is true, Thy word is truth. And He also says in John 17 that God will sanctify his people by the word.

God uses his word, God has expressed his word is truth and so the form and content of our worship service must be ruled and guided by the truth of God.

Worship should be biblical in every aspect.

The first question of Christian worship is not what musical style should be use or what do people like or what do people want or what will attract seekers or what are other churches doing.

The first question of Christian worship should be how this God want to be worshipped.

And that question can only be answered from the Bible.

So an apt motto for those who would embrace the Bible's teaching on corporate worship might be something like this; Read the Bible, Preach the Bible, Pray the Bible, Sing the Bible, Show the Bible in the Ordinances.

Five things that we are commanded to do in the New Testament, five basic elements of worship.

We are to read the Bible, Paul told Timothy give attention to the public reading of Scripture, 1 Timothy 4:13.

So a worship service that is going to be biblical will contain a substantial reading of Scripture, the public reading of the Bible has been at the heart of worship since old Testament times and in the new Testament era it was even more so in the reading of God's word He speaks directly to his people. If we believe that this is God's communication to us what greater thing would there be then to read it but so many times we neglect the reading of the word of God, we minimise it, we do not emphasise it, we might take it on is kind of an extra, but it should be an integral part of our worship.

Secondly we are to preach the Bible, preaching is God's prime appointed instrument to build up his Church as Paul said Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God and how are they to hear except they have a preacher.

Faithful biblical preaching is to explain and apply the Scripture to the gathered company. People who appreciate the Bible's teaching in worship will have a high view of preaching and little time for the personality driven theologically void superficial practical monologues that pass for preaching today.

I was in a church a number of years ago I was on vacation and when we go on vacation my wife and I like to visit churches that are not like our church at home gives us a good opportunity to see how other Christians worship and so we stopped in at a United Methodist church and the service began, there was music and an offering and there was the reading of Scripture from old Testament – new Testament like the Methodist liturgy has and then there was the sermon and the preacher got up to preach a sermon and never once opened his Bible, never once uttered a word of Scripture.

He began to preach about football and he preached a very moralistic sermon with some good lessons about life but it had no source in the Scriptures it was all about the lessons we can learn from football.

That brothers and sisters is not true worship, that is something else, I won't even try to figure out what that is.

[1] Hughes says this, From the very beginning of the Church the sermon was supposed to be an explanation of the Scripture reading, it is not just a lecture on some religious subject it is rather an explanation of a passage of Scripture. Preach the word Paul tells Timothy, 2 Timothy 4:2, expository preaching through the whole Bible, the whole counsel of God was the practice of many of the church fathers and all the reformers and the best preachers ever since.

The preached word is central to the true worship of God.

So we are to read the Scriptures and then we are to explain the Scriptures and next we are to pray the Scriptures.

Jesus says in Matthew 21 the Father's house is a house of prayer.

Our prayers or to be permeated with the language and ideas and thoughts of Scripture. Do we not learn the language of Christian devotion from the Bible? says Terry Johnson, [2] Do we not learn the language of confession and penitence from the Bible? Do we not learn the promises of God from the Bible? Do we not learn the will of God, the commands of God and the desires of God for his people from the Bible?

All of these things we are to plead in prayer from the Bible.

Since these things are so public prayer should repeat and echo the language of the Bible throughout.

You know this is one of the things that concerns me in our circles is either the lack of prayer or the lack of substantive prayer, many times prayer is most time prayer is extemporaneous that is nobody plans ahead,

nobody writes it out, nobody gives much thought to what they are going to pray and so what tends to happen is that people just get up and pray the same prayer that they prayed last time they prayed because it is what comes and it becomes fairly shallow quickly but if we are going to go deep in our prayer we are going to have to go deep into the word of God, the word of God gives us language, the word of God gives us instructions, the word of God gives us as he says here the language of devotion and confession and penitence and promises in the will of God and the commands of God that we are to plead with God for. What better thing than to pray the language of Scripture.

Any says here and I would echo the same comment, the call here is not for written and read prayers but studied free prayer. Our ministers should spend time plundering the language of Scripture in preparation for leading the public worship in prayer.

Now I would say by way of application that I don't think it would hurt for us to write out our prayers sometimes just as a way to help us think well about what we are going to pray.

Fourthly we are to sing the Bible.

This doesn't mean that we can only sing the Psalms or some other text of Scripture, although we should not ignore that resource, Colossians talks about singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and there are a number of ways to understand the dynamics of those three terms but Psalms definitely means Psalms, hymns could mean and probably did mean other text of Scripture set to music other than Psalms and spiritual songs were probably songs that were not directly from Scripture but they were songs that had a language and themes and content of Scripture as their base.

What we mean by sing the Bible Lincoln Duncan [3] says is that our singing or to be biblical shot through with the language, categories and theology of the Bible. It ought to reflect the themes and proportions of the Bible as well as its substance and weightiness. Our songs should be rich with biblical and theological content.

You know singing teaches us, singing teaches us theology.

How many of you sometimes find yourself with a song running an endless loop in your head, you can't hardly even get it out it is just there it is stuck there, music has a way of doing that, music is very powerful that way, it drives those truths into our mind in a way that is inescapable sometimes.

We must be very, very careful about the content of our singing, about the content of our music, of our hymns. Now we have some very good resources and I don't mean to call into question the song book you have either but let's just check it out and make sure that what the songs are saying is what we ought to be saying from the Bible.

What should a Christian worship song look like?

Answer, it should look like a song, that is the songbook of Jesus and the Apostles, that's the songbook of John Calvin and many of the other reformers including the Anabaptists who sang Psalms, who didn't only sing psalms but sang other parts of Scripture, many even in new Testament passages are set to music, this was a way to instil in them the truths of Scripture.

Now many most of those folks did not have access, easy access, to the printed word of God like we do and so by using these songs in worship they were able to memorise Scripture and those things could do that endless loops in their head and it would be beautiful because it is the word of God.

Songs from the Scripture will be rich in both theological and experiential content, they will tell us much about God, about men, about sin and salvation and the Christian life, they will express the whole range of human experience and emotion.

Songs from the Scripture will always be, always be applicable to our lives.

Now just a word about music to go with the songs.

Music should always fit the words, the purpose of the musical elements of a hymn is to carry the words, to convey the words, to reinforce the words. So if you have a song where the music, the tempo, the field,

the emotional feel of the music does not match the words we have a very discordant sound and I don't think that is what God intends, God is a God of order not a God of confusion, He is a God of peace. So we need to try and make sure that as much as possible the music is appropriate to the emotional mood of what we are singing.  
So sing the Bible.

And then see the Bible, see the Bible. We see the Bible through the ordinances. Augustine was famous for saying that the ordinances are visible words, visible words. In baptism and in the Lord's Supper and probably in feet washing and some other things that we do, we see, we smell, we touch, we taste, these things interact with our bodies. Christians should celebrate baptism and communion during the gathered public services, in the ordinances we see with our eyes the promises of God, God addresses our minds and our consciences through the hearing of the word and through the singing but in the ordinances He uniquely addresses our mind and our conscience through other senses, God's promises made to tangible, God's word comes to us in ways that are physical not just intellectual, mental. The Lord's Supper reminds us and assures us of a promise and so these visible symbols of Gospel truth are to be done as a part of our corporate worship. Those are the elements of worship – read the Bible, preach the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, see the Bible.

But what are some biblical principles now that should guide the forms and the circumstances of worship?

I have a quote from C.S Lewis I really like, I have used this quote I don't how many times in all kinds of different ways but he wrote this especially about worship, it applies to all kinds of other aspects of life but listened this is what CS Lewis says about worship;

“As long as you notice and have to count the steps you are not yet dancing but only learning how to dance. A good shoe is a shoe you don't have to notice. Good reading becomes possible when you need not consciously think about eyes or light or print or spelling.

The perfect church service would be the one we were almost completely unaware of because our attention would have been on God. We should not be concerned with forms and circumstances so much for their own sake as much for the sake of the elements or substance of worship and for the sake of the object and aim of worship.

The reformers and early Anabaptists understood two things often lost on us moderns, first they understood that liturgy the set forms of corporate worship, the pattern of corporate worship, the media, the instruments and vehicles of worship these things are never neutral and so exceeding care must be given to the law of unintended consequences. Often the medium overwhelms and changes the message. Secondly they knew that the purpose of the elements and forms and circumstances of corporate worship is to assure that you're actually doing worship as defined by God that you are worshipping the God of Scripture and that your aim in worshipping him is the aim set forth in Scripture.

So we must care about how we worship, not because we think the order of service is mystical or that it carries some supernatural power but we must care about the order of worship and the forms of worship and the circumstances of worship precisely so that those things can get out of the way and we can with the gathered church commune with the living God.

The function of the order of service and the forms and circumstances is not to draw attention to themselves but to aid our souls communion with each other and with God, this is why the great Baptist preacher Jeffrey Thomas in true worship men have little thought of the means of worship their thoughts are on God.

True worship is characterised by self-effacement and is lacking in self-consciousness, that is in biblical worship we are so focused on God himself and are so intent to acknowledge his inherent and unique worthiness that we are transfixed by him and thus worship is not about what we want or like nor do his appointed means divert our eyes from him but rather it is about meeting with God and delighting in his delights.”

And by the way I think we should not have the same interest in cultural accommodation as many modern evangelicals do, we must be against culture derived worship and be more concerned with implementing the principles of Scripture in our specific culture and to emulate the best of Bible inspired cultures of Scripture. This is precisely one of the areas that has produced some of the greatest controversy in worshipping our age.

Where are we going to take our cues from?

Are we going to take our cues from the world around us or are we going to take our cues from the Scripture?

Here are some principles from the Scripture that will give us some cues and how to think about the forms and circumstances of worship.

First of all worship ought to be reverent.

Hebrews chapter 12 says our God is a consuming fire and because of that we must worship him with the acceptable worship in reverence and awe.

If worship is meeting with God how could it be otherwise? It is precisely the reverence and awe of the greatness of God that should characterise our worship.

Worship is an action verb, worship is an action verb, we should not view worship is something that is done to us or for us, worship is something we do it as a participatory event.

Now one of the ways I think this could be fleshed out in greater measure is our congregational singing, you all do a great job at it, better than many churches I've been to, but there is always room for better congregational singing where people are more fully engaged, more fully participating with not just their vocal cords but with their mind and their heart and dare I say even their bodies.

We should see to it that our singing is not a performance but rather an active speaking to each other, singing to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to God. This worship has a horizontal view and a vertical view.

Worship is an action verb.

Thirdly worship must edify and build up.

We already read about this in first Corinthians 14 over and over and over again the apostle's concern is that everything done in worship must build up the body and if it doesn't build up the body it does not have a place in worship, it might have a place at home or somewhere else but not in the gathered worship, we see this in his instructions about communion, we see it in his instructions about tongues, we see it in his instructions about the order of service.

One of the distinctions between all of life worship and gathered assembly in worship is the necessity of doing in public worship only that which will honour God and build up our brother.

Fourthly worship must be orderly.

It must be orderly, God is a God of order not a God of confusion therefore we must worship him in orderly ways.

And again that is directly because that is who God is, remember our worship is ordered because of the character and nature of God, if we are going to worship him in spirit and in truth we must worship him in accordance with who He is and He is a God of order.

And then worship must be intelligible.

Why? Because God is a God who communicates, God is a God who communicates, and if we are going to worship him in spirit and in truth we must worship him in a way that is intelligible, also we must worship him in a way that is intelligible so that we can build up each other.

God reveals himself in intelligible and understandable ways therefore we must worship him in ways that communicate clearly and the forms and circumstances of worship must never obscure or compromise that. So if you have for example I'm just going to use an example we can do that here, if you have

musical instruments in your worship service and the musical instruments are loud and overpowering and you cannot hear your brother singing to you those instruments have become a problem because they have reduced the worship to something that is less intelligible.

I would say the same thing though about some of the music that we sing that is not very simple that is very complex and there is lots of stuff going on and it is hard to understand the words because the music has taken over, all right, be careful about that.

Especially be careful about that for people who do not have the tradition that we have.

You see it is easy for us to go into, and I've done it here this week, I'll sit here on the bench and I will just sing along with the music and I'll enjoy it and it speaks to me it gives me goose bumps and I know what the words are not because I can hear them but because I have sung them so many times but somebody coming into our services who has never, has never experienced or been exposed to the majestic four-part a cappella singing that we so enjoy they don't know what we're doing, they don't understand unless they are reading the words they can't hear exactly what we are saying.

So be careful about that.

In addition worship must drive for excellence.

God is not glorified, the right opinion is not given of God when his people are sloppy and careless.

Remember we must worship God in accordance with who He is and our God is a God who is not sloppy and careless, our God is a God of beauty, a God of glory, a God of majesty and splendour.

We must strive for excellence in our worship.

Now let me be quick to say on the heels of that again this must never compromise the building each other up and so let's not strive for excellence in a way that leaves people behind makes it so that people cannot participate in worship.

Finally worship must avoid worldliness.

We must be careful not to borrow the world's methods, the world's forms, the world's circumstances without careful consideration of whether this is God oriented and consistent with the principles of Scripture. Just because it seems to work doesn't make it right for worship.

We must be careful to avoid worldliness in our worship.

Some people actually go the other way and they actually seek out worldly means and worldly methods and worldly forms and circumstances so they can reach the worldly people and I would just have to say two things, one is whatever you use to draw people that is what you are going to have to use to keep them otherwise it is going to be bait and switch.

Secondly if we use the world's methods and the world's forms in the world's circumstances why should they even come? They've already got that, we are here to offer something else, we are here to offer something better but if we stooped to the world's ways we have nothing left to offer, nothing to call them to, nothing to call them out of.

I was convicted about this quite a number of years ago, I was working with a gentleman who is not Christian, at least he wouldn't claim to be, I think he goes to church once in a while but he doesn't claim to be a radical Christian, and we were working together and I left the radio on in one of the trucks one day and it was set to some contemporary Christian music station that I listened to in those days sometimes and he got in the truck after I got out and then he came into the office later and said, What's up with that music you listen to? He said it sounds just like the music I listen to just different words.

I was convicted!

When people come to church they should be exposed, they should be confronted by God.

All right, before we close here, here are some specific recommendations for our worship now I'm going from preaching to meddling.

These are suggestions, these are things that we ought to think about, these are things that I think we would do well to consider in our worship.

First of all regarding the elements of worship I think we should read the Scriptures more thoroughly and more regularly, we should read significant portions of Scripture every Sunday morning from old and new Testament and how you want to do that is going to be up to you but the church throughout history has found ways doing this in very intentional ways, some churches read make sure that if the Scripture that is being used in the sermon is from the new Testament they read a chapter out of the old Testament, a corresponding chapter a chapter that is connected to the sermon would be great, but other churches just read through portions of the old and new Testament in consecutive order Sunday after Sunday.

One church I know of reads a Psalm every Sunday, they read from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150 and then they start over again, over twice a year they read the entirety of the Psalms.

Some churches have not only a Psalm reading but also a New Testament and Old Testament reading every Sunday.

Let's just pay attention and let's consider having the Scriptures read more thoroughly and more regularly.

Secondly we should do a better job of expository preaching.

We should do a better job of explaining the Scriptures making that the central feature of our preaching and transformation of life must be the goal. Many times expository preaching gets a bad rap because all it is is a running commentary on what the Scripture says and that has never been the goal of biblical preaching, we might as well read the Bible and leave it alone if that is all we are going to do.

Biblical preaching has always been about explaining this word and applying this word to our daily lives so that it transforms us.

You see this is the unchanging word of God it hasn't changed in thousands of years but our context changes every day and we continually need this reapplication of the unchanging word of God to the changing circumstances of our time and place – and that is what expository preaching does and is.

Application must flow from the Scriptures.

Transformation of life must be the purpose and goal of our preaching.

Thirdly I think we should be more thoughtful about our prayers in church.

Our prayers tend to be short and sporadic and not very deep, we should think about our prayers and we should pray more not less.

We should have prayers of confession.

We should have prayers of intercession.

We should have prayers of praise and thanksgiving to our God.

We ought to sing more Psalms.

We ought to sing more Scripture and dare I say we ought to sing it more in unison.

You see four-part singing although it is a beautiful part of our tradition sometimes gets in the way of worship. There is something about the unified voice of God's people singing and making melody in their hearts and their lips to God that speaks and worshipped in a way that four-part singing just doesn't do especially for those people who are musically challenged, especially for those people who have not grown up in our tradition and feel kind of like they are never going to fit in because they cannot sing that way. Most of them can sing along in unison it is a whole lot easier and they feel one with us.

So just try it.

We ought to sing more Psalms, we ought to sing more Psalms in unison that is what the church is done for most of the 2000 years of church history.

And then I think we ought to rethink our observance of communion and baptism and perhaps feet washing and marriage and the other ordinances.

We ought to rethink these things in terms of what they are really saying and what they are really communicating so that we can see God, so that we can see the Scriptures, we need to pay attention to these things, we need to rethink some things I believe about how we approach these sacred ordinances.

The reformers talked about them as means of grace, Luther and the Catholic Church talked about them in terms of sacraments, now let's not get sacraments confused with sacramentalism, Anabaptist called them sacraments up until probably 150 years ago and then we ditched the terminology because of its association with Catholicism, but sacraments or means of grace I think more adequately describes this then ordinances because these things that we do, these tangible realities that we experience in the means of grace or the sacraments they are more than mere reminders, they are more than mere symbols, they are a way we interact with God with our senses, they are tangible, they are real and they speak to us of a spiritual reality in ways that our ears and hearing just don't do. Let's think about that and let's rethink perhaps how we do these things.

And then in terms of forms and circumstances here is a couple of ideas.

I think we ought to be okay with a little more emotional expression, we ought to be okay with that. Now provided that that emotional expression is not manipulated, we should not be about emotional expression, emotional expression should be the result of true worship we should never seek to create it by itself, we should always seek true worship but then I think we should allow and tolerate and maybe even celebrate a little bit more of that emotional expression, we should be okay with it.

Again it should not be allowed to overrun other biblical principles like the building up, if it gets to be distracting, if it gets to be something that gets in the way of our building up then maybe we need to calm it down a bit but I think we've got a long ways to go before that will be a problem.

We should think about the arrangements of our church buildings and our furnishings.

Now you say what in the world does that have to do with worship?

Well if the worship is to be about the building up of the body how does it help us when all we can do is look at the back of each other's heads? Hmmm?

Early Anabaptists would have never sat like this and they certainly didn't have pulpits 3 feet off the floor, they did not elevate the preacher, okay.

Now I'm not trying to beat you all about the head about this, we've got a pulpit in our church too but our pews are not arranged like this and they are not arranged like this on purpose, our pews are arranged in a circle so we can see each other, so we can speak to each other.

Now that would be a little hard for you to do that in this kind of room but what I'm saying is when we go to build a church let's think about this stuff because how we do these things, the forms and incidentals and circumstances of worship, do affect how we worship.

And then two more things, first of all I think we ought to look for more ways to include everybody in worship, we ought to look for more ways to include everybody in worship and especially other ways than just singing, there need to be ways for people to respond to God and to speak to each other and I don't know what all this is going to look like and I'm not trying to tell you exactly how to do it but let's look for ways, let's create ways that the body can speak to itself and build up itself and respond to God in prayer and praise and things like that.

One of the things we have done in order to attempt to do this is we have much of the reading of Scripture done in unison by the whole congregation, we have a lot more standing for singing and prayers and so on and so forth just to get everybody involved and make sure that everybody is participating together.

It is easy for us to just kind of sit there on our pew and sit back and just be worshipped to.

But let's try to engage our people.

Now one last thing that I'm going to leave you with and that is be careful about change.

I've just told you all these things that you might want to consider changing or you might want to think about now I'm going to tell be careful about change.

If we changed too much or too fast we can actually distract people from true worship, that is what CS Lewis was saying if their eyes are on the forms and circumstances and all this stuff our eyes come off Jesus but if these forms and circumstances get out of the way and we don't even notice them then we can worship God and when we change our worship services at least for a while people notice and they maybe are a little uncomfortable they don't know what to do, they don't know that it's time to do this or that, and so it tends to inhibit true worship for a while.

Now I'm not saying don't ever change I'm just saying let's do it carefully and try not to do it too often.

I've noticed that it takes a congregation at least six months to adjust and adapt to a new order of worship and by new order of worship I am not talking about a total overhaul, I'm talking about some new element or so new order in the way things are done, for example we instituted the public reading of Scripture the regular reading of large sections of Scripture at our Sunday morning services it took people six months or a year to get used to that. And that's just a simple little thing.

But if you start changing stuff and you keep on changing stuff and you never let people get used to it their worship is going to be distracted and it is unsettling so don't change too much or too fast.

But maybe change is a good thing.

Thank you all for your kind attention this week it has been a delight to be with you and to get to know some of you better, to renew old acquaintances, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, I hope that you have benefited and if we don't see each other on this side of eternity we will see each other when we are all standing around the throne of God praising him and singing hallelujah.

*Transcriber's notes:*

*[1] Unable to identify full name*

*[2] Unable to identify Terry Johnson*

*[3] Unable to identify Lincoln Duncan*

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