

Having started a topical study last week on the theme of Church Life, I suggested this life takes three directions: it looks up (in worship), within (in edification), and without (in evangelism). All three of these are equally important and all contribute to the overall health of the church.

What is the church to do? What are the purposes of the church, or the primary activities of the church? Well, let me answer those questions with another question. Who gets to answer these questions? If God gets to answer these questions, and we consult solely His word, we would find a three-fold answer. The church exists to worship God (look up), edify the saints (look within), and evangelize the world (look without).

Last week I sought to introduce this subject with an introductory sermon on the importance of the church. This week I want to begin looking at the first of three purposes of the church and that's to look up (in worship).

Thus, I want to begin to consider the subject of public worship (a subject we will return to next week), coming this morning to the nature of public worship.

- I. It Takes Place in the Gathered Assembly of Christ
- II. It Enjoys the Special Covenant Presence of Christ
- III. It is Regulated by the Sacred Scriptures of Christ

I. It Takes Place in the Gathered Assembly of Christ

- 1. By this I mean, public worship takes place on God's holy day, when the people of God come together as a church.
- 2. Ps.111:1—"Praise the LORD! I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation."
- 3. This verse is one of many within the Psalms, that extols the blessings and benefits of public worship.
- 4. Notice OC public worship was similar to NC public worship—it was with all the heart and in the assembly of the saints.
- 5. This is really what public worship is all about (it's really what all kinds of worship is about)—praising God.
- 6. I trust it goes without saying, only God is worthy of worship—only God is worthy of being praised with our whole heart.
- 7. But the main thing I want to point out in this verse is where he worshiped God—"in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation."
- 8. The "assembly" and "congregation" refer to the gathered people of God, in the tabernacle or later temple.
- 9. 1Cor.11:17-18—"Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it."
- 10. As you know, the church at Corinth had its share of problems, at the heart of which were various divisions.
- 11. Thus, Paul writes this first letter to address these problems, and to answer various questions sent him.
- 12. In this section of the letter, Paul is addressing the issue of the Lord's Supper, and the various ways it was abused.

13. But for our purposes, I want you to notice the phrases "you come together" and "when you come together as a church."
14. These phrases refer to a formal gathering of God's people for the purpose of conducting church business in the name of Christ.
15. There are fundamentally two activities that constitute that business—church discipline and public worship.
16. It's for this reason, Paul earlier told them in 5:4—"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."
17. That is, when they were formerly gathered as a church, they were to discipline the impenitent member.
18. Here in chapter 11, he refers not to church discipline but to the church gathered together for the purpose of worship.
19. "When you come together as a church"—this phrase is rather important and suggest two important distinctions.
20. (1) The difference between the church scattered and gathered—these are not two churches but one church viewed from two perspectives.
21. By the church scattered is meant the church from Monday to Saturday, by the church gathered is meant on the Lord's Day.
22. Now, this distinction actually anticipates something I want to talk about in the near future, and that's evangelism.
23. We are scattered from Monday to Saturday for the purpose of shining as lights and acting as salt in the world.
24. As we tend to our responsibilities within our spheres of influence, at home and work, we reflect His grace.
25. And as we gather on the Lord's Day to fellowship and especially worship, we are the church gathered.
26. Perhaps I can illustrate it like this—as we are each a living stone, we formally comprise the temple when we assemble.
27. Thus, while we are all members of the church through the week, and in that sense, the church scattered, we do not constitute the church, until we assemble on the Lord's Day.
28. (2) The difference between informal and formal worship—informal worship takes place outside the church, whereas formal worship takes place inside the church.
29. Put another way, informal worship takes place by the scattered church, and formal worship takes place by the gathered church.
30. By "formal" is meant "prescribed"—it's worship that's been given specific restrictions by God in His word.
31. Informal worship takes place when you read your Bibles, pray, sing, and praise God in your house and/or with your families.
32. Informal worship can take place anywhere, as you think about God and tell others about His saving grace.
33. But formal worship takes on the LORD'S Day when the church is gathered and is prescribed by His word.
34. Westminster Confession (22:6)—"God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies."

II. It Enjoys the Special Covenant Presence of Christ

1. Matt.18:20—"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst (Ps.46:4-5; Rev.2:1)."
2. Those of you here last week will remember, this verse is a part of a passage that speaks of church discipline.
3. Thus, when our Savior speaks about gathering together in His name, He specifically refers to discipline.
4. And yet, according to 1Cor.11:17-18, the church not only gathers to conduct discipline but also worship.
5. In other words, there's fundamentally two reasons the church formally gathers—to conduct the business of the church and to worship.
6. Now, I want you to notice the promise that Christ gives to His gathered church—"there I am in their midst."
7. There's three things I want to say about His presence—He's all-present in creation, His presence exceeds creation, and He's uniquely present among His people.
8. (1) He's all-present in creation, Jer.23:24—"Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him? says the LORD; Do I not fill heaven and earth" says the LORD."
9. The LORD fills heaven and earth with His presence—He is everywhere present within the entire creation.
10. Prov.15:3—"The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place"—by "eyes of the LORD" is meant the LORD Himself.
11. The LORD doesn't have any eyes (because He has no body), but Scripture attributes this improperly of God (that is, figuratively and not literally).
12. Thus, to say "the eyes of the LORD are in every place" is another way of saying "the LORD is in every place."
13. (2) His presence exceeds creation, 1Ki.8:27—"But will God dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!"
14. In other words, this created world cannot contain God—God's infinite presence exceeds that of creation.
15. The reason being, all of creation, which includes time and space, are created by God in Genesis 1:1.
16. Creation is finite (limited), whereas only God is infinite (limitless)—God exceeds creation because He created it.
17. Put another way—God exceeds time and space because He created them—He exists outside of both.
18. (3) He's uniquely present among His people, Ex.25:8—"Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them."
19. Notice, while God in one sense dwells everywhere within and without creation, He uniquely dwelt among His people.
20. This was true of the OC and NC temple—"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1Cor.3:16)?
21. In other words, God dwelt in the Old and New Covenant temples in a way He does not dwell anywhere else.
22. (a) It's spiritual—when Jesus says "where two or three have gathered in My name there I am in the midst of them" He means spiritually and not physically.
23. For example, as we've assembled this morning to worship Him according to His word, He is among us.
24. But Christ is spiritually and not physically among us—physically He's in heaven, spiritually He's among us by His Spirit.

25. Thus, in one sense it's right to say Christ is absent from us, but in another sense, He is always with us.
26. (b) It's covenantal—when we say God is uniquely present in a certain place, we mean, He uniquely reveals Himself in a certain way in that place.
27. For example, when we say God uniquely dwells in hell, we mean, He uniquely reveals His wrath in hell.
28. And so, when we say God uniquely dwells among His church, we mean, He graciously dwells among His people.
29. Ps.46:4-5—"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."
30. The church is described with two imageries—"the city of God" and "the holy tabernacle of the Most High."
31. This is obviously a reference to Jerusalem wherein was the tabernacle (the special dwelling-place of God).
32. God uniquely dwelt in Jerusalem because the tabernacle (and later temple) was in Jerusalem (it was His home).
33. But I want to notice the first part of v4—"There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God."
34. This is a reference to the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit, who refreshes and strengthens the city.
35. O beloved people of God, this is how Christ, by His Spirit, is present among His NC city and temple.
36. He's present to refresh and strengthen them—He's present to sanctify them—He's present to bless them.

III. It is Regulated by the Sacred Scriptures of Christ

1. By this I mean, public worship is to be regulated or governed by the Holy Scripture—God determines, the when, where, and what of public worship.
2. The "when" of public worship is the Lord's Day, the "where" of public worship is the church (the gathered people of God), and the "what" of public worship only what God commands.
3. In other words, when the church gathers on God's day to worship Him, they are not at liberty to worship anyway they choose.
4. Historically, we refer to this as "the regulative principle of worship"—this simply means God alone regulates worship.
5. God's holy word regulates or determines what acts or elements we are to bring into formal, public worship.
6. Now, as we shall likely see next week, there are five elements of public worship—singing, praying, reading Scripture, preaching, and sacraments.
7. Now, remember here I am referring to public worship—public worship is regulated by Holy Scripture.
8. For example, let me illustrate—Paul tells Timothy that only men are to pray and the woman must remain silent.
9. Does this mean that women are forbidden to pray in all worship and must remain silent in every context?
10. No! Of course not! What if we were to have a handful of couples over to our house for a Bible study.
11. Does that mean my wife would be unable to pray in that setting, and all of the woman must remain silent?

12. Furthermore, does that mean, if we were to gather at my house on a Friday night that we have read Scripture, preach, sing, and partake of the sacraments?
13. No! In fact, that would be a violation of Scripture, because parking of the Lord's Supper is in the church.
14. You see, when we talk about the regulative principle of worship, we are talking about public worship.
15. Thus, I want to suggest three basic and broad proofs of what's called the regulative principle of worship.
16. (1) God determines how man approaches Him—from the fall of man, God determines the when, why, and how man approaches Him.
17. Thus, no sooner did man fall did God establish with man the sacrificial system which regulated how man was to approach God.
18. Gen.4:3—"And in the process of time (lit—'at the end of days') it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. And Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering."
19. Brethren, here God accepts Abel's worship but rejects Cain's worship. Why? Because Abel brought it according to God's word and Cain did not.
20. They both brought offerings "at the end of days"—that is, at the end of the week (or on the OT Sabbath).
21. But He rejects the offering of one and accepts the offering of the other. Why? Because God alone determines how man approaches Him.
22. Now why God rejected Cain's offering has been debated—there are two possibilities are both are likely true.
23. First, Cain failed to bring a bloody sacrifice, and secondly, Cain failed to offer his sacrifice by (with) faith.
24. But either way, God establishes at the outset this important principle—He and He alone regulates worship.
25. (2) God's law forbids all non-sanctioned worship—let me suggest three places where Scripture forbids non-sanctioned worship.
26. Exodus 20:4-5—"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor worship them."
27. While there's much that could be said about this command, let me remind, the commands 1-4 have a direct reference to public worship.
28. The 1st command addresses the WHO of worship, the 2nd command the WHAT of worship, the 3rd command the HOW of worship, and the 4th command the WHEN of worship.
29. Thus, in forbidding the worshipping of idols or images, the commandment deals with what's brought into worship.
30. In other words, the 2nd commandment forbids any worship that's not directly commanded (sanctioned) by God.
31. Shorter Catechism (Q.51)—"*What is forbidden in the second commandment?* A. The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His word."
32. (3) God's word specifically regulates formal worship—both OC and NC worship are regulated by Scripture.
33. God not only commanded Moses exactly how to build the tabernacle, but closely regulated every act.

34. Now, while there are important differences between OT and NT worship, there's this similarity between them.
35. Both, Old and New Covenant worship is regulated by God and His Holy Word, and not the worshippers.
36. Heb.9:1—"Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary."
37. In other words, the first covenant, which refers to the OC, had its worship regulated by God Himself.
38. Just as the OC had regulations of divine worship within the physical temple, so the NC has regulations of divine worship within the spiritual temple.
39. The basic activities of the OC priests were regulated—they were not free to do what they wanted in the temple.
40. So too, the basic activities of NC priests, Christians, are regulated—we are not free to act as we wish in the temple (church).
41. 1Tim.3:14-15—"These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."
42. Notice, the fundamental reason Paul wrote to Timothy was to teach him how we are to behave in church.
43. This includes what officers are allowed in the church, their qualifications, and their primary responsibilities.
44. This includes the how, what, and why of church discipline, and it includes the elements of public worship (and so I want to finish this sermon with three closing exhortations).
45. Exhortation 1—Let us praise God—that is, let us enter into the worship of God with a sense of our privilege.
46. Dear brethren, God not only allows worship, but He commands worship, and He actually seeks worship.
47. Jn.4:23—"The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."
48. Exhortation 2—Let us fear God—by this I mean, let us remember who it is we approach within worship.
49. Ps.2:11—"Worship the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling"—having spoken about the activities of worship let us not forget the proper attitude in worship.
50. Exhortation 3—Let us obey God—by this I mean, let us resolve never to allow anything in worship, but what God commands.
51. You know, the issue of worship being regulated by God, actually relates to the sufficiency of Scripture.
52. Are the Scriptures sufficient to instruct us on how we are to worship God as the church gathers on His Day!
53. If you think about it, many churches today worship God in the general way He has commanded in Scripture.
54. And yet, most of these churches don't know why? Ask the average Christian why do you sing, pray, read Scripture, and hear sermons in worship?
55. And they will likely answer in one of two ways—first, they may say tradition, or else, they may admit they don't know why.
56. But here's my point! We now know why! This is why Christian churches have worshiped God in this way.
57. Because this is the way God has commanded to be worshiped! And this is why the church, for 2,000 years has worshiped God this way.

58. Thus, here's my point! Let us resolve with intelligence to worship God in the way His word commands!