



# Why Do We Do That?

*A Guide to Worship at  
Christ Church, Presbyterian*

## Philosophy of Worship

*Prepared by the Worship Committee of Christ Church, Presbyterian*

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The Shorter Catechism states, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” The chief end of the church is the same, because “the chief thing in all the world is God’s glory” (Philippians 2:9-11).<sup>1</sup> God created us to worship Him.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXI, Section 1, states: “The light of nature showeth that there is a God who hath Lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doeth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.”

Therefore, Christ Church, Presbyterian, is committed to worshiping the Triune God *via* the ordinary means of grace using historic, biblical patterns of Christian worship. In our worship we shall read the Bible, preach the Bible, pray the Bible, and sing the Bible. With the Holy Spirit’s help, our worship will be characterized by the following attributes:

- Scriptural: Bible-filled and Bible-directed (Psalm 119:104-106);
- Simple: Based on the unadorned and unpretentious principles and order found in the Bible;<sup>2</sup>
- Spiritual: Spirit-gathered (Acts 2:38-39), Spirit-dependent (Ephesians 4:7-8), and Spirit-empowered (Acts 1:8);
- Reverent: Clothed with humility, and awe for the greatness of God (1 Peter 5:5-7);
- Intelligent: Engaging, challenging and conforming the mind as well as the heart (1 Corinthians 14:15-16);
- Majestic: Reflecting the attributes of God, including: His goodness, holiness, justice, mercy and love (Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Job 36:5; Psalm 52:1; Isaiah 9:6; Zephaniah 3:17, etc.);
- Historic: Seeking to apply the principles of Scripture to our worship rather than engaging in cultural accommodation; i.e. worship that would be understandable to the Apostles and the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1).

Worshiping the living and triune God may produce deep emotional responses among participants, but our services are not designed to induce a continual emotional high. Worship at Christ Church, Presbyterian, will purposefully avoid emotional manipulation and rely instead on the promised, active presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst (Matthew 18:20).

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### Why Do We Do That?

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## Why Do We Do That? — *The Prelude*

Perhaps the most easily overlooked element of our worship service is the organ or piano prelude. After all, the service hasn't really gotten underway yet and the very name suggests that it's not really a part of the service to come, but more like the preface to something important. Besides, if we don't say "hello" to each other during the prelude, we might not have a chance to do so after the benediction, right?

But wait! While the prelude is less important than the reading of Scripture, the singing of hymns and the preaching of the Word, it serves an important purpose in our *preparation for worship*. Habakkuk 2:20 says, "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before Him." When does that silence descend on God's gathered people? During the prelude. Those brief moments before the service begins help us to "come into His presence with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise" (Psalm 100).

If you're used to entering the sanctuary when the meeting between God and His people is already well underway, make it a point to be in your seat a few moments before worship begins next Sunday. During the prelude ask the Lord to inhabit your praises, to empower the preaching, to enrich the singing, and to send His compelling Word out into our community through the congregation of Christ Church, Presbyterian. Then see if He will not "open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it" (Malachi 3:10). *Amen.*

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Choral Call to Worship*

Some elements of worship exist because God’s Word specifically requires that they must be included. For example, the public reading of Scripture is an essential part of Christian worship because such hearing of the Word is directly commanded (Deuteronomy 31:10-13; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27, I Timothy 4:13; James 1:22-23, etc.), and because both the Old and New Testaments give us ample examples (II Kings 22; Jeremiah 36; Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16-21, etc.) demonstrating that such has always been the case in the gathering of God’s people.

On the other hand, there are parts of Christian worship that are not essential, but desirable. These non-essentials may arise in a local congregation, or in a broader communion, for practical reasons that are consistent with biblical teaching and example but which are not specifically commanded in Scripture. Calvin and the Reformers called these elements “circumstantial elements,” which may be “ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed” (Westminster Confession of Faith, I:vi).

The Choral Call to Worship is a non-essential element that arose initially from a very practical consideration. For many years before the Reformation, church choirs typically entered the main doors of the church and processed down the center of the nave behind the priest or other clergy to the chancel area. The Choral Introit was sung outside the church as a means of warning the congregation that they should take their seats and clear the aisle for the procession. It was a “heads up” that the service of worship was about to begin! For centuries the choir sang or chanted an entire Psalm, but over time this was shortened to a brief excerpt of a Psalm.

In our service, there is no need to alert the congregation that the choir is about to make its “introit” (entrance) when the singers are already in the sanctuary. Instead the choir signals the beginning of worship by singing a short excerpt from a hymn or Psalm either in praise of God and His attributes, such as “God is our strength and refuge,” or in the form of a prayer, such as “Father, in Thy mysterious presence kneeling.”

In the Choral Call to Worship we have an element birthed from practical considerations that no longer exist. It is not required, but it is still helpful in establishing the beginning of reverent worship, and finds its biblical warrant under the protection of praising God and/or offering prayer to Him, both of which are required elements of scripturally sound worship.

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Scriptural Call to Worship*

When the Pastor reads the Scriptural Call to Worship it is important to know who is being called. Does God Almighty need to be called to join us in worship? No, He was there before us (Psalm 139). Nor does He need to be alerted to the fact that we've arrived. The Lord is in His holy temple, and He sees the very hearts of those who have entered (Psalm 11:4).

The Call to Worship is for us people, the slow of heart and mind. We need to be reminded as we enter the sanctuary that we enter the presence of the God of the universe and when we meet with His people we are caught up into the eternal worship around the Throne in heaven (Revelation 5:11-14). We may be a small congregation but we worship alongside thousands of people in the CSRA, millions of believers around the world, and we join the countless “ten thousand times ten thousand” saints who already surround the Throne. Corporate worship is anything but a private matter. But I digress....

The Scriptural Call to Worship used at Christ Church changes each week, and is drawn directly from God's Word. God is calling His people to worship and so it is right that we use His Word and not our own. The Pastor, in his biblical role as Christ's representative before the congregation, is the man who extends God's call to His people. The words may be a biblical command:

Oh come, let us worship and bow down  
Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. (Psalm 95:6)

Or it might be a proclamation of one of God's attributes:

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;  
And His greatness is unsearchable. (Psalm 145:3)

Beginning the service in this way reminds us that biblical worship has always been a dialogue between God and His people that He initiates, and to which we respond. He calls us to approach His throne and worship Him. We are there not because we are worthy or because God somehow needs our lisping praise, but because God has condescended to call us sinners His chosen people. *Hallelujah! What a Savior!*

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Gloria Patri and the Doxology*

In our morning services we use two of the most widely known pieces of service music in the Christian world: the *Gloria Patri* and the Doxology. Both can be characterized as “doxological elements” which means, in plain English, that they are exclamations of praise to God from His people. To read examples of doxological praise in the Scriptures, see Romans 16:27, Philippians 4:20, and Revelation 5:13.

In addition to functioning as praise, both elements are also theological, in that they strongly affirm that the three members of the Trinity are One in essence and equality. It’s hard to overstate how critical the reinforcement of that doctrine is in our day. Many of our hymns conclude with a doxological stanza. For instance, “Holy God, We Praise Your Name” ends with,

Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Three we name Thee;  
While in essence only One, undivided God we claim Thee,  
And adoring bend the knee, while we sing this mystery.

Other examples are easy to come by: “Holy, Holy, Holy,” “Come, Thou Almighty King,” “Now Thank We All Our God,” the list could fill the rest of this booklet and more! Any of these final stanzas would serve admirably as doxologies.

Even though the *Gloria Patri* and the Doxology are biblical in pattern, it’s important to note that neither are *required* elements of biblical worship. They are instead what the reformers called “circumstantial” or “prudent” (see the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1.6), meaning that they are “according to the general rules of the Word” but don’t rise to the same level of importance as the reading of Scripture, or preaching.

So, if they’re not required, why do we sing them so often? That question is best answered by another: Do we praise God too much?

To Him that chose us first, before the world began; [the Father]  
To Him that bore the curse, to save rebellious man; [the Son]  
To Him that formed our hearts anew, [the Holy Spirit]  
Is *endless* praise and glory due. (Isaac Watts)

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Prayer of Invocation*

Even though they're listed together in the bulletin, The Prayer of Invocation and The Silent Confession of Sins are actually two separate elements. Because of that we'll deal with them separately, starting with the Prayer of Invocation.

We saw that in the Scriptural Call to Worship God calls His people to worship Him through His Word. This begins a biblical dialogue between God and His people that continues throughout the worship service. In the Prayer of Invocation God's people respond to His call by imploring Him to assist us as we worship. In this way we acknowledge our inability to offer acceptable worship in our own strength, and claim the promise that by His Spirit where two or three are gathered together Christ will be present also (Matthew 18:20).

While the exact contents of the Invocation have varied through the centuries, The Westminster "Directory for the Publick Worship of God" (1644) still stands us in good stead as a benchmark:

"The congregation being assembled; the Minister, after solemn calling on them to the worshipping of the great name of God, is to begin with Prayer;

"In all reverence and Humility acknowledging the incomprehensible Greatness and Majesty of the Lord, (in whose presence they do then in a special manner appear) and their own vileness and unworthiness to approach so near him; with their utter inability of themselves, to so great a Work: And humbly beseeching him for Pardon, Assistance, and Acceptance in the whole Service then to be performed; and for a Blessing on that particular portion of his Word then to be read: and all, in the Name and Mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ."

But don't forget: the pastor isn't someone we hire to do our praying for us! It is our responsibility to pray with him as he leads us, and to fervently add our "amen" to his prayers throughout the service.

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Silent Confession of Sins*

In many quarters of evangelicalism there is a real and deep antagonism to structure in worship. Patterns and rituals are viewed as signs of coldness or spiritual deadness. However, it is clear from even a cursory glance that every congregation develops its own rituals. In matters of public prayer, the introduction of hymns, even the placement of “The Announcements” in the service all tend to fall into patterns that take on ritualistic overtones. So then, the question is not “will we have ritual?” but “will our rituals be scriptural?”

Public confession of sin, while often disdained in our own time, was an accepted element of worship in virtually every branch of Christendom from the early church through the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is biblical (read Nehemiah 9 and the Psalms). However, as the American church increasingly emphasized relaxation and spectacle in worship, and particularly the “comfort” of non-believers, confession of sins in public worship was jettisoned in favor of friendlier activities.

For us as a Reformed congregation, confessing our sins in worship is an important part of the dialogue between God and His people that is foundational to our understanding of Christian worship. At this time our confession is a time set aside for silent prayer. Do your thoughts wander in the silence? Then copy out this prayer of John Calvin and tape it in the flyleaf of your Bible.

Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, we acknowledge and confess before Thy divine majesty that we are poor miserable sinners. We were conceived and born in utter wickedness and corruption and are prone to all manner of evil and incapable by nature of doing any good. By our sinful life we transgress Thy holy commandments without ceasing, and thereby incur Thy wrath and bring down upon ourselves eternal damnation according to Thy righteous judgment.

But we are penitent, Lord, and we grieve because of our sins whereby we provoke Thy wrath. We bring accusation against ourselves and lay transgression to our own charge. Yet we make bold to desire that Thou mayest in mercy regard our miseries. Have compassion on us, most merciful God and Father, and be pleased to forgive all our sins for the sake of the passion of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ.

Grant us also the grace of Thy Holy Spirit, in order that He may teach us to confess our sins in sincerity of heart, to abhor ourselves indeed, and may lead us to the mortification of sin in our lives. For we earnestly desire to return to a life that is truly holy and righteous and that is acceptable to Thee through Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Assurance of Pardon*

The corporate confession of our sins is an important part of the dialogue between God and His people because the Bible clearly teaches that unconfessed sin disrupts our relationship with the Lord, and is a barrier to worship (Psalm 24:3-5, Psalm 32, II Chronicles 7:14). Once our sins are sincerely confessed we are able to offer acceptable worship to our holy God. But what assurance do we have that God has heard our earnest confession and has indeed forgiven our sins? How do we hear God's part in the dialogue? We have the unfailing promises of God in His word that are "yea and amen" to us at Christ Church, Presbyterian just as they were to His people of old (II Corinthians 1:20).

We must never forget that forgiveness of sins comes only through the mediation of our risen Savior, and not through the pronouncements of any man (Acts 5:31, Ephesians 1:7-10). For this reason, the Assurance of Pardon that appears in our Order of Worship each week is drawn directly from Scripture. When the Pastor pronounces the Assurance of Pardon he is appropriating it for himself as well, a believer among fellow believers.

Before the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea,  
A great High Priest Whose name is Love, Who ever lives and pleads for me.  
My name is graven on His hands; my name is writ-en on His heart;  
I know that while in heav'n He stands no tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Sa-tan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt with-in,  
Upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin.  
Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free;  
For God, the Just, is satisfied to look on Him and par-don me.

Behold Him there! the risen Lamb, my perfect, spotless Righteousness,  
The great unchangeable "I AM," the King of glory and of grace!  
One with Himself I cannot die, my soul is purchased by His blood;  
My life is hid with Christ on high, with Christ, my Savior and my God.

*Charity L. Bancroft, 1841-1923*

## Why Do We Do That? – Congregational Hymns

Perhaps the shortest answer to the question of why we sing congregational hymns is, “because that’s what Christians have always done.” The singing of congregational hymns extends back into the Old Covenant. For instance, we find Moses and the children of Israel singing to the Lord a great hymn of deliverance (Exodus 15): “The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!” The Old Testament is also peppered with the command, “Sing to the Lord!” We can safely assume that a command given nearly seventy times was indeed obeyed by God’s people.

In the New Testament it is clear that singing hymns was a regular part of Christian worship, likely carried over from the pattern of the Synagogue. Most famously we read in Matthew’s gospel (26:30) that following the institution of the Lord’s Supper Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn before they went out to the Mount of Olives. Pliny the Younger, Roman governor of Pontus, provides extra-biblical evidence in a letter he sent to Emperor Trajan in 112 or 113 A.D. “They [Christians] were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god.”

Simply defined, a hymn is a song of praise to God. A more useful definition includes the following qualifications, born out over the history of the church: 1) a metrical poem of several stanzas, 2) filled with truth that is in accord with the holy Scriptures, 3) possessing a tune appropriate to be sung by a congregation.

*Why should a hymn have several stanzas?* Even though we live in a culture of sound bites and 15-second news summaries, the truth of the gospel requires thought and meditation upon significant truths. If our hymns don’t foster such truth-thinking, what will prepare our minds and hearts to hear the Word read and preached? The sermon is the primary means of communicating the gospel in worship, but if it is surrounded with simplistic elements that neither embody nor encourage developed thought, the preaching of the Word becomes anachronistic. This may explain why many churches have replaced the sermon with a skit – it fits the surroundings better!

*Why should a hymn be filled with truth as taught in Scripture?* The sermon proclaims the gospel – hymns teach us theology. Hymns teach our heads and our hearts at the same time. They are a means by which the Word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16), and so it is of eternal importance that our hymns be rich with *truth*. What we sing in worship should allow no

room for vague references to cosmic forces, or non-biblical allusions to what we think God might say or do. Because music carries its message straight to our hearts and ingrains it in our conscious and subconscious minds, it is impossible to overstate the need for theological care in selecting hymns.

*Why should a hymn tune be “appropriate” and what does that mean?* There are two parts to this answer. First, a hymn tune is appropriate when it is singable. This speaks to matters of range, complexity, and form, and could comprise a lengthy discussion to be tackled elsewhere. Simply put, if people can’t comprehend the tune they won’t sing it, so the tune should be simple enough for a large group to learn quickly and sing well. Second, a hymn tune is appropriate when it supports the meaning and nature of the text. We could sing *Amazing Grace* to the *Gilligan’s Island Theme Song* but we don’t. Why? Gilligan’s tune doesn’t carry us in the same direction as the words of *Amazing Grace* – it distracts us from the weighty meaning of the text. All examples are not that starkly drawn. Should we sing songs about Jesus to music suitable for a dance club? Martin Luther didn’t think so. When he heard the folk tune he had borrowed for one of his hymns (“From Heaven Above to Earth I Come”) emanating from a pub, he immediately replaced it with a newly composed tune. Luther was, contrary to popular myth, “extremely cautious in protecting the word of God from any admixture of worldly elements,” and we should be too. May God help us to preach, pray and sing the Gospel through means that ring true to His Word and the eternal Gospel that it contains!

## Why Do We Do That? – Reciting Creeds

“Christian truth could not possibly be put into a shorter and clearer statement.”

Martin Luther on the Apostles’ Creed

Creeds have fallen on hard times in evangelical churches. Accused of creating divisions and erecting walls that keep people out of the church, many congregations have adopted a “no creed but the Bible” stance in which statements like the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed are deemed outdated at best and, at worst, harmful.

It is true that creeds divide: they divide truth from error, and they divide true teachers from false teachers. It is true that creeds erect walls around a church: walls of protection and clarity within which Christians may pursue the Truth of God’s holy Word in relative safety. The creeds of the church were developed to defend God’s people against heresy and to define Christian orthodoxy. The Latin word *credo* means literally, “I believe.” Has there ever been a time more prone to spiritual error than our own; or a time when it was more important for Christians to know what they believe?

Of course reciting a creed cannot insulate us completely from error, and contracts don’t keep the wolves out – only the Good Shepherd can do that – but the creeds do remind us, each time we say them, of the great “non-negotiables” of Christianity, to which we cling by faith.

We confess our faith because the Bible is confessional. Examples of God’s people confessing their faith together can be found in both the Old and New Testaments. For instance, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 we find the *Shema*, ancient Israel’s creed, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” In Philippians 2:5-11 we can read what is widely believed to be the earliest recorded Christian creed having to do with the divinity and lordship of Jesus Christ.

*The Nicene Creed* is the most widely used creed in Christendom, and dates to the Council at Nicea in 325 A.D. Composed in part to combat the Arian heresy (the belief that Jesus is a created being inferior to God the Father) the Nicene Creed strongly asserts the doctrine of the co-eternal, co-equal Trinity, and is regarded as *the* definitive statement of Christian orthodoxy. Because of its considerable length it appears in the worship of Christ Church more sparingly than the shorter Apostles’ Creed.

*The Apostles’ Creed* dates back at least to the second century A.D., and perhaps earlier. St. Ignatius, who was born about the time Christ’s earthly

ministry ended, wrote in familiar phrases that Christ was born “of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and died and was raised from the dead.” Even though it was not likely written by the Apostles, the creed bearing their name is in full agreement with the New Testament teachings of the Apostles and specifically attacks the heresy of Gnosticism.

Gnostics believe that the physical universe is evil and that God did not make it (“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth”). Because they believe that the physical realm is evil, they also deny that God took on a human body in Christ (“And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary”). Gnosticism holds that the most important Christian doctrines were mysteries reserved for a select few (“the holy catholic church” stresses the universality of all of Christ’s teachings) and they totally reject the resurrection of the body, because the body is part of the evil physical realm (“the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, *the resurrection of the body*”). If you think Gnosticism is no longer a threat to the church, read “The Da Vinci Code,” and then recite the Apostles’ Creed at the top of your lungs!

The creeds we use in worship are not the very Word of God, but they are distilled from it and true to it, and we recite them because they state in compact form all of the essentials for being a Bible-believing Christian. The creeds help us to pass along those essentials from one generation to the next, and they tie generations of believers together by laying down a specific set of fundamental truths.

## Why Do We Do That? – *Public Reading of Scripture*

Of all the elements of worship taught in the Bible, none is more frequently encouraged, demonstrated, or commanded than the public reading of Scripture. As early as the book of Exodus we find Moses taking the book of the Covenant and reading it to the people (Exodus 24). The books of Deuteronomy and Joshua also record that the spiritual life of God's people revolved around the public reading of God's law.

It's important to note that when the children of Israel departed from God's ways, and they did so with alarming regularity, they always departed from God's Word. When they returned to the Lord, they always returned to His Word. This is a connection that we ignore at our own peril.

One of the most poignant stories of the Old Testament is found in II Kings 22 (and again in II Chronicles 34), where the young king Josiah led the people back to the Lord by publicly reading to them the dust covered, long misplaced book of the law. He read it aloud with a repentant heart before all the people, great and small, and wonder of wonders – a revival broke out! “And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers” (II Chronicles 34:32).

In the early church the reading of Scripture, which included the Old Testament and the letters sent by the Apostles, was of the utmost importance. So much so that Paul's directions to his young pastor friend, Timothy, included, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching” (I Timothy 4:13). To the Thessalonians he wrote, “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers” (I Thessalonians 5:27).

But why is it so important that God's Word be read in worship? Hebrews 4:12 sums it up: “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Even if all the other elements of worship are missing, if there is none to preach or sing, still God's Word can be read and the Spirit will work through the living and powerful Word.

At Christ Church we give earnest attention to the reading of both the Old and New Testaments. Why both? “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17). This is

the basis of the Reformed view that the Old and New Testaments form a unified and complementary whole, not two independent revelations. In the fifth century, Augustine wrote that “the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New.” How true! And how fruitful our reading of God’s Word is, both in public and in private, when we embrace this reality.

## Why Do We Do That? – Expository Preaching

*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?  
And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?  
And how shall they hear without a preacher?* Romans 10:14

That preaching has always been a fundamental part of true Christian worship is not debatable. However, it may be helpful to explain the *type* of sermon you will hear most Sundays at Christ Church.

The preaching in our corporate worship is *expositional* in nature. Expository preaching expounds upon the meaning and application of a particular passage of Scripture rather than starting with a topic and finding verses to support it. Sometimes this means preaching through an entire book of the Bible a few verses each week, but it could also be worked out in a sermon series on the Beatitudes that lasts just a few weeks and doesn't include the rest of Matthew's gospel.

There are at least three things that you should expect the expositional preaching at Christ Church to include. First is *thorough preparation*. In addition to the time the Pastor has invested in his rigorous theological education, he spends a great deal of time each week studying God's Word and praying in preparation for the morning and evening sermons. John Calvin once said in a sermon about preaching,

If I should climb up into the pulpit without having deigned to look at a book and frivolously imagine "Ah well! when I get there God will give me enough to talk about," and I do not condescend to read, or to think about what I ought to declare, and I come here without carefully pondering how I must apply the Holy Scripture to the edification of the people – well, then I should be a cock-sure charlatan and God would put me to confusion in my audaciousness.

Be assured that what you hear from the pulpit at Christ Church is a product of serious preparation and much prayer.

Second, you can expect that the preaching will include *direct application* to your Christian life. Expository preaching is not an abstract exercise because "Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

You should expect to leave worship knowing how the passage preached affects you as a Christian.

Beyond preparation and application, you can expect the preaching at Christ Church to be *Spirit dependent*. The Prayer for Illumination that proceeds the Sermon each Sunday is a petition for the Holy Spirit to empower the preaching, open the hearts of the listeners, and apply God's Word to our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote, "my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Corinthians 2:4-5).

God commands preaching and promises to bless faithful exposition of the Word, and it is reckless to depend on any other method to grow the church and nurture the body of Christ. While the Pastor is always seeking to improve the preparation, delivery and application of the sermon, the essential methodology isn't up for grabs because God works through preaching, and other methods are neither commanded nor sanctioned by Him in His word.

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:22-25).

Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior (Titus 1:1-3).

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:5).

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Offering*

With very few exceptions an offering is received whenever our congregation meets for worship. “Sure,” you might say, “the bills have to get paid somehow!” and of course that would be a true statement. The money collected in the offering each week does provide the means necessary to keep the lights on and pay the staff. These funds support the work of God (Acts 4:32-35), they provide for the laborers and the work of the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 9:14; Galatians 6:6), and they help the disadvantaged (Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 11:27-30). But the offering is even more than that – it is an important part of biblical worship.

When the offering is collected in worship, there are two kinds of gifts people are putting in the plate: tithes and offerings. Tithes represent one tenth of what the Lord has provided for us, and offerings are gifts beyond the tithe. Both are Scriptural.

### *Tithing in the Old Testament*

Giving one tenth of what we have appears first in Genesis 14 where Melchisedek the priest gave Abraham (who was still named “Abram”) bread and wine, followed by a blessing from God. In response, Abram “gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:20). For those who would like to dismiss tithing as limited to the Old Testament law, it’s important to note that this seminal incident occurred about 400 years before the law was given. Abram gave a tenth apparently because he instinctively knew that he should, and he did it willingly. Tithing has nothing to do with the law or legalism, and everything to do with acknowledging God as Lord with a grateful heart. Godly men tithed before the law was given (see also Genesis 28:22). The law helped to establish the importance and relevance of tithing, but the law did not invent tithing.

### *Tithing in the New Testament*

Jesus spoke directly to tithing in Matthew 23, where he says, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” Here Christ clearly teaches that giving tithes will not earn us salvation – that’s a matter of the heart. At the same time he divinely blesses tithing when he says, “without leaving the others (tithing) undone.” The same incident is recorded in Luke 11:42. Later in Luke’s account we find

Jesus taking notice and commending a poor widow who was faithfully giving to the temple treasury (Luke 21:2-4).

Just as Jesus came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, so the tithe is not abolished but becomes a part of the law of love, because love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10). One tenth is a starting place for all of us, but we are not under law – we have a better covenant. God’s love has been poured out in our hearts. As God speaks to your heart, you will find the amount you give to His work increasing. If you find yourself fighting against the tithe, God’s word calls you to examine your heart, “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21). See also 1 Timothy 6:17-19, and Acts 20:35.

Q: Do I *have* to give 10%?

A: No. You can give 20%!

## Why Do We Do That? – Choral Anthems

Choirs, with both men and women singers (Neh. 7:67; 2 Chron. 35:25), were organized for the worship of the temple and were placed under the direction of able musicians (1 Chron. 25). Choral singing was accompanied by instruments, indeed in the temple by a full orchestra, as is also indicated in the titles of various psalms (e.g. Ps. 6). From material provided in Chronicles and the psalms themselves, we learn that Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun were directors of separate temple choirs (Heman's choir, for example, was apparently known as the "Sons of Korah.") The title, "For the Choirmaster" or "For the Director of Music," attached to fifty-five psalms, indicates that psalms or anthems, whatever may have been their origin (e.g. Ps. 51), were collected and arranged for the use of the temple choirs.

The fact that an emphasis was placed on the temple singing being directed and accompanied by trained and skilled musicians indicates that part of the reason for having a choir was to offer particularly beautiful singing to the Lord, singing that was beyond the capability of the congregation itself. Some of the most beautiful music in the world was written to be sung by the choirs of Christian churches.

Choirs are found before, during, and after the temple in the Old Testament. They are part of the temple worship, in the same way that prayer, praise, and sacrament are part of that worship, for reasons that in no way limit their use to a particular period in the history of salvation. The New Testament shows us what seem to be choirs singing in heaven, never says anything that could be taken to forbid or even discourage the use of choirs in worship, and, in any case, tells us comparatively little about how to construct a worship service, in largest part, no doubt, because that instruction had been so comprehensively given in the Old Testament. The Bible is in favor of choral singing as a part of worship.

*These paragraphs are excerpted from a longer article by Dr. Robert Rayburn, pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, Washington. The entire article may be viewed at <http://www.faithtacoma.org>.*

## Why Do We Do That? – The Choir in the Rear Gallery

*Thus says the Lord: “Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls. Jeremiah 6:16*

During the design phase for our new sanctuary the Building Committee studied and discussed, even debated, the placement of the choir at great length. With over 80% of the church buildings in our county placing the choir in front, the Committee knew that such a visible change would be hard for some to get used to. At the same time, the Committee took seriously the idea that “architecture for churches is a matter of the gospel. A church that is interested in proclaiming the gospel must also be interested in architecture, for year after year the architecture of the church proclaims a message that either augments the preached Word or conflicts with it.” (*Christ In Architecture*, Eerdmans Publishing).

So, why is the choir in the back? There are many reasons, but due to space constraints I’ll deal with what I believe are the “Three Best Reasons.”

1. **History.** Even though most modern churches place the choir facing the congregation, this practice is only about 100 years old in Reformed circles. Throughout the centuries since the Reformation the majority of choirs were either in the back or off to the side. The choirs and organs in Presbyterian and Reformed churches were moved to the front of the room when the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century revivalist movements swept the land, during which time the choir became one of many entertainments used to draw a crowd. Prior to that, choirs in the back of the sanctuary were the norm. Why?
2. **Theology.** The Roman Church has always viewed the choir as a part of the clergy. The choir processes in with the clergy and is set apart from the congregation with the priests. The reformers established a more biblical theology of the choir, placing them with the people to aid the people in their response to the read and preached Word.

A major tenet of the Reformation was that the people should *participate* in worship rather than watch worship “performed” by professionals. The dialogue between God and His people in which God speaks and the congregation responds is indispensable to biblical worship. It follows then that the best place for the choir to help the congregation respond is not facing them, singing and speaking *at* the people, but singing and speaking *with* them. So, what of it? Isn’t this just heady theology?

3. **Practical.** The church is not only an historical and theological entity, it is also the Body of Christ in the world and we must respond to the issues confronting the church in the here and now. Having said that, I would argue that the same faulty theology that moved the choir from its place of humble service (the back) to the place of performance (the front), started the degeneration of worship that has overwhelmed the church in our time. The Building Committee had the courage to respond to the prevalence of “me” worship by “asking for the old paths,” returning the choir to its position of humble service with the people of God. After all, people who want to be stars don’t tend to gravitate to the back of the room!

## Why Do We Do That? – *The Benediction*

The benediction is another element of Christian worship that reaches back through the millennia into the earliest records of God’s interaction with His people. In the Old Testament book of Numbers we find the first recorded benediction, commanded by God and assigned to the priesthood:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them:

“The Lord bless you and keep you;  
The Lord make His face shine upon you,  
And be gracious to you;  
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,  
And give you peace.”

“So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”

This practice, instituted by God Himself, carried over into the temple worship, then into the synagogues and, through the early church, to us. Benedictions are always scriptural, because they are not the Pastor’s words to us, but God’s words to His people. When the Pastor, as God’s representative in worship, raises his hands and pronounces the benediction (*bene* = good; *dictio* = speaking) he is giving us “good words” from our heavenly Father as we go out from worship to serve Him for another week.

And why does the Pastor raise his hands when he pronounces the benediction? In Leviticus 9:22, we find that “Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people and blessed them.” And in the New Testament, we see Christ Himself blessing His disciples shortly before His ascension: “And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them” (Luke 24:50).

If you’d like to dig a bit deeper you’ll find other biblical benedictions in 2 Corinthians 13:14, and Ephesians 3:20-21.

## Why Do We Do That? – Concluding Thoughts

Christ Church, Presbyterian does not promise you the most professional service in Augusta. We can't promise you the best choir, the best sermon, or the richest surroundings, but we can promise you before God that every element in our service has been carefully thought through and has a Biblical warrant for being there, and that the order in which the service progresses will follow biblical logic – not human logic or imagination.

Even taking such care to be biblical does not guarantee that our worship will be acceptable in God's sight. The Psalmist wrote, "The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite heart" (34: 18). Later he writes, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise" (51:17). In Isaiah the Lord says, "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

These passages and many others serve as a warning that we can do everything just so but if our hearts are proud, if we lack a contrite and humble spirit, God will find all of our propriety and planning entirely unacceptable. May the Lord grant to us all a humble heart and the attending blessing of worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24) both now, and in the world to come. *Amen.*

# Notes

# Notes



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