

What is *Reformed* Worship

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Reformed Worship is Reverential | Handout #7

Summary

This unit of study is intended to teach the basic the mood, tenor, and attitude of reverence in the worship found in the Scriptures.

A Counter-Cultural Mood

—When we teach that worship is a reverential approach to God, we are at odds with our feel-good, psychologically therapeutic, and affirming culture. Sadly, this mood is also at odds with the broad culture of *Christian* churches. As goes the culture, so goes the church. For example, our culture is infatuated with therapy and self-help, but not in a confrontational, “judgmental” way. The result is wrapping up therapy under the guise of Scripture with informal, upbeat worship.

—Our reverential service to the Lord is a break from our worldly “norm.” Worship is a time that is set aside from our worldly labors, cares, and toils. As we assemble, we do so in a mood that gathers our thoughts and sets them aside for the worship event: “casting all your anxieties upon him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). We come to publicly set aside our anxieties, our worries, and our stresses to give ourselves wholly to God, laying our lives down as a “living sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1).

—*Apostolic Constitutions* 2.7, 57

...In like manner, let the deacon oversee the people, that nobody may whisper, nor slumber, nor laugh, nor nod; for all ought in the church to stand wisely, and soberly, and attentively, having their attention fixed upon the word of the Lord...As to the deacons, after the prayer is over, let some of them attend upon the oblation of the Eucharist, ministering to the Lord’s body with fear. Let others of them watch the multitude, and keep them silent...After this let the deacon pray for the whole Church, for the whole world, and the several parts of it, and the fruits of it; for the priests and the rulers, for the high priest and the king, and the peace of the universe. After this let the high priest pray for peace upon the people, and bless them, as Moses commanded the priests to bless the people, in these words: “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make His face to

shine upon thee, and give thee peace.” Let the bishop pray for the people, and say: “Save Thy people, O Lord, and bless Thine inheritance, which Thou hast obtained with the precious blood of Thy Christ, and hast called a royal priesthood, and an holy nation.” After this let the sacrifice follow, the people standing, and praying silently; and when the oblation has been made, let every rank by itself partake of the Lord’s body and precious blood in order, and approach with reverence and holy fear, as to the body of their king.

Old Covenant v. New Covenant Worship?

—This merging of the culture and the church has caused churches to believe that worship in the Old Testament was formal and reverent, while worship in the New Testament is spontaneous and exuberant.

—A cursory glance of the book of Hebrews, though, teaches us that the attitude of New Covenant worship is both bold and reverent:

—“With confidence,” we are to “draw near to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16).

—This confidence is not arrogance, though, since it is with our weaknesses, temptations, and sins (Heb. 4:15), that we come boldly because “we have a great high priest” (Heb. 4:14).

—Our boldness is in Christ. We know that the Father will hear us because Christ “was heard because of his reverence” (Heb. 5:7). Because Christ “offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb. 9:15) we can now worship.

—Our boldness is in “reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29). The God worshipped in the Old Testament as a “consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24) is the same God who *is* a consuming fire in the New.

—This reverence, or, “fear of the Lord,” is one of the benefits of the New Covenant, which the LORD promised to place in the hearts of his people for their good (Jer. 32:38-41).

A Vocabulary of Reverence

—The general terms for worship

—Old Testament: *‘abodab* (“service”), which comes from the same root as *‘ebed* (“slave, servant;” Ex. 3:12, 21:1-6, 23:25; Pss. 89:3, 20, 116:16). This word speaks of servants of the great King who come to offer him the service, he desires and deserves.

—New Testament: *latreuo* and *latria* (“service, worship;” Acts 7:42, 24:14, 26:7; Rom. 1:9, 2:37, 9:4, 12:1, 15:16; Phil. 3:3; Heb. 8:5, 9:9, 10:2; Rev. 7:15, 22:3).

—The specific terms for worship

—Old Testament: *histabawa* (“prostrate”). Whereas the Hebrew term *‘ebed* is used for “serving” the LORD, *histabawa* is used of the worship offered to the LORD in accordance with his Word (Gen. 24:52, 27:29, 49:23; 2 Chron. 7:3, 29:29).

—New Testament: *proskunein* (“to fall on the ground in adoration”) expresses the honor given to men, it is also in a peculiar manner, the honor given to God (Matt. 4:9-10, 14:33; Mark 15:19; John 4:21-24; Acts 10:25).

Some Ways of Manifesting Reverence

—**Using silence** (Ex. 3:5; Ps. 46:10).

—**The law/confession.**

—**Singing the full range of Psalms.**

—**Listening intently to the reading and preaching of the Word.**

—*Westminster Confession of Faith* 21.5:

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God.

—*Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q&A 157:

How is the Word of God to be read?

The holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.

—**Kneeling in prayer** (1 Kings 8:54; Ezra 9:5).

—**Bowing the head** (Neh. 8:6).

—**Lifting of hands**

— Moses stretched out his hands in interceding for Pharaoh (Ex. 9:29), Solomon did so in praying a prayer of adoration at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:22), the congregation raised their hands and shouted “Amen and Amen” when the law was read (Neh. 8:6), and the people called upon

the priests in the Temple to raise their hands to the LORD in intercession as well as benediction (Ps. 134:2).

—A universal human expression:

“Besides, this attitude has been generally used in worship during all ages; for it is a feeling which nature has implanted in us, when we ask God, to look upwards, and has always been so strong, that even idolaters themselves, although in other respects they make a god of images of wood and stone, still retained the custom of lifting up their hands to heaven. Let us therefore learn that the attitude is in accordance with true godliness, provided that it be attended by the corresponding truth which is represented by it, namely, that, having been informed that we ought to seek God in heaven, first, we should form no conception of Him that is earthly or carnal; and, secondly, that we should lay aside carnal affections, so that nothing may prevent our hearts from rising above the world (John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:8*).

—What is the meaning of raising ones hands? Notice how Lamentations 2:19 is instructive. After calling the people to “cry out” and “pour out” their hearts to the LORD, Jeremiah says, “Lift your hands to him.” The lifting of hands is an outward expression of the heart, of crying out to God (cf. Lam. 3:41; Ps. 28:2, 63:4, 77:2, 143:6). It is a physical way we reach out to God in our time of need. As well, it is a visible way we call upon “Our Father *who art in heaven*.” Psalm 119:48 even says that lifting of ones’ hands because of God’s Word is appropriate. The raising of the hands was also the offering of spiritual sacrifices (Ps. 141:2 cf. Heb 13:15).