

Arbor Foundations
14 – Corporate Worship
Jan 6, 2019 – John Raquet

Key Ideas / Biblical Basis

First, what’s meant by the word “Corporate” when used with “Corporate Worship”?

From Webster’s 1828 dictionary:

CORPORATE, *adjective* [Latin , to be shaped into a body, body.]

1. United in a body, or community, as a number of individuals, who are empowered to transact business as an individual; formed into a body; as a *corporate* assembly, or society; a *corporate* town.

2. United; general; collectively one.

They answer in a *corporate* voice.

What we mean by “corporate worship” is the worship that a church does together, as one body, as opposed to worshipping God privately or in other, smaller groupings of people (such as families).

As in all things, what God has revealed in the Bible should be our standard, or rule, for how we live, and this certainly would include corporate worship.

Below are several section of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith (in modern English) that we believe are a good summary of what the Bible teaches as related to corporate worship. We will be looking at a variety of topics that are touched on in these parts of the LBC. As always, while the LBC may be a good summary, Scripture is our authority.

From Chapter 22 - Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day

1. The light of nature demonstrates that there is a God who has lordship and sovereignty over all. He is just and good and does good to everyone. Therefore, he should be feared, loved, praised, called on, trusted in, and served—with all the heart and all the soul and all the strength.¹ But the acceptable way to worship the true God is instituted by him,² and it is delimited by his own revealed will. Thus, he may not be worshipped according to human imagination or inventions or the suggestions of Satan, nor through any visible representations, nor in any other way that is not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.³

¹Jeremiah 10:7; Mark 12:33. ²Deuteronomy 12:32. ³Exodus 20:4–6.

5. The elements of religious worship of God include reading the Scriptures,¹⁶ preaching and hearing the Word of God,¹⁷ teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord,¹⁸ as well as the administration of baptism¹⁹ and the Lord’s supper.²⁰ They must be performed out of obedience to him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear. Also, purposeful acts of humbling^a with

fasting²¹ and times of thanksgiving should be observed on special occasions in a holy and religious manner.²²

^asolemn humiliation

¹⁶1 Timothy 4:13. ¹⁷2 Timothy 4:2; Luke 8:18. ¹⁸Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19. ¹⁹Matthew 28:19, 20. ²⁰1 Corinthians 11:26. ²¹Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12. ²²Exodus 15:1–19, Psalms 107.

6. Under the gospel, neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is now restricted to or made more acceptable by the place where it is done or toward which it is directed. Instead, God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth²³—daily²⁴ in each family²⁵ and privately by each individual.²⁶ Also, more formal^b worship is to be performed in public assemblies, and these must not be carelessly or deliberately neglected or forsaken, when God by his word or providence calls us to them.²⁷

^bsolemn

²³John 4:21; Malachi 1:11; 1 Timothy 2:8. ²⁴Matthew 6:11; Psalms 55:17. ²⁵Acts 10:2. ²⁶Matthew 6:6. ²⁷Hebrews 10:25; Acts 2:42.

From Chapter 1 – The Holy Scriptures

6. The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for his own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life is either explicitly stated or by necessary inference contained in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is ever to be added to the Scriptures, either by new revelation of the Spirit or by human traditions.⁹

Nevertheless, we acknowledge that the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in the Word.¹⁰ We recognize that some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the church are common to human actions and organizations and are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian wisdom, following the general rules of the Word, which must always be observed.¹¹

⁹2 Timothy 3:15–17; Galatians 1:8,9. ¹⁰John 6:45; 1 Corinthians 2:9–12. ¹¹1 Corinthians 11:13, 14; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40.

1. The importance of corporate worship

- a. God is deserving of our worship continually by our whole being, but corporate worship is a particular form of worship that is commanded (Heb 10:25) and is shown by example throughout the NT.
- b. Impacts on the believer who participates in corporate worship:
 - i. Assurance (Heb 10:22)
 - We obtain assurance of our in Christ, as we are reminded of the gospel and how it applies to us, and our conscience is cleansed as we are reminded of the promises of God.
 - ii. Consistency (Heb 10:23)
 - Helps us to hold fast to our confession of faith without wavering.
 - Worshipping together with others encourages us that we are not alone, strengthens us, and reminds us of the truths we tend to forget, practically speaking.

- iii. Sanctification (becoming more like Jesus) (Heb 10:24)
 - When we meet together in corporate worship, it has the effect of encouraging us to grow in love and good works
 - Points us toward sin and areas of growth that we may not have seen by ourselves
 - We are jointly encouraged to grow (different dynamic than individual worship)
 - Mutual encouragement to love and good works

Think of this in terms of the negative: Why does our assurance, our consistency, and our sanctification waver if we neglect participating in corporate worship?

- c. Impacts on unbelievers/the world:
 - i. Corporate worship is a localized demonstration of the bride of Christ (the church) responding to Jesus (Eph 5)
 - ii. Preaching in a corporate worship setting is an important evangelistic tool used by God to save many (Rom 10:13-15)
- d. Worship should be God-focused (John 4:23-24—we should worship the Father in spirit and in truth)
 - While there are positive impacts on those who participate in corporate worship, our purpose in worshipping is not primarily to benefit ourselves, but to glorify God.

2. Key elements of corporate worship

- a. Reading the Scriptures (1 Tim 4:13)
 - i. When we listen to the Scriptures, we are hearing “directly from God”
 - ii. Makes it clear that the Scriptures are our rule of faith and practice

- b. Preaching and hearing God’s Word
- i. There are three related words that apply here (Strong’s definitions):
 - **euaggelizō (εὐαγγελίζω), usually translated “preach”:** to announce good news (“evangelize”) especially the gospel: - declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel) (found 52 times in NT)
 - **kērussō (κηρύσσω), usually translated “preach”:** to herald (as a public crier), especially divine truth (the gospel): - preach (-er), proclaim, publish (found 60 times in NT).
 - **didaskō (διδάσκω), usually translated “teach”:** to teach (found 91 times in NT)
 - Preaching has an element of prophetic declaration (“thus says the Lord”) that isn’t always strongly present in pure teaching. However, teaching is an important part of most preaching.
 - ii. As a church, we favor what is often called “consecutive expository preaching”
 - Expository: The message comes from the text itself—the sermon’s points are the points in the text. The message emerges from the text in a way that can be shown/demonstrated.
 - Consecutive: Going through an entire book of the Bible
 - Benefits of expository preaching¹:
 - *It is the method least likely to stray from Scripture.* If you are preaching on what the Bible says about self-esteem, for example, undoubtedly you can find some useful insights. But even when you say entirely true things, you will likely abstract them from the Bible’s central story line. Expository preaching keeps you to the main thing.
 - *It teaches people how to read their Bibles.* Especially if you’re preaching a long passage, expository preaching teaches people how to think through a passage, how to understand and apply God’s Word to their lives.
 - *It gives confidence to the preacher and authorizes the sermon.* If you are faithful to the text, you are certain your message is God’s

¹ Adapted from article by D.A. Carson, “6 Reasons Not to Abandon Expository Preaching” (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-reasons-not-to-abandon-expository-preaching/>)

message. Regardless of what is going on in the church—whether it is growing or whether people like you—you know you are proclaiming God's truth. That is wonderfully freeing.

- *It meets the need for relevance without letting the clamor for relevance dictate the message.* All true preaching is properly applied. That is of extraordinary importance in our generation. But expository preaching keeps the eternal central to the discussion.
- Why is it helpful for expository preaching to be consecutive?¹
- *It forces the preacher to handle the tough questions.* You start working through text after text, and soon you hit passages on divorce, on homosexuality, on women in ministry, and you have to deal with the text.
 - *It enables the preacher to expound systematically the whole counsel of God.* If we are to preach the whole counsel of God, we must teach the whole Bible. Other sermonic structures have their merits, but none offers our congregations more, week after week, than careful, faithful exposition of the Word of God.
- iii. From time to time, we'll also take a topical approach, when there are specific Biblical topics that we feel a need to address, but which may not be covered comprehensively in any one passage of Scripture.
- We tend to have this be exception, not the norm, because of the benefits of consecutive expository preaching, as described above.
- c. Teaching and admonishing one another through singing (Col 3:16, Eph 5:18-19)
- i. There is a horizontal (person to person) aspect of singing that is only possible in a corporate worship setting.
 - ii. Eph 5:19 speaks of making melody to God with our heart, which indicates a vertical (us to God) component of singing as well.

- d. Prayer
 - i. We see the example of prayer in the early church (Acts 2:42, Acts 4:24-30, Acts 13:1-3)
 - ii. Paul asks various churches to pray for his ministry (Rom. 15:30, Eph. 6:19, Phil. 1:19, Col. 4:3-4, 1 Thess. 5:25)
 - iii. Paul instructs Timothy to lead the church in Ephesus to pray for all men, especially those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-2, 8)
 - e. Administration of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
 - i. While not necessarily done at every single corporate worship service, these should be done as part of corporate worship. (See previous lesson for more details).
3. The regulative principle of worship
- a. Two approaches are commonly taken by protestant churches:
 - i. *Regulative principle*: Corporate worship of God should be in the manner he has prescribed in his word, and are not free to come up with our own ideas of how he is to be worshipped.
 - ii. *Normative principle*: We are free to come up with different ways to worship God in corporate worship as long as they do not violate what God has forbidden.
 - b. We hold to the “regulative principle” of worship. Why?
 - i. Primarily, because it is the pattern we see in scripture.
 - The tabernacle was to be build according to the pattern that God showed them (Exodus 25:40)
 - The first and second commandments show God’s particular care for how He should be worshipped (Exodus 20:2-6)
 - The story of Nadab and Abihu offering “strange fire” before the Lord (Lev 10)
 - Jesus rebuking of the Pharisees for teaching as doctrine the commandments of men (Matt 15:1-9)
 - Paul rebuked the Colossians for worship practices that went beyond what they had been taught (Col 2:18-23)
 - ii. Benefits of adhering to the regulative principle of worship
 - Freedom from cultural captivity (we don’t need to constantly be on the lookout to keep up with current trends)
 - Freedom from constant battles over preferences (because we operate within reasonable bounds)
 - Freedom of conscience (we won’t be violating anyone’s conscience if we stick to the Biblically defined elements of corporate worship)

- Freedom to be cross-cultural (the basic components of the service can stay the same from culture to culture, even though styles and specifics will vary)
 - Freedom to focus on the center (we can unapologetically stick with the basics and stay there, ensuring that we are covering the things that are truly important)
 - iii. Even with the regulative principle in place, there is still lots of “grey area”
 - It’s a principle, not a sharply defined set of guidelines
 - Styles and specifics can vary significantly—scripture doesn’t specify every small detail of worship
 - As much as possible, this should not be a matter of contention within a church or between churches (graciousness is needed)
4. Our role in corporate worship
- a. We are called to be participants, not observers (active, not passive)
 - b. Desire is to have our heart attitudes aligned with what is going on externally
 - i. This is sometimes (often?) not the case when we start out, but corporate worship is designed to help us align our heart attitudes with what God desires

So What?

What happens if we neglect corporate worship? How does that weaken us?

Go a step further—what happens if we neglect any particular element of worship?

For Further Study

<https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-theology-and-corporate-worship/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-reasons-not-to-abandon-expository-preaching/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-just-read-alone/>

<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/public-reading-scripture/>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/the-freedom-of-the-regulative-principle/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/regulative-principle-worship/>

<https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2003/the-regulative-principle-of-worship/>