

CORPORATE WORSHIP

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In his abounding grace, God has given His blood-bought sons and daughters one predominant glimpse and purview of heaven, the corporate gathering of true Christians on a regular basis. Heaven is the world where believers will forever live together worshiping God, praising God, serving God, fellowshiping with one another, and abounding with joy! Corporate worship here on earth should reflect, albeit in a small way, these joys that all believers will fully realize in glory! To accomplish this, a handful of elements should describe the weekly corporate worship gatherings in a local church.

1. BIBLE-SATURATED

Every local church gathering should be guided by and saturated with the Bible. The Scripture must govern all that takes place in the local assembly. All that occurs in the local church should radiate from the Scriptures and should directly tie in to the Word of God. The Word of God should permeate the sermon, the music and singing, the fellowship and conversations, the public prayers, and of course, the parking of the two ordinances (baptism and Lord's Supper). One must gather to worship to hear from God. God speaks in and through His Word. Thus, the more that the worship service is Bible-saturated, the more that God speaks to His people. Thus, everything that happens when the family of God is gathered together should be Bible-saturated.

2. CHRIST-EXALTING

Christ is the sum and substance of all theology. Every verse of the Bible leads to Christ and thus every element of Christ's church should exalt His great name! The goal of corporate worship should never elevate the worth of man and the abilities of man. Rather, the goal of worship should always be to exalt Christ and Him alone. The preeminence of Christ should permeate the entire public gathering of worshipers. The prayers should be Christ-centered and Christ-exalting. The fellowship should be centered on Christ. The ordinances should remind believers of the gospel of Christ and His saving work. The sermon should present a full Christ and a full gospel so that God's people can be conformed to the image of Christ. The music should focus on Christ, His person, His work, His grace, His sovereignty. Let everything elevate the glory of Christ!

3. SPIRIT-EMPOWERED

Nothing has any lasting value if it is devoid of the Spirit of God. Worship accomplishes nothing if the Spirit of God does not attend with power, grace, and life. This is why believers should ready their hearts before coming to corporate worship so that they are humble, ready to receive what the Spirit of God has for them, and eager to receive the Word preached and apply it to their lives. The centerpoint of corporate worship is the preaching of the Word of God. Preaching accomplishes nothing lest the Spirit empowers the preacher and goes forth with His Word with unction. No worship can please the Lord unless the worshiper offers sacrifices of praise in the power of the Spirit. Thus, every element of corporate worship should be done in

the power of the Spirit, by the will of the Spirit, in the truthfulness of the Spirit, and for the glory of God in the Spirit. Believers should pray before, during, and after corporate worship for God to bless every aspect of worship (singing, Scripture reading, prayers, ordinances, fellowship, testimonies, sermon) and for the Spirit of God to attend every facet of worship with divine power and to bring about regeneration to the lost and sanctification to the saved.

4. JOY-FILLED

The height of happiness resides in the heart of the believer who praises His Lord. The praise of God brings joy to the soul. The worship of God instills unfading joy in the worshiper. Worship should never be dry, dull, boring, lifeless, stoic or hopeless. Rather, corporate worship should permeate with joy, with life, with vigor, with passion, with zeal! Joy should define worship because God has joy in Himself and so when His people take joy in Him they receive abundant joy. The greatest joy that a true worshiper has is the elevation of the Triune God. Even the conviction of sin produces joy since it drives the sinner to the cross to behold the glory of Christ in His atoning and sufficient cross-work. The worship of ancient Israel captured the joyousness of worship. Sing for joy to the Lord, the psalmists declare repeatedly! Let all corporate worship gatherings permeate with joy *in Christ* and in *His gospel* and in *His salvation!*

5. GOD-GLORIFYING

Why does the church exist? Tragically, many contemporary ministries and so-called church gatherings on Sundays have as their goal to elevate the worth of man, to provide self-esteem, self-help, and self-praising principles to help people cope through the busy week at work. Thus, man becomes the center of corporate worship. Consequently, church serves to glorify man rather than God. But this is never the biblical purpose of corporate worship. Christ is the center of worship and God must reside as the King in every worship gathering. Worship should never strive to elevate man but it should elevate God! Gatherings should never seek to make man feel good about himself; rather, doing things biblically should drive man to despise himself seeing who he really is as a despicable and wicked worm in God's holy eyes and yet drive man to God through Christ for the glory of Christ so that all praise would be rendered unto Him alone. Let all elements of corporate worship seek to glorify God, that is, make much of God by focusing all thoughts, all minds, and driving all affections to God and His glorious Name.