

First Baptist Church of Kennett Square

Theology, Culture and Practice of Worship

What follows is a characterization of how we, as a part of the body of Christ, understand worship to be a revelation of God's personality, His character and the proper attitude for created beings in His presence. This is organized into three sections. First, a set of slogans which bring light to our *theology of worship*. Second, a description of what makes up our *culture of worship*. Finally, an elaboration on key practical matters in the execution of corporate worship. Each section is a bit less firmly fixed than the previous. In particular, it would be unusual for us to change an aspect of our theology of worship, while cultures clearly evolve over time and the details of worship are constantly changing in small (and sometimes not so small) ways.

The primary usage of this document is as a lens through which our various practices of worship can be viewed and evaluated. First Baptist Church has existed since 1882 and in that time Christian worship has changed dramatically. The practice of worship, the *when, how* and *with what*, will continue to change and develop as long as our Lord tarries. For us to be able to constantly and consistently worship our God in a way that is pleasing to Him, we must agree on a set of principles - not a set of practices - that guide the planning and execution of worship as a body. More explicitly, at no point in this document will the songs sung, service times, instruments played, liturgies spoken or prayers prayed be spelled-out or catalogued. Rather, the text below explains what it means to be worshipping our God in a way that is pleasing to Him and as a body we will embrace those worship practices which are successful in these regards.

Soli Deo Gloria
To The Glory of God Alone

Worship Perfected: A Theology of Worship

God gives us a clear example of perfect worship through John's vision of the Heavenly throne room in the book of Revelation. In the following paragraphs this vision is broken down into a handful of slogans. Each of these simple phrases is followed by a short explanation and, in certain cases, examples of how these ideals can play out in our lives. There is nothing special about the order, except for the very first, it is of the highest importance.

Our worship is about Jesus:

This is obvious, but clearly worth stating. In Revelation 5.12 we see tens of thousands of angels surrounding the Father's throne and singing: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" In Heaven, Jesus is the focus of perfect worship and our first job, whenever we get together, is to make Him our center.

Worship is work:

This is not nearly so obvious as the first, but it is very important as well. In Revelation 4 we see four living creatures and we are told that, "*Day and night they never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,'* who was, and is, and is to come." (Emphasis added.) These creatures, clearly not human but created by God nevertheless, exist strictly to sing God's praise. More to the point, they never stop doing their job. For us, this means that worship is not easy, it requires effort and we are charged with being diligent about getting better at what we do. Like the four living creatures we too were created to worship, but we have not been perfected just yet. (The flip side of this, however, is that since we are still yet to reach Heavenly perfection we have limited stamina and energy. As such, we are careful not to burn anyone out as we strive for perfection.)

Sing unto the Lord a new song:

Revelation 5.9 reads: "And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation." The community in Heaven is singing to Jesus at this point, because Jesus did something that they had never seen before, that only He could do and that amazed them. In response to Jesus doing something new for them they sang a new song. Since God created the first human beings He has been working miracles in our midst, responding to whatever

difficulties His people have come upon, in ways that only He could. For us this means that the songbook of perfect worship is never complete. No one hymnal, no one style, no one era of songs contains all that we need to express to God how much we appreciate who He is and how much He has done for us. Referring back to the previous point, we have work to do in learning new songs. This could mean songs that are literally new, as in they were just recorded by professionals, or it could mean songs that are ancient, but new to us - think the Psalms or chants from the fourth century church - or, it could mean our community members writing new songs that capture something about our God or what He's done for us, that no other song has ever expressed.

We worship in God's Spirit:

If you read Revelation carefully you will notice that there is no mention of the Spirit's participation in any of the worship activities. He does not lead the songs, He is not causing the elders to cast down their crowns...where is the Spirit? The answer is EVERYWHERE! In Revelation 1, when John first sees Jesus in His glorified form, Jesus is moving amongst seven golden lamp-stands which, we are told, represent the Spirit of God. We then see those same lamp-stands in front of the Father's throne in Revelation 4. We are told that the lamps are "blazing," presumably bathing the throne room in light. But, above and beyond the Spirit's manifestation in these ways, we are told that John's vision of Heaven and his participation in the throne room activities are made possible by the Spirit. When we invite the Spirit into our service - when we pray our invocation - we do so in the knowledge that we are literally worshipping "in the Spirit," as He moves around us and shines a light, giving us a glimpse of Jesus and the majesty of God the Father.

...from every tribe and language and people and nation...:

This phrase occurs in many places in John's Apocalypse and its importance for us cannot be overstated. God has reconciled Himself to humanity, all of humanity, through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. In perfect, Heavenly worship, all races, all tongues and all cultures are included. There is no reason our worship here on earth should not be the same. Now, mind you, it is not always easy building bridges to other cultures and including unfamiliar elements in what we do, but then again *worship is work*.

Everywhere, and all the time:

One day, one glorious day, we will all be caught up together and our worship will be perfect, and we will be united. Until that day, we move about our daily lives. Sometimes we can't make Sunday services or midweek Bible studies. Sometimes people move from the area and leave us altogether. These things are part of our reality. As such, we should remember the four living creatures and the elders in God's throne room. They worship constantly. We can do the same. As we drive we can be in prayer. Excelling in our jobs can be an offering to God. We can humble ourselves as we teach and guide our children, just as the elders humble themselves and cast down their crowns. In that day ahead, worship will be our only job, as we spend eternity thanking Jesus for His infinite gift to us. For now, we can work on using a few minutes more, each day, to lift Him up.

Transportational and transformational:

John opens this letter by writing that He was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, which is to say, he was worshipping. Suddenly John finds himself in the throne room in heaven. As we have discussed above, the worship does not stop in heaven. John's private worship, during his lonely exile on the island of Patmos, joins him with the non-stop glory given to God in heaven for all eternity. Our worship should do the same for us. As we gather on "the Lord's day" we should be "in the Spirit" and we should find ourselves transported into God's presence. The worship in which John participates culminates with God creating a new heaven and a new earth. As God's people praise Him for His mighty acts and fall down before His righteous judgement He blesses them by replacing a world of death and destruction with a perfect world, built from gold and precious jewels. We want to worship God in a way that brings us into His presence and we believe that being in God's presence will change us.

Worship Culture: What Characterizes Our Corporate Worship

Our understanding of God:

Our theology, the way we understand who God is and who we are before Him, is foundational to our worship. *Worship Perfected* describes our understanding of proper attitudes and approaches to worship generally. However, our understanding of who God is, informed by His written Word and His Spirit, influences our corporate worship at all levels; e.g. the songs we sing, the decorations of the sanctuary, the words we speak et cetera.

Our response to God's pursuit of relationship with His creation:

We believe that God relates to us both as a body or community and personally and particularly. This pursuit of relationship can be characterized as that of Father with child or Creator with creation. Entering the presence of a thrice-Holy God, who is glorious in ways that nature's beauty can barely suggest, we cannot help but humble ourselves and lift up His name.

Individual church history:

Part of what makes up what we do *now* in our worship is what we *did* in worship. Songs become special to us as they help us express our hearts during times of joy or deep sorrow. Liturgies, our church covenant for example, express truths about us as a community that have emerged over more than a century of praising God in this house of worship (and its predecessors). The decorations and design of church and sanctuary are a portrait of what the people of this church consider to be beautiful and honoring to God. These are all small things, but they are important to God's people - our friends and family - and they are not set aside lightly.

Musicians and worship leaders from the congregation:

We have discussed the *what* and *why* of worship up to this point, now we discuss the *who*. In the Old Testament there was a special order of the priesthood - the Korhites, men descended from Levi - who were responsible for all the musical aspects of worship, both singing and making music with instruments. We choose our worship leaders in a much less formal way, however, we still believe that, like Levi and his descendants, our worship leaders are called to a position of leadership. Like any other position of

leadership within the body, we are called as a congregation to both encourage our worship leaders and hold them accountable to the special office they hold.

Pastor's leadership:

This is certainly related to the paragraph above; our Pastor is one of the people that leads us into worship. However, the Pastor's leadership goes beyond the worship service itself, both by setting the direction for our worship in broad terms and helping us to work out the practical details of our worship such that all members of the community are drawn in. Ultimately the quality, both from human and divine points-of-view, lies with our Pastor.

Practice: Key Components of Our Service in Worship

Leading people into the presence of God (worship) is a sacred thing.

The moment we lose sight of this we shift from leading worship to “performing,” The struggle we face is twofold.

- Many people come to worship services looking for a performance, expecting to be “entertained.” Our challenge as worship leaders is to draw people into an encounter with the Holy, Living God who wants to redeem and restore all of life and invite people to experience “life to the full.”
- For some people the chance to be “up-front, on stage” is attractive and we become overly concerned about how we appear to others when our primary focus should be on leading people into the presence of God. While practicing this craft is important to leading worship well, preparing ourselves spiritually is equally important. We invite Abba Father to guide us as we guide others into His presence. A good guiding question is, “Are these people joining with me in worship or are they simply being entertained?”

A congregation should have multiple styles or expressions of worship.

A vibrant, life giving community recognizes and celebrates the reality that God uses multiple styles and forms of worship to speak to different people. There may even be seasons within an individual’s life where God uses a particular style or form of worship to reach them. Our goal should be to provide multiple expressions of worship within the same community to assist people as they seek to encounter God.

Our goal is to have “Blended Worship” within the First Baptist Community. “Blended” in that when you look at the entire worship experience within our community you will find opportunities for quiet reflective worship, celebrating the hymns of our history, and praise & worship music. There will be services that have a very liturgical, high church feel, others that follow the service style of our history and still others that are much freer flowing and casual. We are constantly seeking the best worship style and music to lead people into the presence of God and communicate the message for each service. We will not be tied to the idea of having every individual service be “blended” in worship style. Rather, on the whole, our community will experience a variety of worship styles.

Dated: June 12, 2016; Updated: October 28, 2017; Updated: November 21, 2017