

“Worship At Trinity Presbyterian Church”

By Rev. Roland S. Barnes

“God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24

The worship of God is our highest and most important calling in life! There is a sense in which all of life should be worship. All that we do, think, or say should be done in such a manner as to bring glory to our great God. However, there is also a sense in which we worship God as a particular activity that is apart from the everyday affairs of life. This is our focus when we are called together on the Lord’s Day to worship as a body of believers. There is then a unity in worship. There is private worship, family worship, and the **corporate worship** of a body of believers gathered on the Lord’s Day! Corporate worship is something that we do in unity with others. This unity is demonstrated by several factors:

I. There Is One Focus In Worship!

Our focus in worship is vertical, not horizontal! Worship is not primarily “fellowship.” Fellowship is “one another” oriented. The focus is horizontal! The worship of God is vertically focused. Our focus is on God, and not on man! This is why we try to get the horizontal out of the way before we begin the worship service! **Announcements and greetings** are horizontal in nature and therefore we have them scheduled before we begin the service. Our God is so awesome and so full of glory that we want to give Him our complete and undivided attention! We focus on Him and Him alone! Our focus then is in heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of God the Father. Our focus is in the Heavens where even now Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are surrounded by all the Heavenly hosts who ever sing and praise and worship Him. **See: Revelation and Psalms**

Question: How do you worship a God that you cannot see? Our worship is to be in Spirit and in truth! We worship according to the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit fills the church and transforms it into the very temple of God! (Ephesians 2:20-22) Worship, then, requires spiritual focus and spiritual concentration! The two most important ingredients to true worship are the Spirit of God and the human heart! In true spiritual worship you must concentrate on giving your heart’s devotion to the Lord! You must concentrate in order to worship Him and love Him with all of heart, mind, soul, and strength!

We begin our service with a **CALL TO WORSHIP!** We call upon God’s people to worship and glorify Him! Usually we use a Call to Worship from the Psalms. Then we sing a Hymn that focuses on the character and greatness of God so that we praise and worship Him for who He is in all of His glory and splendor! We then have an **INVOCATION!** The invocation is when we invoke the presence of our God in our midst! To “invoke” means to call (Latin: vocare). We are calling upon God to manifest His presence in our midst by His Holy Spirit. Thus God is the audience of our worship! The congregation is the actor and the pastor is the leader or prompter. Many view the congregation as the audience, God as the prompter, and the pastor as the performer. At Trinity Church we have our **choir** in the back of the sanctuary for this reason. Although a choir could sing from the front of the sanctuary it is less likely for a performance mindset to prevail if it is in the back. In the back of the congregation they can exhort and encourage the congregation to give praise to the Lord! **Choirs and instruments** should be supportive of the congregation in lifting up their voices in praise. Choirs and instruments should not take the place of the congregation in praise!

II. There Is One Faith In Worship!

We cannot have corporate worship if we come with many different faiths or beliefs. We are gathered together as a body of “believers!” That implies that we all believe something. We are believers in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ! We are united by our common relationship to the Father as His adopted children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! Our Faith is both objective and subjective. Our Faith is objective in that it constitutes a body of truth to which we adhere. We are united by the objective truth of the Gospel which we all believe: God is the creator, redeemer, and the One who sustains us (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). We are sinners, we deserve judgment! God has saved us by His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, etc.

Our Faith unites us in worship! We are coming together around a common confession of Faith! Therefore, we stand and confess our Faith as one when we use a written **Confession of Faith**, like the Apostles’ Creed. Also, when we hear the reading and the preaching of the Word we are gathered as one around the “Faith” that unites us! Our faith is also subjective! It is our personal “faith” in the God who has revealed Himself to us in His Word! We express our unity in worship as we give expression to our faith using **hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs**. Hymns are expressions of God’s truth, Psalms are the hymns of the Old Testament believers, and spiritual songs are expressions of our faith. When we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to our God in worship we express our unity with all true believers in Christ from the past and present!

We give expression to our faith when we **pray** together, **respond** to the reading of Scripture, and **give** our tithes and offerings to the Lord! Worship is an expression of our faith and dependence on the Lord! Worship, then, is **participatory** in nature! You are not to sit passively by and watch a show taking place. Rather you are to enter into worship as you focus on God and respond to His presence and His word. In the sacraments of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism the congregation focuses on God’s gift of grace to us in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We gratefully receive God’s grace and mercy as He offers it to us in Christ!

III. There Is One Heart In Worship!

Our corporate worship on the Lord’s Day involves a uniting of our hearts before the Lord. It is not the time for “individual” expression of devotion to the Lord which would be appropriate in another setting. In corporate worship we are uniting our hearts as one to praise our God. Thus our hearts give worship to our God with a unity of expression. We are not a gathering of people who are in the same room worshipping individually and separately. We are united in heart and mind and soul to worship the Lord.

IV. There Is One Voice In Worship!

Our voices are united in worship. We are not spontaneously calling out unto God in a sporadic manner. We are united in worship before the Lord and we are calling out to Him with one voice. We do not all sing a different hymn when it is time to sing. We do not have some singing while some are praying and others are confessing. When we sing, we lift our voices as one. When we pray we lift up our voices as one. When we confess our Faith, we lift up our voices as one. Sometimes the pastor will offer prayers up unto the Lord on behalf of the whole congregation. When he does this he will sometimes lift up his hands unto the Lord, symbolizing that the whole congregation is lifting up its heart before the Lord.

Also unison prayers are helpful if we are to lift up our voices in prayer as one. Some look at these prayers with disdain because they are not spontaneous. Spontaneous prayers are good and appropriate in many settings, however there is a place also for a Biblical **written prayer** that all may pray together with one heart, mind, and voice. We may **confess our sins** as one if we use a written prayer of confession. We may offer up a **prayer of thanksgiving** as one if we use a written prayer of thanksgiving. Many hymns are prayers as well and no one complains of the words being written out. No one complains that the words are written and are not spontaneously sung from the heart. That they are written out does not mean that they may not be sung from the heart.

V. There Is One Mind In Worship!

If there is to be one mind in our worship, a unity of God's people lifting up their hearts and voices in worship, we must all be focused on God's truth! God's truth forms the content of our worship! Our worship must be based on God's revelation of Himself in Scripture! The words that we say, that we hear, that we sing, that we pray, must all be based on God's revelation of Himself in His Word! Therefore, worship that is pleasing to God will be full of Scripture: both the **preaching and reading** of the Bible! May the Lord fill our hearts and our worship services with praise!

The Worship Service

Romans 12:1

***1**"I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."*

How was the "worship service?" I have been asked that question more than once throughout my 30+ years as an ordained minister. It has been my practice of late to respond by saying, "Well, I'm not sure. How did you do?" In other words, the question is often asked, "How was the worship service?", from the same perspective as that asked of any other event that one attends. If one attends a comedy act and is asked, "How was the show?", you might expect to hear, "It was funny!" or "It was boring!" or some other response that describes how the event impacted the person who watched it. If one attends a sporting event he might respond by saying that it was thrilling or exciting. When one attends such an event he does so not as a participant or an actor, but as a passive spectator. He judges what he watches as one watches a performance. However, a "worship service" is not an event to be passively observed. A worship service is an act of service which is offered by those who attend it. They are to be participants or actors in the service of worship. A simple analysis of the the very phrase itself, "worship service," will make the point. In Romans 12:1 the Apostle Paul speaks of believers as presenting their "bodies unto God as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." What we call a "worship service," can just as well be called a "service of worship." Now it is helpful to ask the question: "Who is providing the 'service' in the worship service? Or, who is doing the 'serving' in the worship service?" When we gather together as a body of believers, as the church, we do so in order to give unto God praise and honor and glory. We are presenting ourselves to him as living sacrifices which is our service of worship. We are doing the serving. We are the actors and God is the audience to be served. We are providing the service of worship unto our God. Thus, when someone asks, "How was the worship service?", I want to respond by saying, "I don't know, how did you do?" In other words, "How did you sing? How did you pray? How did you listen? How did you confess your sin or your faith?" Did you sing with all your heart, with understanding? Did you listen with diligence, preparation, and prayer? Did you pray with an earnest desire for the growth of God's kingdom? The "Worship Service" is not a show to be watched, or a performance by the Pastor(s) to be critiqued. The "Worship Service" is your service of worship unto God. May God so work in our hearts that we will earnestly offer ourselves to Him as living sacrifices when we gather together on the Lord's Day to serve Him and to give Him glory!

Yours for Christ's Kingdom,

Pastor Barnes
