

How Are We to Worship?

by Shanda Bleyenberg

As time goes by, worship is increasingly changing in many churches. Rev. McAtnee, in an article from *The Outlook*, explains that we all know we worship at church, but we are having a hard time deciding what worship is. The contemporary trend of worship tries to meet the needs of the people. Churches are making their worship services a little bit more attractive so people will come. On the other hand, the traditional approach of worship does not change for the people, but teaches the truth of God.

One major difference between the traditional and contemporary approach to worship is the preaching. Today, so many people want to be physically involved in the church service; they don't want to sit quietly and listen to one man speak. Therefore, churches cut sermons short and increase choirs and audience-led activities. After all, this is a much more entertaining church service, and it most certainly should attract more and more people. In the newspaper *Christian Renewal*, D. G. Hart explains that worship is to glorify God; it is not designed for evangelism.

The question needs to be asked, "Is church for the people or is it for God?" Worship is most definitely for the glory of God. A few years ago, Rev. Dykstra (now professor in the Protestant Reformed Seminary) preached a sermon in Edgerton. I can clearly remember him saying, "I do not want any of you to walk out of here tonight and say that you got a lot out of the sermon." We do go to church to learn and to grow spiritually, but ultimately we go to church to glorify God's name, for His sake and not our own. So then how do we know what is the right way to worship? We must look in the infallible Word of God to find the answer. Article Seven in the Belgic Confession explains how the manner of worship is written in the Scriptures. "It is unlawful for anyone to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures." The Scriptures are sufficient!

First, we must realize that preaching is the chief means of grace. It must be central in our worship services, and we must preach the pure truth found in the Holy Bible. "Preaching is the very power of God unto salvation" (Rev. Bruinsma). This central preaching is not so evident in the contemporary trend of worship. To keep this preaching in our Protestant Reformed Churches, parents and teachers are called to raise up children in the fear of God. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). We need to teach children at a young age to sit quietly and listen to the sermons. "As they grow their hearts and minds become trained in this spiritual exercise, and as a result they learn to concentrate on the preaching" (Rev. Bruinsma). In a classroom, the trend is to have cooperative work with visuals and hands-on activities. I think this is good, but teachers must have a balance. Teachers should teach their students to sit quietly, demanding their attention. This will help train them for a worship service.

In a classroom, teachers could have students with different beliefs. A child may come to school believing that God loves everybody. In this Post Modern world, it would seem right to say to the class, "Everyone may have their own beliefs. You may believe in a different God than I believe in. After all, we need to be tolerant and accepting of all people and their beliefs." This is so sad. We must not fall into this barrier; we must teach the truth from the Bible. We must not preach or teach for the people, but for God alone.

Singing is another part of worship that is greatly changing in the church. Few churches today sing from the Psalter as our denomination does. Churches are constantly updating their hymns. Many hymns are God- glorifying, but we still do not sing them in our worship service. Why not? The Holy Spirit provided His people a book of Psalms that are sufficient. What better songs could we sing than songs that are inspired by the Holy Spirit? The Psalms bring forth meaning best expressing our faith. Churches are constantly changing their music to be more self-fulfilling, entertaining, and up-beat. We need to sing for God, not ourselves. God wants truthful and precious words sung to Him.

I believe that the classroom is different from a worship service. Children can sing other songs than those from the Psalter. However, teachers need to be very careful about other songs presented to the class. In so many songs today, we see Arminian beliefs. We cannot teach our students songs that portray a God that loves all people when we teach them that this is a false belief. Teachers need to explain to their students how important it is that we sing songs that glorify the one and only true God. Teachers need to make their students realize that the Psalms are truthful and inspired by God.

Wherefore, although we look far and wide and search on every hand, we shall not find better suited to that end than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and uttered through him. And for this reason, when we sing them we may be certain that God puts the words in our mouths as if Himself sang in us to exalt His glory (John Calvin).

In both the worship service and the classroom, people must realize that God loves faithful and joyful hearts singing to Him. He looks at the heart, not at the voice. Teachers, encourage your students to sing praises unto God; encourage them to memorize songs and keep them in their hearts forever! My nephew, Cody, from the Redlands, California, congregation once said, “We need to memorize songs because some day our enemies might take our Bibles from us. But if we have songs and our Bible in our hearts, they can never take that from us.” What child-like faith!

Worship is changing rapidly in this century. It will continue to change. Our calling is to stay strong in the truth. Let us pray for the ministers and teachers of our churches so they may preach and teach the truth from the Scriptures. May we look to God for guidance and realize that our worship is for the glory of God alone!

References

“Psalm Singing” by Rev. Jason Kortering.
“Questions about the WORSHIP SERVICES in the PRC” by Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma.
Christian Renewal. “Reformed Worship” by D. G. Hart.
Reformed Confessions
The Holy Bible: King James Version

Shanda is a member of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota.

Originally Published in:
Vol. 58 No. 2 February 1999