

For the past few weeks, we've been engaged in a topical study on Church Life. I have suggested this life takes three directions—we are to look up (in worship), look within (in edification), and look without (in evangelism).

Last week we began to examine the first of these, and that's looking up in public worship. If you recall I suggested three things about the nature of public worship—It Takes Place in the Gathered Assembly of Christ, It Enjoys the Special Covenant Presence of Christ, It is Regulated by the Sacred Scriptures of Christ.

Thus, having addressed the broad topic of the nature of public worship, I want to return this morning to the more specific theme of the elements of public worship. In other words, what are the specific God-commanded activities that take place in worship. If God alone determines what's done in worship, what are those activities (elements) commanded by God.

And so, I desire to consider our theme, the elements of public worship, under these two simple headings: The Elements Examined, and The Elements Clarified (praying, reading, preaching, singing, and partaking – the first 4 were also true of OC worship, while the 5th is true only of NC as they NC ordinances)

- I. The Elements Examined
- II. The Elements Clarified

- I. The Elements Examined

- A. Praying

- 1. Prayer is an essential element of all worship, especially public worship, both Old and New Covenants (1Ki.18:36; 2Chron.7:15).
 - 2. 1Tim.2:1-2—"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
 - 3. V8—"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (notice the who, what, where, and how of public prayer)."
 - 4. (1) The who of public prayer, v8—"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."
 - 5. Now, the first thing I want you to notice is, v8 is specific instruction for men, and vv9-15 specific instruction for women.
 - 6. Men are to pray in public, women were to dress modestly, without excessive glamor, and learn in silence.
 - 7. Put another way, only men are to lead in prayer within the public and formal worship of God's people.
 - 8. Let me clarify—this does not mean women do not pray in public worship, it means, they do not lead in prayer.
 - 9. As the minister or appointed representative leads in prayer, he is praying on behalf of the congregation.
 - 10. It's for this reason, plural pronouns should be used—"Our Father in heaven...give us...forgive us...lead us."
 - 11. Thus, let me remind you, when prayer is offered in worship, don't check out and think you're a spectator.

12. Thus, Paul in 1Cor.14:16, speaks about a congregational "Amen" in the midst of public worship (which means 'so be it').
13. But what's very clear from v8, in contrast to vv9-15, only men are to lead in prayer in public worship.
14. (2) The what of public prayer—by this I mean, what, at least in part, are men to pray for in public worship?
15. Verses 1-2—"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
16. In other words, in part, prayer should be offered up on behalf of—"kings and all who are in authority."
17. Now, this isn't everything we should pray for, but we should pray for saving and restraining grace with regards to our national leaders.
18. The reason is then provided—"that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."
19. The imagery behind this phrase is found in the LORD'S exhortation to Israel while in Babylonian captivity.
20. Jer.29:7—"And seek peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace."
21. In other words, as Israel lived in Babylon, they were to pray that Babylon would know peace and not war.
22. Why? "For in its peace you will have peace"—that is, they would be able to lead quiet and peaceable lives.
23. Brethren, never believe the lie, that Christians are to have nothing to do with the nation they live in!
24. Many Christians have this faulty notion, because our citizenship is in heaven, we are not to concern ourselves with earthly things.
25. But brethren, this is simply not true! While we are in a sense exiled in this world, we have a responsibility to the particular nation we live in.
26. Scripture teaches us we are to honor our leaders, obey them, pay taxes, and here we're told to pray for them (yes, we are to pray for them in private and yes, we are to pray for them in public).
27. (3) The where of public prayer, v8—"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."
28. Here I'm thinking about the term "everywhere"—by which is meant, in every place there's a local church.
29. Malachi 1:11—"My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering."
30. Here the Lord foretells of a time when His name shall be great among the Gentiles, and worship shall be offered "in every place."
31. Jn.4:4:21—"The hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father."
32. In other words, there was coming a time when public worship would no longer be restricted to any one location.
33. (4) The how of public prayer—here I'm thinking of the statement "lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."
34. Now, the first thing that needs clarifying is—I don't think Paul is mandating men raise their hands in prayer.
35. The main point isn't the posture but the heart attitude—"lifting up holy hands" which are then defined "without wrath and doubting."

36. In other words, holy hands are connected to holy hearts—hearts "without wrath (anger) and doubting (disputing)."
37. Thus, the issue isn't so much, the outward position of the man that's praying, but his inward disposition.
38. Now, having said that, let me say something that I trust is obvious—the outward position is not unimportant.
39. In fact, Paul actually assumes that men, when they pray in the assembly, will pray with hands lifted to heaven.
40. Our outward position reflects our inward disposition—the one (outward) is illustrative of the other (inward).
41. And so, lifted hands illustrate the direction of our prayers and hearts—these prayers are going heavenward.
42. The same is true with regards to lifting your hands in praise (singing)—these praises are going heavenward.

B. Reading

1. Reading Scripture is an essential part of public worship, both in the Old and New Testaments (Deut.33:11).
2. 1Tim.4:13—"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine"—these are among the instructions Paul gave Timothy.
3. He was hopeful to visit Timothy, but in the meal while "till I come" "give attention" "be devoted" "to reading."
4. Now, Paul isn't exhorting Timothy to maintain good reading habits, but he's referring to the public reading of Scripture.
5. How do we know this? Because notice how the verse continues—"to exhortation, to doctrine (teaching)."
6. In other words, whatever it is that Timothy was to read, it was to serve as the basis for exhortation and teaching.
7. And because this exhortation and doctrine (teaching) was to be public, the reading of Scripture was public.
8. It's for this reason, the ESV translates this verse—"devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture."
9. Thus, Paul reminds Timothy that he must read the Holy Scriptures when the church is assembled to worship.
10. But the question might be asked—what Scripture was to be read when the church was assembled to worship?
11. (1) OT Scripture—by this I mean, Timothy (and the rest of the NT churches), had the complete OT Scripture.
12. Because most, if not all, of the NT churches were Greek speaking, it's likely he read from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Hebrew OT).
13. Acts 15:21—"For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."
14. By "Moses" is meant the first five books of the OT—they were read every OC Sabbath in the synagogue.
15. While admittedly this refers to synagogue worship and NT church worship, there were obvious similarities.
16. In fact, in many ways synagogue worship was similar to NT worship, in that they read and preached Scripture.

17. (2) NT Scripture—by this I mean, by the time Paul wrote Timothy, there were already many NT books in circulation.
18. 1Thess.5:27—"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren" Col.4:16—"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."
19. In other words, the letters were to be read in the public assembly, copied, and then passed on to the nearest church.
20. Thus, the reading of Holy Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, are an essential element of public worship.

C. Preaching

1. I trust it goes without saying, that preaching of the word is essential and central to true public worship.
2. Bruce Milne—"The sermon is the climax to our worship as we hear the living voice of God and are moved to give ourselves to Him in consecration and service."
3. 1Tim.4:13—"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine"—notice these last two words.
4. V13—"Till I come, give attention (devote yourself) to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to doctrine."
5. Other words, Timothy was to devote himself to reading, exhorting, and teaching within public worship.
6. (1) Exhortation—the Greek word translated "exhortation" is a beautiful that has a rather broad meaning.
7. It can mean to urge, encourage, correct, or comfort—it essentially refers to the "application of Scripture."
8. This is what distinguishes preaching from teaching—have you ever wondered what's the difference?
9. Well, I'm about to tell you! While preaching includes teaching (as we shall see) it includes exhortation.
10. (2) Doctrine—this word means "teaching"—it can refer both to the matter and manner of instruction.
11. In short, it refers to teaching the truths of Scripture—the doctrine of God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and last things.
12. These are the two components of preaching—exhortation and teaching—teaching the truth and applying it.

D. Singing

1. It becomes evident that congregational singing is essential to worship, both in the Old and New Testaments.
2. Col.3:16—"Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."
3. The first thing that needs to be said about this verse, is the context in which it's found in Colossians (as well as its sister passage in Eph.5:19).
4. Because it's not found in a context that discusses public worship, some have questioned whether or not it speaks about public worship.
5. But this would be wrong to conclude, because the context of Col.3:16, is a context of church relations.

6. They are to bear with one another, forgiving each other, loving each other, and being unified together.
7. In other words, vv12-15 refer to general responsibilities to each other outside of public worship, whereas, v16 describes a specific responsibility to one another within public worship.
8. Put another way, verses 12-16 describe various mutual responsibilities that take place within the church.
9. Verses 12-15 describe various responsibilities that deal with our interaction, v16 deals with public worship.
10. Thus, I was to point out three things about public singing—its content, its horizontal purpose, and its vertical purpose.
11. (1) The content of public singing—"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."
12. Most of you might know, there's been a lot of debate as to what exactly these three (psalms, hymns, and songs) mean.
13. Psalms—this refers to OT Psalms that were song in OC worship, and were also song, in early NC worship.
14. Hymns—this likely refers to hymns taken from other passages of Scripture other than the OT Psalms.
15. Spiritual songs—this likely refers to shorter rhymes or choruses that are to be sung with/by the spirit.
16. But either way, it seems evident that these three, while slightly distinguished, are very closely related.
17. It also seems evident they are all three summarized by the phrase "the word of Christ"—that is, the holy Scripture.
18. The Scripture is here referring to as "the word of Christ" because it tells us about salvation through Christ.
19. (2) The horizontal purpose of public singing—"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in (with) psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."
20. Most of you are aware of what's commonly called "the one another passages"—there's dozens of them.
21. But I would guess, that few (if any) people would appeal to Col.3:16 as one of these "one another passages."
22. But it actually is, and it's an important one—we are to teach and admonish each other through our singing.
23. (3) The vertical purpose of public singing—"singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"—ultimately speaking our singing is "to the Lord."
24. While this I trust is obvious to us all, it's a point that really needs to be stressed and underscored in our day.
25. Singing in public worship is foremostly to God—we sing for His ears—we sing out of love and gratitude.
26. Thus, before I leave this 4th element of worship (singing), let me a few words about the selection of songs.
27. What are the necessary qualifications if a song is to be sung in public worship—it must be Biblical, musical, and congregational.
28. (a) Biblical—this I trust is most evident—the songs we sing must be Biblical—they must teach us truth.
29. (b) Musical—by this I mean, the words must be put to a musical tune (melody) that allows it to be sung.

30. Now here I am not saying there's needs to be musical instrumentation, but there needs to be a melodic tune.
31. (c) Congregational—by this I mean, the tune needs to allow for the song to be sung by the church together.
32. Thus, providing the lyrics are Biblical and put to a tune that's singable by the congregation, such songs are lawful for public worship.

E. Partaking

1. By this I refer to the partaking of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper—these are ordinances as they've been ordained by Christ to be partaken of within His assembled church.
2. 1Cor.11:17:22—"When you come together as a church...when you come together in one place...when you come together to eat (v33)."
3. The Lord's Supper is a local church ordinance that's to be celebrated within the assembled local church.
4. Matt.28:19-20—"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you' and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
5. I really fear many Christians fail to understand this well-known passage, by failing to understand who it's given to.
6. Our Savior gives it to the apostles as representatives of the church and not merely to individual Christians.
7. This becomes evident as we consider the three major activities—make disciples, baptize them, and teach them.
8. In other words, people are saved, added to the church through baptism, and then taught the truth by qualified men (all of this takes place within the church).
9. Now it's true that baptism may take place outside the church building, in a river or lake, but never outside the church.
10. Baptism is an ordinance of entrance (and thus we are baptized once), whereas the Lord's Supper is an ordinance of nourishment that takes place weekly.

II. The Elements Clarified

1. Here I want to close our time with a few brief clarifications concerning the elements of public worship.
2. (1) Elements and the means of grace—here I want to remind you of something I mentioned last week.
3. It's not enough to have the right activity in worship, if you're not meeting with God through those activities.
4. It's for this reason God chooses the elements of worship, because they are ordained by Him for our good.
5. Ps.84:1—"How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God."
6. Ps.84:4—"Blessed are those who dwell in Your house they will still be praising You" v7—"They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion."
7. Ps.84:10-11—"For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand" v11—"For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."
8. John Calvin—"Believers have no greater help than public worship, for by it God raises His own people upward step by step."

9. (2) Elements and circumstances—by circumstances are meant, things that aid the elements of worship.
10. For example, an element of public worship would be the piano (or other instruments), lights, microphones, seats, etc.
11. In addition to these, further circumstances would be the time of public worship and the length of services.
12. It's up to the elders to determine such things, as they consider the needs and situation of their specific church.
13. LBC (1:6)—"We acknowledge 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, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."
14. (3) Elements and liturgy—by "liturgy" is meant the form or structure of public worship—the order of worship.
15. And again, while there's no one inspired order of worship, almost from the beginning, Christians have ordered their worship in the form of a dialog.
16. Hart—"The Covenantal pattern of Christian worship takes the shape of a dialogue between God and His people."
17. God speaks to His people in public worship (through His word), and His people respond to Him (through prayer and praise).
18. As a result, most Reformed liturgy is similar—God speaks to us (by a call to worship), we respond (by prayer), God speaks to us (by Scripture reading), we respond (by song), God speaks to us (by preaching), we respond (by song) and God speaks to us (by benediction).
19. Thus, public worship reflects a dialogue between the Covenant God of Scripture, and His covenant people.
20. In essence, God says to us "I am Your God," and we respond to Him, "We are Your people"—this is true worship. Amen.