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06 Jul 08

Doctrine and worship

The history of the Church is plagued by many controversies. Some are legitimate and the controversies have resulted in a clearer focus of biblical truth. Take for example the early controversies concerning the Person of Christ in the first three hundred years of the church. These Christological controversies resulted in many creeds that clearly stated the biblical truth concerning the perfect deity and perfect humanity of Christ (Nicene Creed, 325 AD; Athanasian Creed, 373 AD).

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the battle was over the authority and sufficiency of the Bible. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was charismatic. As a result of these controversies, the church was forced to clarify their stand on key doctrines and practices of the church. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the battle concerns the style of worship, leading to what is now known as the “worship wars.”

How shall we worship God? Such a debate is often sparked by comments such as these, “I like a church that is casual, where I can go and relax during worship.” “I don’t like hymns; somehow, I don’t feel the spirit of worship.” “Worship is a matter of personal taste; there’s neither right nor wrong.”

These statements reveal that there is a great deal of confusion and ignorance about the nature, purpose and practice of worship. This confusion extends to Bible-believing, Reformed churches such as ours. The “worship wars” have resulted in churches replacing the organ and piano for drums and guitars, traditional hymns for a more contemporary sound, hymnals for overhead projectors, pulpits with stages. How do we evaluate these changes? What is good and bad? What is acceptable and not? And how do we arrive at our style of worship? What is the basis for such concluding one way is better than the other? Is not the sincerity of the worshipper’s heart more important than the external mode of worship?

### **Worship in Spirit**

As those of the Reformed faith, we agree that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. In other words, whatever we do, even and especially in worship, our goal is to glorify God. The Bible tells us that “*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). The word “spirit” is taken to mean anything from introspective meditation to exuberant expression.

There are some people who believe that worship of God that in the spirit must be spontaneous and informal. Spontaneity and informality become the measure of good worship. The reason is that sincerity is often associated with spontaneity and informality. The more spontaneous and informal a person, the more sincere he is. It may be true that a

person who acts spontaneously may be one who acts sincerely. However, it is not necessarily true that what he does out of spontaneity must be also biblically right. The same people who argue for spontaneity also claim that informal worship frees the worshipper, frees the emotions, without which, they cannot enjoy God in worship.

The danger of such thinking is that our feelings and emotions are not reliable guides for truth. More often than not, we are misled by our emotions and feelings. It is all too easy to conjure up emotions that are far from the truth.

The second argument for worship that is spontaneous and informal is that the church must consider the needs of church visitors. The basis for this claim is that worship that is formal is alien to the visitors and may drive them away; and thus church worship must be visitor-friendly and seeker-sensitive. However, this begs the questions: Is worship of God designed for unbelievers? Should unbelievers determine the standard and style of worship for God's redeemed?

### **Biblical Theology**

These questions and attitudes are the reasons that we must know what we do when we worship. Worship is the very life of the church and the Christian. If there is anything that God's people must excel in, it is worship. The believers of old understood that as well. Prior to the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation, believers were mere observers in worship in the church. The mass was said in Latin. The chants are rendered by the monks. After the Reformation, church worship was participative.

The Reformers also reformed the worship in the church. For example, the Westminster Divines who composed the Confession of Faith (1649), the Shorter and Larger Catechisms actually began by first writing the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1645). The implication is that there is a close relationship between theology and worship. Our theology determines our worship. Our worship in turn is a reflection of our theology.

Biblical theology gives expression to the infinity of God and the finiteness of man. There is an unbridgeable gap between the holy God and sinful men. God is infinite. Man is finite. This truth alone is enough to dampen our confidence that we, by our own efforts, can render anything that is even remotely acceptable to God. If we are to worship God, we must come on His terms, with "*a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart*" (Ps 51:17) and "*a contrite and humble spirit*" (Isa 57:15).

Biblical theology also gives expression to the sovereignty of God. God is the LORD over all things. "*The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein... Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place?*" (Ps 24:1-3). Thus, our worship must reflect the truth that God is sovereign over all creation, and we, as creatures, dare not presume to think otherwise. Biblical worship therefore must be theocentric; it focuses on God, it places God at the heart of our worship. Biblical worship must seek to please God and not men.

Biblical theology also teaches the total depravity of man. The mind, will and emotions of man are corrupted by sin. This means that we, by our own intelligence and resolve, cannot devise any means of worship that is pleasing to God. The Bible has examples of people who thought they could worship God as they like. Cain, for example, “*brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD*” (Gen 4:3). His brother, Abel, also brought of the firstlings of his flock; and the Bible tells us that “*the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect*” (Gen 4:4-5). The lesson is that because of our sinfulness, our worship of God must be conformed to what He has revealed to us.

### **Biblical Worship**

Our worship is a reflection of our theology. If our worship does not reflect our theology, then it is safe to conclude that either we have departed from our theology, or that our theology no longer governs our worship. The argument put forward by those who have decided to replace biblical worship with a more contemporary format is that as long as the sermon is theologically accurate, the style of worship is inconsequential.

However, this begs the questions: Would we restrict the Bible to some parts of our life and not to other parts? Would we limit the authority of the Bible to church governance and not liturgy? Would we say that the Bible is relevant as to who we should marry, and irrelevant to how we should raise our children? And if the Bible does not determine our worship, would it also have any bearing in other areas of our Christian life? Does it make any sense if we try to be biblical in our life the other six days of the week, only to discount the importance of the Bible on the day of worship? If the Bible is to have any relevance at all, it must surely be relevant in our worship.

Our beliefs cannot be divorced from our behaviour. Our faith cannot be divorced from life, as the Westminster Divines put it, the Bible is “the rule of faith and life,” and that includes our worship. The Reformers believe that our understanding of the Bible (content) must find expression in biblical worship (form). The change in one will necessarily affect the other. Can we make the preaching against sin more palatable to the sinner? Can we point sinners to Christ without pointing out their sinfulness and the dreadfulness of sin? In other words, if there is a change in the form of worship, there is most likely a change in the content. May the LORD grant us the understanding and preserve our practice of biblical worship.

13 Jul 08

## **10th Anniversary of Vancouver B-P Church**

We thank our Lord “*upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer for you all making request with joy*” (Phil 1:3-4); and we thank God for your every prayer for us. We left for Vancouver on 3 July in the morning, spent some 18 hours on the plane, and arrived on the same day in the afternoon. This is the wonder of travelling against time.

The Vancouver B-P Church celebrated her 10th anniversary on Saturday (5 July). We praise the LORD for establishing this Gospel work on the west coast of Canada. Those of you who have read the commemorative magazine would agree with me that God had a definite hand in this work from the very beginning.

It was God who implanted in the hearts of B-P Church members who had moved to British Columbia, the holy desire to begin a witness that is faithful to Him and to His Word. It was God who provided the funds to buy the building through the late Dr Tow Siew Ai. It was God who moved Calvary B-P Church to raise over \$600,000 to refurbish the Vancouver B-P Church (VBPC). It was God who sustained the work in its infant years by moving His servants from all over the world to minister to a small group of worshippers when there was yet no permanent pastor. And today, He continues to do the same.

### **A Short Ten Years**

In the scheme of eternity, ten years are but a fraction of a micro-second. However, from a human perspective, for a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching to not only sustain but also grow in the spiritual desert that is western Canada, ten years are indeed a worthy milestone; more so when we consider that VBPC is now self-supporting. What our Lord says of the church at Philadelphia can be said of the VBPC, “*I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name*” (Rev 3:8).

Yes, VBPC began small – and is still small in numbers – but the people have a great God. The 10th Anniversary Thanksgiving Service served as an opportunity for God’s people to remember what God had done so that our hearts may be thankful for what God has given us in the present; so that our hearts may be hopeful for what God has prepared for us in the future. The Thanksgiving Service also gave us the opportunity to reconsecrate ourselves to God, and to remind ourselves of what we have promised to do for Him.

Sir Christopher Wren was the architect who designed and built St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. One day, as he was inspecting the work site, he asked the masons who were working on the building what they were doing. The first worker told him that he was making a living. The second told him that he was just constructing another building. The

third mason told Sir Christopher, “I am part of a magnificent project to build the world’s most beautiful cathedral to the glory of God.”

The third man had the right perspective, one that powered his zeal, motivated his heart, and sweetened his labours. But he was not quite right in the sense that it is not the cathedral (or the church) that makes a Christian; rather it is Christians that make up the church, and it is the pre-eminence of Christ in the hearts of Christians that make the church the most beautiful edifice that will glorify God.

Our Lord Jesus told the disciples, “*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matt 16:18). The church is not a particular building of bricks and cement at a particular place. The church is flesh and blood Christians. And it is the building of this church that is the central theme of history. Phillip Schaff, church historian, says that the church is “the grandest and most comprehensive institution in the world, as vast as humanity and as enduring as eternity...[The church] is no after-thought of God...but it is the eternal forethought, the controlling idea, the beginning, the middle, and the end of all His ways and works.” This is the idea behind what our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 16:18.

### **The Church – Christ’s or Man’s?**

Our Lord promised, “*Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*” (Matt 16:18). While we rejoice in this blessed truth, God’s people must never neglect our sacred duty. One of the fatal flaws of the church in the 21st century is that we have embraced the world. In the name of contemporary relevance, we have abandoned fundamental truths. Techniques have supplanted truths. Style has taken over substance. Integration with the world has replaced separation from the world.

The church today is more concerned that church-goers are being entertained than she is about their being “*rooted and built up in [Christ], and stablished in the faith*” (Col 2:7b). The church today is more sensitive that sinners be not offended than she is about God being grieved. Like Nadab and Abihu, the 21st century church has offered strange fire before the Lord.

We try to be like the world so that we may win the world. We change our music to suit the people in the world. We water down our sermons so that we would not be offensive. However, the irony is that the more believers are like the world, the more we lose our credibility as people who have been called out of the world.

We try to behave like the world in the hope that the world would accept us. We try to be cool more than we want to be Christ-like. We think that in order to love the world, we must be like the world. And we think that if the world knows that we are trying to be like them, they would love us, and hopefully they will love our Saviour as well.

But we forget that our Lord Jesus says that we are not of the world. And He has commanded us to “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any*

*man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15). God commands the church to “*come out from among them...separate...touch not the unclean thing*” (2 Cor 6:17). There is a distinction between the church and the world that is commanded by God. Yet, sadly far too many Christians are trying desperately to perform an extreme make-over of the church to blur that distinction so that the world will think better of us.

But the only way for the 21st century church to make an impact is for God’s people to return to our Lord Jesus Christ. If the church is to be an effective witness for our Saviour in this world, we must return to Christ.

- Is Christ still the head of the church?
- Is Christ still the corner-stone?
- Is Christ still the foundation of the church?
- Does Christ approve of our methods?

We must ask ourselves these questions:

- What is the basis for the church – Christ or man?
- Who is the head of the church – Christ or man?
- To whom should we turn to revive the church – Christ or man?
- For whose glory does the church exist – Christ or man?
- What is the hope of the church – Christ or man?

The correct answer to each of these questions is Christ. And this is what we must keep in mind if our church would be one that remains true to her mission and a faithful witness to God. Pray for VBPC; pray for Calvary BPC.

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We thank God for a blessed time at the Vancouver B-P Church Bible Camp (7-10 July). The camp was held at the Cedar Springs Christian Resort Centre in Sumas, Washington, less than an hour south of the Canadian border. The place may not have all the modern niceties of a four-star hotel – there is no TV or cable – but the place is truly a spiritual refuge. Set at the foothills of Mount Baker, the accommodation is rustic but comfortable. The food was excellent. But more importantly, it was the Christian fellowship and the study of God’s Word that brought us the greatest delight.

Today, Calvary's Hokkien Fellowship celebrates her fifth anniversary. The Hokkien Fellowship started with only three members, but the Lord has blessed this ministry, and now it has over 20 worshippers every Lord's Day. Our Lord Jesus says, with specific reference to children, to *"despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven"* (Matt 18:10). Surely we can say the same for the Hokkien Fellowship. May the Lord continue to bless the ministry of the Hokkien Fellowship of Calvary B-P Church.

### **I Will Build My Church**

If God sees the way we worship Him, if He hears the music that is being played in churches today, if He knows the attitude of those who worship Him, will He be pleased? A wrong view of God will inevitably lead to unbiblical worship. A wrong view of Christ will result in an unbiblical view of the church. In Matthew 16:18, our Lord Jesus says, *"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

In Matthew 16, we see a discussion on the Person of Christ. Jesus asked the disciples, *"Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"* (Matt 16:13). The disciples said that there were people who thought that He was John the Baptist, and others who thought that Jesus was one of the prophets (Matt 16:14).

Our Lord repeated the same question but directly and personally to the disciples, *"But whom say ye that I am?"* (Matt 16:15). Peter was the first to answer, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"* (Matt 16:16).

Our Lord Jesus did not ask the question because He was ignorant of what others were saying about Him. He asked the question because He wanted to establish a fundamental truth that has been forgotten by the church – *"Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"* (Matt 16:18). There are several lessons to take note.

### **Christ is the Foundation**

Christ is the foundation of the church. He says *"Upon this rock I will build my church"* (Matt 16:18). The "rock" does not refer to Peter. The rock is the confession of that great truth that Christ Jesus is the great God and our Saviour. The Psalmist says that *"the LORD is my rock...For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God?"* (Ps 18:2, 31). The Apostle Paul, alluding to the children of Israel in the wilderness, says that *"they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ"* (1 Cor 10:4). The "Rock is Christ." Christ is the Rock, upon which the foundation of the church rests.

### **Christ is the Builder**

Christ is the Builder of the church. *"Upon this rock I will build my church."* Yet there are believers who thought they are the ones who are building the church, and some even see

themselves as indispensable to the work. But Paul tells us that at best, *“we are labourers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9).

Undoubtedly, Christians have a work to do. Our Lord who ordains the ends also appoints the means to build the church, but we must understand that no man can build the church apart from our Lord Jesus! If anyone other than Jesus is the builder, it is not the church that is being built.

Christ Jesus is the builder of the church; this is the basis of our confidence. *“Upon this rock I will build my church.”* At a time when the future of the church looks bleak and uncertain, this is the expectation that must bolster our hope. Our Lord Jesus who loved the church and gave Himself for it, will also continue to build it, to sanctify and cleanse it so that *“He might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Eph 5:25-27).

### **Christ is the Owner of the CHURCH**

Christ is the Owner of the church. *“Upon this rock I will build My church.”* Christ is the Head of the church. No man (individually or corporately) can stake any ownership on any church. It is utter folly and the height of arrogance for a man to think and claim that a church belongs to another man because he founded it. Those who dare rob God’s glory will do well to remember what He did to the tabernacle at Shiloh and the temple in Jerusalem. When the Israelites worshipped idols, the Psalmist says that *“they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images...So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men”* (Ps 78:58-60; so too when men attribute the glory of the church to other men. Christians, we serve God and then we get out of the way so that His glory will shine forth. Christ alone is the owner of the church because He redeemed it with His own precious blood.

### **Christ is the protector of THE CHURCH**

Christ is the Protector of the Church. *“Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”* The “gates of hell” refers to all the forces that are mustered against the church. This is a war that challenges who Christ is and His reign of righteousness.

While it is true that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, it does not mean that the enemies will cease to try. The implication is that there is an ongoing struggle between righteousness with unrighteousness, between light with darkness, between Christ with Belial.

However, the victory is the Lord’s. Against all the powers employed by Satan, the church will stand and will prove to be invincible. It does not exempt the church from attacks. In fact, we can be certain that the Church on earth will be exposed to relentless attacks, but the church will be protected, and it will prevail.



## **Christian's commitment**

The promise of the church's victory is not an excuse for God's people to neglect our sacred duty. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian fell asleep at the arbor of ease on the way up the Hill called Difficulty. What was supposed to be a brief respite became an extended slumber, and when Christian was asleep, the Roll (which represents the Word of God) fell off his hands.

God's people must be watchful. There is a tendency for Christians to adopt the position that the spiritual condition of the church depends on the spiritual condition of the man in the pulpit. It is important to have a strong pulpit, and a faithful man to stand in the pulpit, but ultimately the spiritual condition of the church depends on the spiritual condition of every believer who goes to church. What you make of the church – how strong it is and to what extent it shines for our Lord Jesus – depends on how spiritually strong you are and the extent to which you glorify our Saviour.

Dearly beloved, let us be fervent in spirit serving the Lord, reaching forth unto those things which are before and let us press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

27 Jul 08  
A-Maize-ing Grace

*“The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore”* (Ps 121:7-8). We experienced first hand and in a dramatic way this promise of God’s preservation on our way to the Cedar Springs Christian Resort for Vancouver BP Church’s annual Bible conference. We began the day (Monday, 7 July) early. And it was about 4:00pm when we turned off the main road into a small country lane on the way to the resort. The road was relatively straight with corn farms straddling both sides of the road.

Besides Rebecca and I, there were four other passengers in the van (retired nurse, Poh Nya; Wei Ping; Anna-Joy; and Eunice, a daughter of one of the deacons). I remembered Rebecca commenting that the journey seemed to take longer than before; then she dozed off. The other passengers, except Poh Nya, were also asleep. I remembered telling myself, “Stay awake! Stay awake! It’s only a short distance to go.”

The next time I opened my eyes, the van was moving but tilted at an angle. I was momentarily stunned, but I could hear Poh Nya calling out my name. I had fallen asleep at the wheel and veered off the road into a corn field. The van continued to move through the field, cutting down the newly planted corn shoots like a harvesting machine. I finally brought the van to a stop just before the paved road. We were all shaken, but otherwise, we were fine.

God preserved us from serious injury. Things could have been far worse had I veered to the left onto on-coming traffic, or driven into a lamp post. A motor-cyclist who stopped to help said that our vehicle could have rolled over, but the place where I veered off was a gentle slope from the road down to the corn field. Thank God also that the field was not wet, or else we would have sunk into the mud. Thank God that I veered off at the right place; had I gone on for another two hundred metres, we would have come to a busy four-way stop. We thank God for His mercies and protection. Truly, the Great Shepherd watched over His sheep.

Following this incident were four wonderful days of studying the Word of God. We thank God also for the fellowship and mutual encouragement of God’s people. The testimony time on the last day was particularly moving.

Thank God for a blessed ministry in Vancouver. God willing, we will be returning to Singapore on Monday (28 July). Please pray for God’s mercies in our travels.

### **Theology and Language**

We have established previously that there is a definite and direct link between our theology and our worship. Our theology must be reflected in our worship. Theology is the

expression of our understanding and our knowledge of the Person and work of Christ. Correct theology would lead to a correct understanding of our Lord, and that must in turn lead to correct worship of Him.

There is also a link between language and theology. Our theology is expressed in words. The Christian faith is a faith passed from generation to generation not by oral tradition but in written form. God told Moses, “*Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua*” (Exod 17:14).

“*God...spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets*” (Heb 1:1); God communicated through written words and speech. Even dreams and visions were plainly interpreted so that there would be no ambiguity as to God’s intentions and will. Pharaoh, through Joseph, knew what the fat and skinny cows meant. Nebuchadnezzar, through Daniel, knew the meaning of the vision of the great image.

In the Gospels, our Lord taught from the Old Testament scriptures. Later, the apostles, by the superintendence of the Holy Spirit, wrote the New Testament Scriptures. “*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life...these things **write** we unto you*” (1 John 1:1-4). “*These things have I **written** unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God*” (1 John 5:13).

Words are important. They convey meaning as well as attitude. Case in point: while we use Singlish in our day-to-day casual conversation, we do not use it in formal settings and correspondences. Likewise, we also do not use gutter language in communicating our faith. The language in expressing God’s truth must have a noble solemnity. The most damaging flaw of modern translations is that they diminish the gravity of the Christian faith by their use of colloquial language. One modern translation renders Zechariah 13:6 as “And if someone says, ‘And so where did you get that black eye?’ they’ll say, ‘I ran into a door at a friend’s house.’” The accuracy of the translation aside, the choice of words reflect an irreverent attitude.

### **Language and Attitudes in Worship**

There is a definite and direct link between language and attitude. Words have meanings and meanings have consequences. Solomon warns us about “*the way of the evil man...the man that speaketh froward things*” (Prov. 2:12), about “*the mouth of the wicked speaketh forwardness*” (Prov 10:32), about “*the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things*” (Prov 15:28). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul warns us about corrupt and evil communication (Eph 4:29; Col 3:8).

Thus the language that we use in worship will ultimately be reflected in our attitudes during worship. I had the opportunity to attend a pastors’ conference some years ago in Vancouver. The conference was open to all pastors and seminary students. At one of the meetings, the worship leader, who was the assistant pastor of the host church, went on

stage dressed in jeans and t-shirt, and with a guitar around his neck. He began the meeting with a strum of his guitar, but he hit a wrong chord; he paused and said, "I guess we better pray to the old man up there." His choice of words in referring to the Almighty God as "the old man up there" is another example of words that reflect an attitude of irreverence.

We may not be as flagrantly irreverent as this worship leader in our attitude toward God, but we must also be mindful of our language in worship. The worship of God is a holy convocation that demands a noble solemnity.

There are Christians who regard the worship service as a time of celebration. In one sense worship is a time of celebration, but we must not forget what the celebration is for and the Person whom we celebrate. When we lose focus of God as the object of and the reason for our worship, the worship service/celebration becomes man-centred. Sadly this is what worship services in today's church have become – a time for the worshippers to feel good about themselves.

This man-centred worship (also known as seeker-sensitive) results in a worship service that puts man ahead of God. The whole worship experience, from the music during worship to the length, language and substance of the sermon, is planned with the goal of pleasing men. The idea is that if the worshipper is pleased, then God must be too. This was what the children of Israel thought; they were pleased with their worship of God, but God was not. *"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me?...Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me...Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hateth: they are a trouble unto Me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear"* (Isa 1:11-15).

Ecclesiastes gives us this counsel, *"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few"* (Eccl 5:1-2).

Be more ready to hear. Be not rash with our mouths. Be not hasty to utter anything before God. Let our words be few. If we do speak at all, let there be neither *"foolish talking, nor jesting"* (Eph 5:4). Rather let our words of worship manifest a noble solemnity. This is especially pertinent to worship leaders. Let all who have the privilege to lead in worship be not overly confident in ourselves and allow familiarity to breed complacency and contempt. Pray! Prepare! Practise! This is what every worship leader must do. The Psalmist says, let us *"serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling"* (Ps 2:11). Let that reverence and rejoicing be expressed in our words and reflected in our attitude in worship.

03 Aug 08

*“For He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone”* (Ps 91:11-12). We echo the Psalmist in thanking God for His watching over us, and we thank God also for your prayers for us.

We thank God also for His care over the Vancouver B-P Church. The worshippers remained faithful and zealous in their service for God in the absence of Pastor Colin Wong. Despise not small things, as our Lord told the church at Philadelphia, *“thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name”* (Rev 3:8).

Remember also Rev James Chan in his travels to Thailand in August. He will be training the local pastors and visiting some of the mission stations.

Singapore celebrates her 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of independence this Saturday. The Bible exhorts us to pray *“for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty”* (1 Tim 2:1-2). Pray that the leaders whom God has set over us would rule with equity and integrity. Please pray also for the Church Session as we would be holding a retreat on “biblical worship” as well as to map out plans for next year.

## **The Church and the World**

Why do Christians worship? What is worship for? Should our worship service cater to the world and plan our worship service in such a way that it will be attractive to the unbelievers? Or should our worship service express the desire of the church and manifest the believers’ distinctive nature of being separate from the world?

The answer to this question is found in our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, *“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men”* (Matt 5:13-14). The purpose of the church is to be different. The usefulness of the church to the world is dependent upon its being uniquely different from the world. When the church has lost its saltiness, she loses her power.

The liberal church, ashamed of Christianity’s unique claims against all other religions and human philosophies, has filtered out the biblical doctrines and reduced Christianity to a feel-good, do-good, and be-nice religion. The Bible is reduced to a manual on ethics. Christianity is made safe and inoffensive so that the church will be credible in and acceptable to the world. The reason is this: if the church looks more like the world, she will be more attractive to the world. However, the opposite is true, when the church becomes worldly, she loses her relevance to the world, and she is like salt that has lost its saltiness.

## The Church

In Greek, church simply means “called out” (*ekklesia*). Its Hebrew equivalent is “gathering” (*qahal*). Both terms have the implication of relocation. In the Old Testament, the children of Israel were the gathering of God’s people called out of and delivered from Egypt and brought to Mount Sinai. In Deuteronomy 4:10, Moses recalled God’s words, “*Specially the day that thou stoodest before the LORD thy God in Horeb, when the LORD said unto me, Gather me the people together, and I will make them hear my words, that they may learn to fear me all the days that they shall live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children*” (Deut 4:10).

This gathering of God’s people at Sinai is equivalent to the church of the New Testament. The writer of Hebrews makes this comparison. “*For ye are not come unto the mount [Horeb] that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn*” (Heb 12:18, 22-23).

The lesson is this: just as Israel was relocated out of Egypt (the world) unto God at Sinai, the church was relocated out of the world unto God. In both cases, there is a distinction of God’s people from the world. The difference between the Old Testament gathering at Sinai and the church is that the former is a physical relocation; whereas the latter is spiritual.

In the Old Testament, God’s people were physically moved from Egypt to Sinai and later to Canaan. As long as they were in Canaan, they were deemed as separated from the world and unto God. The New Testament church remains in the world but separated from it. In His high priestly prayer, our Lord Jesus says, “*I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world*” (John 17:15-16). The Apostle Paul adds that believers are to be “*blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world*” (Phil 2:15).

The church therefore is the assembly of God’s people spiritually separated from the world while they are still physically being in the world. For this reason, the Bible gives this command: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*” (2 Cor 6:14-18). The church has a distinctive identity that must be incongruent with that of the world. Whatever the world is, the church is not.

## The World

It is easier to understand the doctrine of separation than to apply it. Christians over the years have different degrees of separation. On one end of the spectrum, the liberals who seek to be inclusive with the world have no interest whatsoever for the doctrine of separation. At the other end of the spectrum, fundamentalists who want to be faithful to God use the doctrine to measure their and judge other believers' orthodoxy. The liberals ignore the doctrine of separation; some fundamentalists give it a bad name.

In the New Testament, the word "world" has several meanings. First, it can mean the created order – "*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth*" (Acts 17:24). The Christian's to the world as God's creation is to be a good steward of His providence. The Psalmist says, "*the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD...Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him*" (Ps 33:5, 8).

World also refers to the human race – "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15). The Christian's responsibility to the world as the human race is to be an ambassador for our Saviour. God has "*committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ...we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*" (2 Cor 5:19-20).

Third, the 'world' describes a way of life that is in rebellion to God – "*Wherein in time past ye walked according to **the course of this world**, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience*" (Eph 2:2). Our Lord Jesus says that He has no part in this way of life. "*I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine*" (John 17:9). Our responsibility in this case is to be separated from the world. The writer of Hebrews describes believers as "*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (Heb 11:13).

The idea is that the Christian is living alongside among a people who are not his own. As God's redeemed people, we are outwardly in this world, but inwardly, our hearts are not for we have set our affections "*on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Col 3:2). God willing, next week we will consider the church in the world. For now, I pray that it will be said of us; that we do not "*mind earthly things. For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ*" (Phil 3:19-20).

10 Aug 08

Just as I was preparing this series of pastoral letters on biblical worship, I received through Eld Foong a list of questions posed to him by a newspaper reporter wanting to know if Calvary B-P Church (CBPC) feels threatened by the megachurches. My answer is no. The reason is that there is a huge difference in the philosophy and methodology of ministry between CBPC and the megachurches. They have secularised the Christian faith, not only in terms of what they do but also in terms of how they measure success. By their measure, Noah would have been a failure because he preached for 120 years and only managed to win his own family. Jeremiah would have been a failure too because he preached for some 40 years and few believed him. Worldliness is a pernicious danger because when we think we are safe, we are at that moment susceptible to it.

### **The Church in the World**

Last Lord's Day, we considered the definitions of the church and the world. The two entities co-exist not as compliments but as contrasts. What then should the church in the world be like? The Apostle Peter describes believers as "*a **chosen** generation, a **royal** priesthood, an **holy** nation, a **peculiar** people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (1 Pet 2:9). There are four adjectives that describe the believer: he is God's elect; he is dignified. Because of his being chosen, he is also set apart (holy) as God's treasured possession (peculiar people).

Believers are to be holy because our Saviour is holy. The Bible commands us to be holy "*in all manner of conversation*" because God who has called us is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). What does it mean to be holy? Simply, to be holy is not to be worldly, to be "*not conformed to this world*" (Rom 12:2).

What then is worldliness? When Christians think about worldliness, certain activities immediately jump into our minds – dancing, smoking, drinking, going to the movies, etc. Others think of worldliness in terms of sins listed in the Ten Commandments – adultery, fornication, theft, etc.

However, worldliness is not just doing worldly things. To be worldly is also to think like the world. To be worldly is to conduct the work of the church by the methods of the world; we have become worldly. Dr Bob Jones III, Chancellor of Bob Jones University, used to say to the students – the process determines the product. The methods you employ will determine the outcome of the product. Worldly methods will produce worldly Christians.

To be worldly is also to measure the success of the church in the same way the world measures success. If we measure the success of our ministry solely in terms of our attendance, weekly collection, programmes, the church has become like the world.



However, the church is not to be like the world. We have been set apart from the world and all its trappings unto God. Therefore, the church must serve as a refuge for all who are called of God to be different from the world. The church must be a community of saints who does not measure one another's worth in material terms. The church must be a sanctuary for all who desire to be holy.

### **The Church Against the World**

Thus the church in the world is really the church against the world. This struggle between the church and the world started right after the fall of Adam. God told the serpent, *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Gen 3:15). It was and continues to be a spiritual battle between sin and holiness.

Before the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, God commanded them to utterly destroy the Canaanites. *"When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it...And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them...thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an **holy people** unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth"* (Deut 7:1-6).

The same struggle continues today. The Bible portrays the church and the world as diametrically opposed to each other.

*"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:15-16).

*"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God"* (James 4:4). *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt 16:26; see also Matt 6:19-21; Rom 12:2; Col 3:2).

Love not the world. The friendship of the world is enmity with God. The church must come to terms with this fundamental truth because it is essential not only for our ministry but also for our very existence. To the extent that the church is like the world, we have ceased to exist.

This does not contradict the second of the love commandments – to love our neighbours as ourselves. We love them evangelistically. We love our neighbours in the

same way that our Lord Jesus loves sinners. To love not the world merely affirms for believers that we are different from the world.

### **The Church in Worship**

This fundamental difference between the church and the world must manifest itself first and foremost when the church meets in worship. The Apostle Paul said that the Thessalonians “*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God*” (1 Thess 1:9).

The church must display this separation from the world when she worships. We gather at a place on the day when the people in the world either sleep in or engage in their worldly pursuits. We speak the same language, yet we pray in the name of Christ. We read from a book that we say is the Word of God. We sing hymns to a God whom we cannot see; songs whose words and tunes are unlike the music of the world. We give to Him of our hard-earned resources. We hear the words of a preacher, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, become the power of God unto salvation. Every so often, we eat a morsel of bread and drink grape juice from a tiny cup that are insufficient to fill our bodies but are a means of grace for our souls.

True worship must cause the world to ask, “Is this what Christians do?” “Why do they do this?” True worship may cause the world to think that Christians are trapped in a bygone era. True worship may even bring ridicule. This lack of appreciation by the world is a mark of the church’s testimony for our God; that she is called out of the world. Paul says “*We preach Christ crucified...unto the Greeks [the world] foolishness*” (1 Cor 1:21, 23). The Gospel is foolishness to the world. True worship will be deemed as foolish, but it is foolish only to those who do not believe. And the church must reject the claim that her worship is old-fashioned and resist the temptation to modernize our worship.

God’s people must be hospitable, and we must make visitors to our church feel at home by helping them find the *Doxology* and the *Glori Patri* in our hymnals. We must help them turn to the relevant passages in the Bible. However, we must never change our worship for the sake of unbelievers. The church at worship must display her holiness; that she is being set apart from the world unto God. Visitors in our midst must see and hear this difference for it is the reason and the testimony that we have a hope that is beyond this world. May our Saviour be exalted always in our worship.

17 Aug 08

Would you bless God for prison? This was what Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn did when he was sent to the Russian gulag (labour camp) for expressing his views on the Soviet Communist regime.

On 4 August 2008, Solzhenitsyn died at the age of 89. Solzhenitsyn won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970 for his work, including *Gulag Archipelago*, which chronicles his own prison camp experiences in the gulag. Trained in mathematics, Solzhenitsyn became a writer. It was his writings criticising the Soviet Regime that led to his arrest and exile in 1945. He served eight years in the Russian gulag.

While the newspaper pays tribute to his literary and political work – one English newspaper describes Solzhenitsyn as being the “first to break down the wall of silence surrounding repression in the Soviet Union” – no newspaper report speaks of Solzhenitsyn’s views on the humanistic, anti-Christ western culture.

In 1978, Solzhenitsyn spoke at the commencement of Harvard University. In that speech – “[A World Split Apart](#)” – Solzhenitsyn uttered some words that upset his American hosts. He pointed to the moral and spiritual decline in the West and said that “men have forgotten God.” He said that the United States was being undermined by secularism. Solzhenitsyn says, “Man is God’s creature...freedom was given to the individual conditionally, in the assumption of his constant religious responsibility.” He lamented that when man uses his freedom for self-gratification, and his “sense of responsibility to God and society grew dimmer and dimmer.”

Solzhenitsyn’s argument is that it is not merely enough to be free, but that freedom must have a purpose, but freedom that does not bring man to a higher plane and nobler purpose is useless – “*For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another*” (Gal 5:13). To be sure, it is better to have freedom than not, and it is better to be able to choose than not, but what we choose also matters. And God’s people must choose that which is holy and pleasing to God. “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things*” (Phil 4:8).

While we do not fully agree with or accept Solzhenitsyn’s religious views (he belonged to the Orthodox Church), his words serve as a warning to Christians who have taken the liberty that we have in Christ to be license for self-centred, self-gratifying living.

## **What is the church for?**

A Christian's individual relationship with Christ does not exempt him from his corporate responsibility as a member of the body of believers, which is the church.

Here, we begin by asking – what is the church for? Answers to this question are sure to be varied because every person will answer the question according to his own needs. Parents with young children may say that the church must meet the needs of young families by providing childcare facilities or a kindergarten. Older folks may say that the church must provide some form of homecare. There are Christians who see that the Church is responsible only for spiritual matters – Bible studies, fellowships groups. And there are believers who think that the church has the responsibility to Christianise the society.

What is the church for? The concluding verses of Matthew's Gospel give us our Lord's Great Commission to the church – *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”* (Matt 28:19-20).

The debate over the Great Commission is how the church fulfils it. Traditionally, Christians hold the view that the church and society are to be separate, and the church has no business in the world. These are the separatists, who see the purpose of the church as not to save the world but to save God's people from the world. And the best way to save sinners is to be separated from the world. The church that holds this view tends to be isolated.

There are also Christians who see the church as an agent for social change, as a tool for transforming culture; that the church must expand its sphere of influence in society. These are the social-advocates, and they tend to veer toward political and social activism. They believe that the best way to fulfil the Great Commission is to change the world. This becomes the basis for the Social Gospel.

In recent years, the Church Growth Movement (CGM) believes that the purpose of the church is to fulfil the Great Commission. While the goal is definitely commendable, its methods are questionable. The CGM sees the church as a business; the Gospel as its product; believers are the salespeople; and the community as the consumer. To draw people into the church, the CGM adapts and caters to the preferences and needs of the people. They are the seeker-sensitive churches. The CGM believes that the best way to fulfil the Great Commission is to be like the world.

## **The Great Commissioner**

Is the purpose of the church – fulfilling the Great Commission – related to worship? Yes, simply because the purpose of the church will determine the preaching of the church. And the focus of the church will determine her emphasis.

The church is called to fulfil the Great Commission. I believe that every church – separatist, social-advocates, or seeker-sensitive – desires to fulfil the Great Commission. They do not disagree on what the Great Commission is about. The major difference – and it is a very important one – is on who the Great Commissioner is.

So before we can answer what the purpose of the church is, we must first know who the Head of the church is. It is the Head who gives the Great Commission, and He alone determines what the Commission is. And what the church does in terms of fulfilling the Great Commission must fall in line with the nature and the character of the Head of the church.

The Giver of the Great Commission is our Lord Jesus. He says to Peter, *“Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Matt 16:18). Paul says that *“Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore...the church is subject unto Christ”* (Eph 5:23-24); *“He is the head of the body, the church...that in all things He might have the pre-eminence”* (Col 1:18).

The church is subject to Christ even on the matter of fulfilling the Great Commission. In all things, Christ must be pre-eminent even, and especially, in our worship. In our attempt to fulfil the Great Commission, we must never forget the commands of the Great Commissioner. To the extent that we give Him lip service and replace His instructions with our own ideas in how we worship, we have failed in fulfilling the Great Commission. God willing, next week we will consider the link between the Great Commission and worship.

24 Aug 08

While I was clearing my drawers over the week, it dawned upon me that we are coming to the last quarter of 2008. It is time to start praying and planning for 2009. We can all start with this prayer – “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). Pray for yourself. Pray for the church too.

There are several exciting things coming up in September. God willing, we will launch the Young Adults’ Fellowship (YAF) on 6 September. The YAF will meet on the first and third Saturdays of the month.

In response to the requests of several church members, we will also begin a series of lectures on the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) on the first and third Thursdays of the month. This class will be different from the Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) which we are currently studying at our Tuesday night prayer meetings. The WCF is one of the best doctrinal creeds of the Reformed faith. The WCF is more detailed than the WSC and covers not only the doctrines of the Christian faith but also the whole spectrum of Christian living. For example, Chapter 23 concerns the Christian and his relationship with civil authorities; Chapter 24 deals with marriage and divorce; Chapters 30 and 31 Church discipline and the roles of synods and church councils. It is our prayer that through this class, Calvinians will be more familiar with the Reformed doctrines. God willing, the WCF class will begin on 4 September.

### **The Great Commission or the Great Commissioner?**

The Straits Times (8 August 2008) reported that the number of Christians in Singapore has increased from 5.2% in the 1920s to 10.1% in 1980, 12.7% in 1990, and 14.6% in 2000.

The report attributes the growth in part to mega-churches using marketing techniques and pop culture to win over the young, saying that “young Christians are being drawn to contemporary, charismatic churches...which run exuberant services backed by gospel pop-rock.” In response to criticisms by more traditional churches, one mega-church says the contemporary style of worship merely makes Christianity “relevant and practical for 21st-century living.”

So why do people flock to these mega-churches? They went, according to the ST, for the “hip music, fellowship with other youth, opportunities to socialise and, perhaps, even find a life partner.” One worshipper says that he prefers the “expressiveness and emotion” of the worship in these mega-churches.

The debate over the style of worship is not new to the church, but it has been sidetracked. No church would deny the need to make the Christian faith relevant and practical to the times. No church would deny the need to fulfil the Great Commission. However, as we have pointed out, the Great Commission must be carried out in ways that

are accordance to the Great Commissioner who is our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the builder, owner, protector of the church (Matt 16:18).

The tendency with mega-churches, as pointed out in the ST report, is that they have taken all means to remould the Gospel and make it palatable to the world, but they have failed to make the Christ of the Gospel pre-eminent in the lives of the worshippers. Instead of focusing on the God whom we worship, the mega-churches have shifted its focus to the worshippers.

### **Worship as Part of Discipleship**

Matthew 28:18-20 is often quoted as a text for a call for mission or a command for evangelism. *“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”* (Matt 28:18-20). Emphasis is often placed on the words “go” and “all nations.” As a church, we must preach the Gospel to the lost, pray that sinners will come to Christ; but that is a narrow understanding of the Great Commission.

The command of Matthew 28:19-20 is “teach” (Gk: *matheteuo*) and not “go.” The word “teach” is also translated as “disciple.” A paraphrase of Matthew 28:19-20 would read as “as you go, and **disciple** all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

This understanding tells us that the Great Commission is more than just about conversion; it is more than just about bringing more people into the church. The Great Commission is about discipleship; it is about Christian nurture; it is about how a believer may be helped and trained to mature in his understanding and in the proper expression of the Christian faith.

Worship – the public exaltation of our God – is an inevitable part of discipleship. And one has to wonder about the church that brings a person through its doors and fails to disciple the convert in his/her first duty as a Christian, which is to worship God in spirit and in truth.

Worship that caters to the preferences of the worshippers is wrong for two reasons. First, it ignores God’s means of bringing faith to people, which is the foolishness of preaching (1 Cor 1:21). *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom 10:17). One of the chief reasons given for changing the worship music in the church is that the young are not used to the hymns. Marva Dawn in her book *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, poses this pertinent question: Do Christians dumb down worship “do so in order to appeal to persons in our culture?” Although she is not necessarily a traditionalist in worship, Dawn adds that Christians must be a “people formed not by the ethos of the world around us but by the narratives of the Scriptures.” In other words, Christians are to be distinctly different from the world.

Second, worshipper-sensitive worship is wrong because it sees the worship services merely as an evangelistic tool. Evangelism is only one part of the Great Commission; discipleship is the other part. And if the church takes the Great Commission seriously, she would not change the worship service to suit the tastes and cater to the preferences of the world.

Worship is part of discipleship. The worship services are the church's strongest and most visible testimony to the world. And if what the unbelievers see and hear in a church worship service bears no distinction from that which they are familiar with in the world, that testimony is weakened and the Gospel message is confused.



31 Aug 08

Later this week, we will begin our series of lectures on the Westminster Confession of Faith (every first and third Thursdays of the month). Praise God for the good response so far. Please continue to pray for the class that God will be glorified as we study the doctrines of the Christian faith. We need to know what we believe, and we need to know why we believe what we believe. The Bible says that we are to “*earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*” (Jude 1:3). This presupposes that we know what to contend for and that we can differentiate between truth and falsehood. The Christian who knows only that he must defend the faith but does not know what to defend is no better than the guard dog that barks at every passer-by including its master.

I believe that an understanding of the Christian doctrines as expressed in the WCF will put our faith on firm ground. Christianity is a historic faith, meaning to say that the tenets of the Christian faith have been proved over centuries, so that nothing that is taught from the Bible is novel. If a doctrine is true and vital to the Christian faith and the salvation of the soul, it would have been taught long before Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have the audacity to claim that they have discovered (or even recovered) it. Charles Spurgeon is absolutely right when he says that there is nothing new in theology except that which is false. Any new-fangled teaching, whether it is neo-orthodoxy, neo-evangelicalism, has been proved to be false; that will also include any new idea that purports to make one more fundamental than what the Bible teaches.

Christianity is also a reasonable faith, meaning to say that we can study it. God, through the prophet Isaiah, says, “*come now, and let us reason together*” (Isa 1:18). We do not have to and neither can we afford to believe blindly. I read somewhere not too long ago a preacher saying that believers need to just believe, and even if what they believe turned out not to be so, it is alright because God will understand that they are sincere. There is nothing in the Bible to say that the doctrines of the Christian faith are measured by and founded upon our sincerity. There are many people who are sincere in what they believe, and they are sincerely wrong. Instead, our Lord Jesus invites us to “*search the scriptures*” (John 5:39). He often rebuked the Pharisees for their ignorance of the Scriptures (Matt 12:3; 19:4; 22:29). The Apostle Paul also praised the believers at Berea that they were “*more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*” (Acts 17:11).

Is there a need to study the doctrines? Absolutely, for two reasons. First, the Christian faith is a multi-generational faith. We sing the hymn “Faith of our Fathers,” and we have to realise that it is only faithful sons and daughters that will sing of the faith of their fathers. The Psalmist says, “*Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to*

*come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments” (Ps 78:3-7). In this passage, five generations of believers are mentioned. This multi-generational faith legacy also applies to the church. We need to teach so that our next generation would know. For this reason, Paul told Timothy, “the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).*

Second, we need to study the doctrines of the Christian faith because it is the basis for biblical unity and spiritual maturity. The Apostle Paul says that God “*gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the **unity of the faith**, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:11-15). Teaching the truth will bring about unity in the church and maturity in the Christian. On the other hand, false teachings will cause division and confusion. So, let me urge you to come so that we may search the Scriptures together, and “*grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).**

We have been dealing with worship in the Church. Biblical worship exalts God and demonstrates His holiness. The church in worship therefore must express God’s holiness as well.

The WCF states that the Church is “given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints” (WCF, Chap. 25, sect. 3). In other words, the purpose of worship, where the Word of God is preached and the Lord’s Supper and water baptism are administered, is for discipleship. The Lord’s Day worship service is vital for the making of disciples.

The Apostle Paul compares the Christian’s spiritual journey to that taken by the children of Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1-14). God ordained manna to sustain the children of Israel; likewise God ordained worship as a means to sustain the believer. And just as the Jews grumbled about having to eat manna day in day out, likewise God’s people tend to complain about the same old way of worship.

Thus new and more contemporary styles of worship are invented to cater to the varied tastes of church goers. There is one church on the west coast of America where a worshipper can choose one of four meeting halls, each with its own style of music. In other words, you worship what suits you. Every one is singing his own songs, and doing what is right in his own eyes. This “made-to-order” worship not only brings confusion and diminishes the reverence of worship, but it also fails to fulfil its task of discipleship.

God willing, next week, we will touch on the Fourth Commandment – “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod 20:8).

07 Sep 08

Praise God that several people who have been attending the Hokkien Fellowship will be added to the Church by way of water baptism, affirmation of faith and transfer. Some of you may not be aware that every Lord's Day morning at 11:30am, a group of about 30 people gathers in Room 2.1 for the Hokkien Fellowship. We thank God for Sister Dorothy Koh and her team who faithfully minister to this group of non-English speaking believers. Please continue to pray for the Hokkien Fellowship.

Praise God also for the good response to the Mandarin Gospel Rally held over two evenings (29-30 Aug). There is nothing more important than the preaching of the Gospel and the saving of souls. "*How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things*" (Rom 10:15). Continue to pray for those who have believed, and that their faith will be strengthened.

There are two other matters that we ought to be praying for. The first is for the Vancouver Bible-Presbyterian Church. They have been without a resident pastor since April of 2008. Now with the rejection of Rev Colin Wong's work visa, there is an urgent need to pray that God would send another person to shepherd the flock in Vancouver.

Second, we need to be praying for the translation of the *Daily Manna* into the Thai language. The English *Daily Manna* is coming to the end of its first two-year cycle. The Thai translation is being done by one lady, Ms Hathaikan Iamla-ong (Ao for short) in Chiangrai. Please continue to pray for her. The first issue of the Thai *Daily Manna* is expected to be out in 2009.

### **The Priority of Lord's Day Worship**

Over the last few months, we have been considering worship. Biblical worship is Christ-centred. Biblical-worship must be Bible-directed. Biblical worship is a priority for believers. For that reason, God had set a day for believers to assemble together in public worship.

In the Old Testament, this requirement was set forth in the Ten Commandments, "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*" (Exod 20:8-11). After the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, that day of worship was changed to the first day of the week as pointed out by the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says that God, "has particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week: and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath" (WCF, Chap. 31.7).

In history, there have been attempts to remove the day where believers assemble for public worship. French philosopher, Voltaire waged a war against the Christian faith by lobbying the government for a six-day week. Voltaire's strategy was simple; he declared, "If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday."

In recent years, the attempts to do away with one specific day for the Christian's public worship did not come from atheists the like of Voltaire but from within the Church. Some years ago, there was a news report with the following headline: "Anglicans consider changing day of worship." An Anglican priest who was also a professor of liturgics (the study of church worship) said that Sunday worship was causing great pressure for his son because it clashed with his rugby practices. He added that Sunday morning worship services were difficult because of the "problem with hyper-busy families engaged in weekend soccer, skiing, and other pursuits."

The tragic similarity between the Christian who chooses the way he wants to worship God, and the one who chooses the day of worship is that both based their decisions on their own needs and preferences.

Those who have studied the trends of the church blame the decline on Lord's Day worship on the rise of leisure activities and professional sports and technological advancements. One person observed that going to Church on Sunday morning began its downward trend when the cars became more efficient. A journey that might have taken over twenty hours could now be done in few, and that made weekend getaways viable.

To be sure the influences of the world have a strong and negative impact on church-going. However, that is only part of the story. The other part has to do with the church and Christians. There are churches that have unconsciously diminished the uniqueness of the Lord's Day.

The modern church behaves more like a service provider, where the most successful churches (meaning, large number of worshippers) are the ones who are able to provide the most varied services and the most attractive programmes. In some mega-churches, there are programmes for every conceivable age, marital and racial group. There are programmes for toddlers, teenagers, adults, seniors, singles, newly weds, divorcees, single parents, etc. The church covers from cradle to grave and everything in between. With these programmes, Lord's Day worship is just another programme in the church.

From the standpoint of the individual believer, we can see how these dedicated programmes could influence their commitment to the Lord's Day worship. If he thinks that his spiritual needs are met at one of these programmes, why should he go to Church on the Lord's Day?

Another ministry of the church that could work against the Lord's Day worship is the practice of having special meetings. There are some churches that will organise regular "revival meetings."

These “revival meetings” have a dual purpose of evangelising the sinners and reviving the congregation. These meetings are better planned, and they come with special music and a dynamic preacher. Church members who attend these meetings usually come away with a mountain-top experience like that of Moses. This is seldom practised in our church; the only event closest to “revival meetings” in our church is the annual Bible Camp, when we do see a spontaneous and sometimes emotional reaction to the preaching of God’s Word.

The programmes and special events in themselves are not wrong or unbiblical. In fact, they are spiritually beneficial. The problem comes when we compare the weekly Lord’s Day worship services to these special meetings. When the comparison is made, the contrast becomes obvious, the Lord’s Day worship services will come across as bland and boring. That is why some churches try to replicate the emotions and the atmosphere of these special meetings by music.

### **The Pulse of the Soul**

God has a purpose for establishing a weekly assembly for the local assembly. He did not ordain a week in every six months for believers to meet and be spiritually super-charged. God did not command believers to gather for a one-week mountain top experience for every half-year.

Instead, God established a weekly gathering, which He said would be a “*perpetual covenant*” for all generations (Exod 31:16). God’s intention is for His people to come before Him one day every week, week after week and year after year. The one day in seven pattern of worship acts like some sort of a pulse of the soul. The preaching of God’s Word every Lord’s Day is God’s way of ensuring that the believer is being spiritually fed regularly, and that his faith is growing consistently.

When God provided manna for the children of Israel, they had to gather for themselves when they needed for the day. They could not gather one week’s need in one day. Likewise, there are not short cuts or quick fixes to spiritual growth. God’s plan is not for believers to have brief periods of intensive spiritual stuffing and followed by long periods of spiritual starving. This kind of spiritual eating disorder is bad for the soul. God’s intent is for the Christian to come to Him regularly, every Lord’s Day. Dearly beloved, do not neglect your weekly appointment with God in His house.

14 Sep 08

This afternoon, the Mandarin Congregation will celebrate her 34<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We praise God for the blessings that He has bestowed on our Mandarin-speaking brethren. In my few short months in Calvary, I have had the opportunity to preach at the Lord's Day worship services and the fellowship groups as well. It greatly encourages me to see the zeal of our Mandarin-speaking brethren in the Gospel ministry, and their desire for learning the Word of God.

Many of the Mandarin-speaking brethren were present at the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) lectures which kicked off last Thursday (4 September). Praise God for the overwhelming response at the first meeting. When the idea of having a course on WCF was first brought up, we were expecting no more than 30 people because the lectures would be held on week night, and because it was a course on doctrine, which is, to many people, dry and boring. However, nearly 70 people signed up, and over 80 turned up. So I praise God for your zeal and desire to learn. May the Lord continue to grant the joy to study His Word. The WCF lectures are held every first and third Thursdays of the month. And we invite you to join us.

A new Young Adults' Fellowship (YAF) started its inaugural meeting on 6 September. The YAF is really the offshoot of a Bible study group by the young working adults. The YAF will meet every first and third Saturdays of the month. Please pray for Dn Thomas Goh and Bro Jeffrey Chai as they take the lead. And if you are in your early twenties, whether working or studying, please come and support this ministry.

### **Remember the Sabbath Day**

Last week, we consider the importance of the Lord's Day worship to the discipleship of the believer, and his understanding of biblical worship. The Lord's Day worship sets a pattern for Christians. It is to be the pulse of the soul, means by which Christians are regularly fed the Word of God. Most importantly, the Lord's Day is commanded by God. He intended the Sabbath to be for a perpetual covenant for us (Exod 31:16). The Sabbath is also to be holy. *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God...For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Exod 20:8-11).

The Sabbath day is to be a holy day. This underscores the uniqueness of the Lord's Day. Christians will never understand what biblical worship is until they come under the conviction that the Sabbath day is holy.

Some church-goers have argued that the Sabbath is no longer binding on the New Testament believer because it was in the Old Testament. But that argument is flawed

because God has included the keeping of the Sabbath holy in the Ten Commandments, His Moral Law.

The point is that the scope of sin as defined by God is wider than that of criminal offences defined by the civil authorities. The unbeliever who is concerned about the offence committed against a person's body has no regard for the sin against a person's soul. God, however, treats both acts as equally heinous. And believers must be careful not to make light of spiritual things, things which God has provided for the well being of the soul.

### **The Lord's Day and Worship**

But what is the relationship between the Lord's Day and worship? If the Lord's Day is unique and holy, then the activities on that day must also be unique and holy. The sad reality is that the church today has lost its sense of holiness, and the idea that worship is a holy activity.

We are, as Peter says, "*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people*" (1 Pet 2:9). We are set apart from the rest of the world. In this sense, everything that we do is holy. Every believer must see his work as a calling from God because the Christian faith impacts to all areas of life.

Tragically, this idea of universal priesthood of the believer has led to two erroneous views on worship. First, every believer is free to do what he wants because every believer is a priest. Second, since the Christian faith permeates all aspects of our lives, then what we do outside the church can be done within the church. These are the reasons that churches give to justify having dancing, magic shows, entertainment as part of their worship services.

However, this blurring of the lines between the holy and ordinary is unbiblical. God made the universe in six days, and He rested on the Sabbath. He made the six days, but He ordained the seventh to be holy. In my opinion, the contemporary church worship blurs, if not removes, the distinction between the church and the world, and between the activities on the Lord's Day and that of the other six days.

### **Common is Profane**

*"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy...The LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"* (Exod 20:8, 11). The opposite of holiness is profanity. In our modern parlance, "profanity" refers to vulgar language. The word in Latin is *pro fanum*, which means "to be out in front of the temple." And "to profane" is "to commit the act of desecration."

God's idea of what constitutes profanity is simply to take holy things and make them common. *"Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed*



*difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them” (Ezek 22:26).*

After Nadab and Abihu were struck dead by God for offering strange fires, God told Aaron, their father, to make the “*difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean*” (Lev 10:10).

In Nehemiah, we read of Nehemiah’s stiff rebuke of the Jews in Jerusalem. The walls had been rebuilt and the flames of revival had dimmed, and the people were back to business as usual, even on the Sabbath. Nehemiah said, “*Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath*” (Neh 13:17-18).

In the case of Aaron’s sons, their act of profanity was the result of their doing something which God had not commanded. In the case of the Jews in Jerusalem, their profanity was the result of their failing to do what God had commanded. In both cases, they rendered holy things common.

For six days in a week, Christians engage in their gainful work and wholesome activities like the rest of the world. On the Lord’s Day, however, Christians gather together for the holy activity of worshipping God. Activities that were allowed and even praiseworthy for the other six days are now forbidden on the Lord’s Day. There is no difference in the nature of the work or activity. The difference comes from the work of grace that is wrought in the heart of the believer. God has not only set apart one day out of seven, but He has also set us apart. Thus, when a believer disregards God’s command to keep His Day holy, it is as if he is profaning the work of grace in his life. By failing to observe the Lord’s Day and keep it holy, a believer is setting himself out of the temple, physically and spiritually.

May the Holy Spirit grant us the heart of David who writes “*I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD*” (Ps 122:1).

21 Sep 08

Over the last two months, we have been considering the topic of worship. What is biblical worship? Why must believers make the Lord's Day worship a priority in our lives? Today, we want to deal with this question – how do we know our worship is acceptable and pleasing to God?

One of the by products of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation is the restoration of the authority of Holy Scripture and of God-centred worship. Of course, there are different shades and degrees of Reformation. Some groups have gone farther than others in reforming the church. Other groups applied the Reformation in some parts of their church life but not in others. The Lutherans and Anglicans, for example, agreed with others of the Reformed tradition that the Bible is authoritative in matters of doctrine. But they did not think that the Bible has anything to say concerning church liturgy (worship) and polity (government). They adopted what is known as the normative principle, which simply states that whatever Holy Scripture does not explicitly forbid is permissible. So, if the Bible is silent on the issue of burning incense, then according to the Anglican and Lutherans, the practice can continue. Luther argues that God gave men five senses to be used in worship, and thus Lutheran worship involves liturgical vestments, candles, etc.

John Calvin, on the other hand, believes that worship is primarily for God's glory and not for men's pleasure. For the Reformed churches, including the Bible Presbyterian church – we believe the Bible determines our doctrine, liturgy and polity. We believe that in the matter of worship, we are bound by the Word of God. This is the regulative principle. The regulative principle states that whatever we do in worship must be founded on the Word of God.

### **Scripture and Regulative Principle**

Critics of Reformed worship say that the idea is based on Old Testament teachings. But there are New Testament proofs for the regulative principle. John Calvin, in his essay *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, writes, "I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them...is that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honour of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to His worship, if at variance with His command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, 'Obedience is better than sacrifice' (1 Sam 15:22). 'In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Matt 15:9). Every addition to His word, especially in this matter [of worship], is a lie. Mere 'will worship' is vanity." By 'will worship,' Calvin was referring to worship that was rendered by men's will and not in accordance to God's.

Our Lord Himself also commanded the disciples to teach the new converts "*to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt 28:19-20), and that would

include worship. The Bible also tells us that God is a jealous God, and the children of Israel were warned, *“Thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice”* (Exod 34:13-15). God’s people were not to worship the gods of the land, and they were not to worship the true and living God with the methods of the heathen.

The doctrine of man’s depravity also lends weight to the regulative principle of worship. Paul tells us that *“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Rom 3:11-12). If man is incapable of doing good, then it must also follow that man, by his own intelligence, is also incapable of rendering worship that will be pleasing to God.

### **Regulative Principle and Christian Liberty**

A second opposition to regulative principle is that it goes against the teaching of Christian liberty. Critics argue that in matters where the Bible is not explicit, then Christian must be allowed to exercise his liberty.

This reasoning is flawed. First, it must be pointed out that the restraint of sin is not the restraint on Christian liberty. Second, Christian liberty is always exercised with the conscience of the other Christian in mind (Rom 14; 1 Cor 8). Out of love for his neighbour, a believer chooses not to exercise his Christian liberty.

Imagine walking into a church where the style of worship for that day depends on the worship leader. And it varies from one week to the next. In such a situation, worshippers are held captive to the whims and fancies of the worship leader. When the worship leader introduces unbiblical elements into the worship, the weaker conscience of the worshippers would be defiled.

In a church where the regulative principle of worship is upheld, the worshippers are freed from being held captive to a man’s ideas of worship. Instead, their conscience is protected because the worship service is based on the Word of God.

### **Wisdom in Application**

We believe in the regulative principle of worship, but we also recognise that there are things which are necessary and things which must be decided on circumstance. The Westminster Divines say, *“The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture...Nevertheless we acknowledge...that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence”* (WCF, Chapter 1.6).

There are elements in worship which are regulated. However, there are circumstances involving worship which must be decided according to Christian prudence. These circumstances include the time and place of worship, the schedule of preaching, the use of choir, etc.

The world is banging on the door of the church with her music. It is offering her a Christianity that is both entertaining and hip. At the same time, the “success” factor is adding pressure to the church to conform. These are the challenges that the church faces today. And if our desire is to worship God in spirit and truth, then we must worship Him in the way that He has prescribed for us in His Word. May the Lord help us!

28 Sep 08

In a few days' time, we will enter the last quarter of 2008. By now you have the October-December issue of *Daily Manna*. This marks the end of a two year cycle, and if you have been following the *Daily Manna*, you would have read through the Old Testament once, the New Testament and Psalms twice. I commend all who have taken on the challenge some two years ago.

To those who have just recently started reading the *Daily Manna*, there is more ahead. A new two year cycle will begin in 2009 with concentration on the Old Testament. The daily Bible reading remains the same, but the *Daily Manna* readings focus on the Old Testament. Please continue to pray for the contributors as they write as well as yourself that the daily feeding on God's Word will help you grow spiritually. For your encouragement, the *Daily Manna* is now being translated into Thai and Mandarin, and the first issue will be available in 2009.

Worship means different things to different people. Here are a few definitions: "Worship is a response to God's love and provision for us... Worship means to declare worth, to attribute worth. Or to put it in biblical terms, we praise God. We speak, or sing, about how good and powerful God is... Any expression of our love to God – for who He is, for what He's said, and for what He's doing."

While worship comprises a few of these elements, there is something that is missing in the understanding of worship in most church-goers. Worship is for the church, not a building but a gathering of people called out by God. Worshippers are called out of their normal routine to assemble together to praise and honour God. Worship is therefore a solemn affair. The wise preacher warns us, "*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few*" (Eccl 5:1-2).

## **Liturgy**

The things that we do during worship are called a liturgy, which means the order of worship. Liturgy is usually (and mistakenly) associated with formal worship. The fact is that every church that worships has a liturgy. It is not a question of whether or not there is a liturgy, but what kind. And the question that should concern Christians is this: what is the best liturgy to worship God? The Charismatics worship one way, and the Anglicans worship another way. Both worship in a way that best reflects its theological convictions. Our liturgy must reflect our theology, and our Reformed worship is based on the doctrines of God's sovereignty, man's depravity, and our Lord's saving grace.

Our worship must demonstrate that God is the Creator and we are the creatures; that He is the Redeemer and we are sinners. Thus, Reformed worship is redeemed sinners responding in obedience to God's mercy and grace. Reformed liturgy is based upon the

covenant relationship between God and man. And in worship, this covenant takes the shape of a dialogue between God and His people. He reveals through His Word, and we respond. There are two parts of worship in Reformed worship: (1) Revelation – those parts which are performed on behalf of God. (2) Response – those parts which are performed by the worshippers.

As you know, our order of worship usually takes this form:

- *The Lord is in His Holy Temple*
- Call to Worship – this is to summon to people to come and worship God. “*O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our Maker*” (Ps 95:6). The best way to summon the people to worship is from the Word of God.
- Hymns – the opening hymn is our response to the call of worship. Likewise, the other hymns are also our responses to one form or another of God’s revelation.
- Invocation and *Gloria Patri*. The house of God is a house of prayer, and prayer should play a large part in public worship. “*Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy. Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them*” (Ps 99:5-6). When the worship leader leads in prayer, worshippers are to listen, pray along, and to affirm that which has been prayed.

There are several kinds of prayer in a worship service. The invocation is a calling upon God to aid us in our worship. In the invocation, the main subject of our prayer is God, His Person (Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer), His attributes (love, power, wisdom, sovereignty), and His works (creation, providence, salvation).

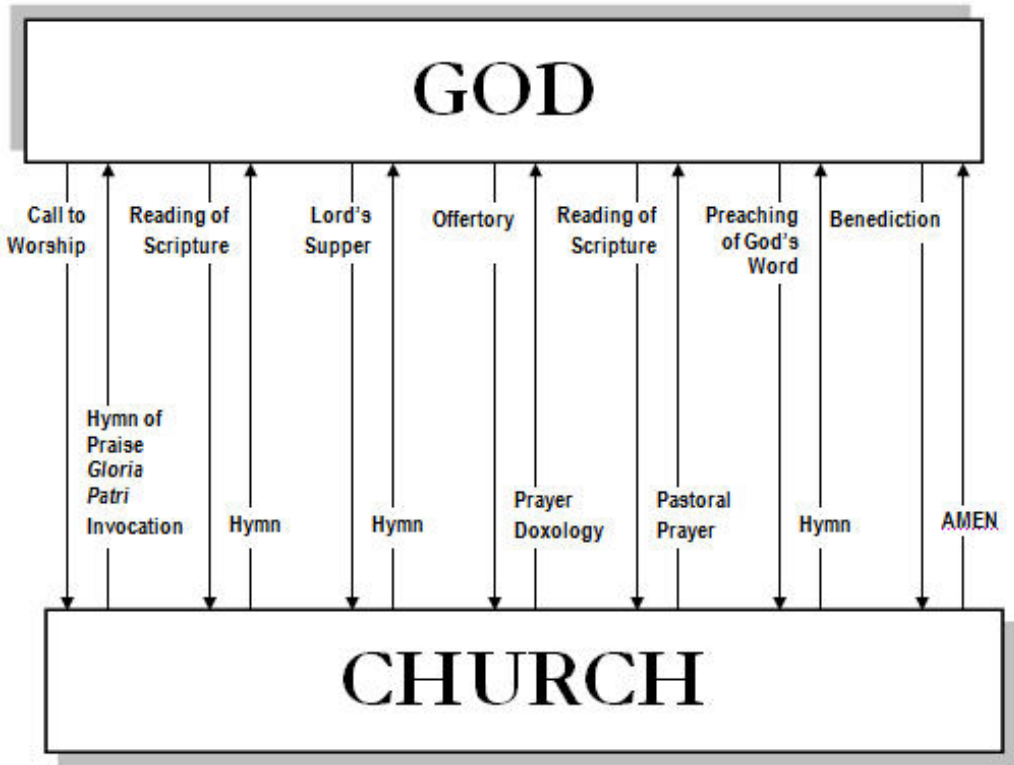
The offertory prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving to God for His gifts to His people, and the dedication of ourselves along with our substance for God’s service. The pastoral prayer is a prayer of intercession for the church.

- Scripture reading. The Word of God is the essence of worship. The Bible is God’s revelation of Himself. The Bible, therefore, must be read and read extensively in the worship service (see Neh 8:1-8).
- Offering and *Doxology*. Offering is an act of worship. “*Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts*” (Ps 96:8; see Deut 16:16).
- Sermon. Preaching is the proclamation of God’s Word. There can be no worship service without the preaching of God’s Word. “*So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Neh 8:8)

In preaching, the authority of the preacher rests upon the Word of God. The man who has the privilege to preach must bear that responsibility with the utmost care and diligence. The worshipper, on the other hand, has the responsibility to hear.

Benediction. The benediction commends on the whole body of believers to God's care and announces His blessings on them. The benediction is the climax of worship. (see Num 6:23-27).

Reformed liturgy is a vertical dialogue between God and men. God above revealing to men below, and men below responding to God above.



There is no horizontal element in worship. Worship is a dialogue between God and men, and not a conversation among God's people. That is why we **do not** start the worship service with "Hi, how are you today? Please shake hands with those sitting beside you; say, *God loves you and so do I.*"

That worship is not horizontal (man and man) does not mean that we must be aloof, or that our worship does not edify, or that we cannot be a blessing to the people sitting around us. Worship that is true will be edifying to the worshipper, and we become a blessing when we have received what God has for us through His word, and from that abundance of blessings and spiritual riches, they overflow to bless others. Think about this, what better blessing can we give to others than those which we received from God?

Lovingly in Christ,  
Pastor Isaac Ong

---The End---