

HEALTHY TENSIONS IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

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I. Introduction

- A. Conversations about worship often produce much more heat than light.
1. The act of worship is innate, but knowing how we're to worship God isn't.
 2. People view worship in a number of seemingly paradoxical or at least contrasting ways.
 3. Every generation is responsible to examine their practices, traditions, and beliefs of worship against God's Word.
- B. Different reasons we tend to "take sides" in worship discussions:
1. We don't like being wrong.
 2. We tend to idolize our preferences and practices.
 3. We associate worship more with what we do than what God has done
 4. We look at worship through the lens of systematic rather than biblical theology
- There is only one worship war, and it is between God and Satan, each the supreme object of someone's worship, either redeemed or lost. We are self-absorbed when we use the "war" word as a working term for the petty and overly self-indulgent skirmishes that we enter, almost always over transient, not eternal, things. (Harold Best, *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, pg. 60)
- C. We must not be afraid to dialogue with and learn from those who disagree with us.
1. Prone to read what we agree with.
 2. Take time to discerningly read outside your theological comfort zone – Reformed, Charismatic, Emerging
- D. There are certain truths about worship that don't exist in tension with other truths, but rather oppose falsehood.
1. Worship must be directed to the God of Scripture, not a god of our own making. Overemphasizing one aspect of worship can result in a distorted view of God.

2. Worship centers on God's saving work through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
 3. God's Word, not our preferences or opinions, governs our worship.
 4. God alone determines how we approach Him, what we call Him, and how we relate to Him.
- E. However, there are a significant number of perspectives and nuances that exist in healthy tension as we worship God.
1. Some, if not many, have an order or priority to them.
 2. Typically see one side as "bad" the other as "good." Both are essential to a biblical understanding of worship.
 3. Scotty Smith - The key word is not balance, but faithfulness.

II. Healthy Tensions

<p>Transcendence of God (Is. 6:1-6) God is distant, other Holiness and righteousness "Holy, Holy, Holy" Cathedral</p>	<p>Immanence of God (Heb. 4:14-16) God is near, Emmanuel Mercy and grace "Jesus, Friend of sinners" Store front church Both: Is. 54:5; Is. 57:15</p>
<p>Head (Jn. 4:22, Col. 3:16) "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" Teaching, Didactic, Mental Doctrine "Immortal, Invisible"</p>	<p>Heart (Mt. 15:7-9, Col. 3:16) "with thankfulness in your hearts to God" Experiencing, Affective, Emotional Devotion "I Love You Lord" Both: Mt. 22:37</p>
<p>Prostration (Heb. 12:28-29; Rev. 1:17) "in reverence and awe" "let us worship and bow down" Ps. 95:6</p> <p>Reflects the meaning of the most common Hebrew and Greek words for worship.</p>	<p>Celebration (Ps. 150, Ps. 100) "trumpet...harp...tambourine...dance!" "let us make a joyful noise!" Ps. 95:1</p> <p>Reflects the tone of many Psalms and the reality that the tomb is empty.</p> <p>Both: Ps. 2:11 "rejoice with trembling" Mt. 28:8 "fear and great joy"</p>
<p>Vertical (Mt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10) "making melody to the Lord"</p> <p>Glorification "Crown HIM with many crowns" Can lead to Gnosticism, individualism, and spiritual pride</p>	<p>Horizontal (1 Jn. 4:7-12; 1 Cor. 14:26) "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." Edification "His glories now WE sing" Can lead to emotionalism, man-pleasing, and a social gospel Both: Rom. 15:5-7</p>

<p>Internal (Phil. 3:3; Jn. 4:24) “worship by the Spirit of God” “Holy is the Lord”</p> <p>“Our minds are to be stirred with truth rather than our feet being animated by rhythm. The latter may accompany the former but must never exist without it.” (Alistair Begg, <i>Graven Mistakes</i>, p. 75) Both: Ps. 63:3-4</p>	<p>External (Ps. 47:1; Ps. 95:6; 1 Tim. 2:8) “with all my being!” “we stand and lift up our hands”</p> <p>“The English word worship is used to translate certain Hebrew and Greek terms in Scripture, which designate a specific bodily gesture, expressing an attitude of grateful submission, praise, or homage to God.” (David Peterson, <i>Engaging with God</i>, p. 55)</p>
<p>Planned (Mt. 6:7 1 Cor. 11:17-34)</p> <p>Opposing view seen as transient, exhausting, and temporary</p> <p>Strengths: thoughtful, consistent, thematic, responsive to the broader needs of the church</p> <p>“Forms are a means to an end, and if they are constantly changing they obscure the end rather than lead to it.” (Hughes Oliphant Old, <i>guides to the Reformed Tradition</i>, p. 162)</p>	<p>Spontaneous (1 Cor. 14:29-32; 1 Th. 5:19-21)</p> <p>Opposing view seen as stale, boring, and irrelevant.</p> <p>Strengths: can change direction to suit the need of the moment; fosters awareness of God’s active presence; contributes to a present dependence on the Holy Spirit</p> <p>“A man ought not to be so confined by any premeditated form as to neglect any special infusion, he should so prepare himself as if he expected no assistance, and he should so depend upon divine assistance as if he had made no preparation. (Isaac Watts, <i>A Guide to Prayer</i>, p. 183)</p> <p>Our plans are not the Holy Spirit. Both: 1 Cor. 14:39-40</p>
<p>Giving to God (Ps. 135:1; 66:2)</p> <p>Focus on our actions (praise, obedience, offerings, gratefulness) Expectation from God The work of the people</p> <p>Strengths: emphasizes our responsibility, sacrifice, and obedience</p> <p>Can drift towards works-righteousness and emotionalism</p> <p>True worship involves a response.</p>	<p>Receiving from God (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 4:7)</p> <p>Focus on God’s actions (atonement, Word, sacraments) Invitation from God The work of the triune God</p> <p>Strengths: emphasizes God’s initiative, sovereignty, and enabling</p> <p>Can drift towards apathy, fatalism, and self-centeredness</p> <p>God has acted before we gather.</p>

<p>Directive (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18) Biblically faithful Emphasis on transforming How does God want to change us through the Gospel?</p>	<p>Reflective (1 Cor. 12:4-14) Culturally representative Emphasis on expressing How does God want to display the Gospel uniquely through the gifts in our church?</p>
<p>Rooted/Historic/Liturgical (Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:15) Other view seen as unbiblical, dangerous, man-pleasing, and compromising.</p> <p>“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death (G.K. Chesterton, <i>Orthodoxy</i> 64-65).</p> <p>“A right use of the knowledge of historical forms of Christian worship could assist us in the twentieth-century American church by helping us to break free from bondage to our own culture.” P. 320, Jeffrey Myers, <i>The Lord’s Service</i>.</p> <p>Strengths: comprehensive, unaffected by fads, regulates the theological diet of the congregation, guards against doctrinal impurity, helps people develop a collective memory through repetition</p> <p>We shouldn’t expect non-Christians to be totally comfortable with our meetings. .</p> <p>All meetings are liturgical to some degree.</p>	<p>Relevant/Contemporary/Emerging (1 Cor. 9:22) Other view seen as unbiblical, boring, rigid, insensitive, and out-of-touch.</p> <p>“At its best, contemporary worship was born not simply out of a desire to swap the organ for a guitar, but out of an intense longing to somehow move from the casual, disinterested reciting of creeds and singing of hymns into an authentic time of loving and grateful interaction with the One who shed his blood for us.” (Joe Horness, <i>Exploring the Worship Spectrum</i>, pg. 102)</p> <p>“Though the limiting to a constant set form of words is justly disapproved, serious, pious and well-composed patterns of prayer may yet be greatly used in order to form our expressions and furnish us with proper praying language. And I wish the assistances that might be borrowed from these were not as superstitiously abandoned by some persons as they are idolized by others. (Isaac Watts, <i>A Guide to Prayer</i>, p. 71)</p> <p>Strengths: responsive, culturally engaging, more natural, more easily accessible</p> <p>The concern is not familiarity but intelligibility.</p> <p>Both: Mt. 15:32</p>

<p>Excellence/Skill (1 Chron. 15:22, Ps. 33:3; 1 Chron. 25:7) Emphasis on practice, rehearsals, and gifting</p> <p>Associated with orchestras, trained organists and paid musicians</p> <p>Bach B Minor Mass</p> <p>Can drift towards arrogance, formalism, and art-worship</p>	<p>Authenticity/Love for the Lord (Ps. 51:17; Ps. 147:10-11) Emphasis on sincerity, engagement, and heart</p> <p>Associated with 22 year old guitarists, kid's choirs, and volunteers</p> <p>Amazing Grace</p> <p>Can drift towards sentimentalism, sloth, and pride in "genuineness"</p> <p>Excellence has multiple meanings. Both: Ex. 36:2</p>
<p>Corporate (Heb. 12:22-24; Ps. 111:1; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet. 2:9-10) "who gave himself for us...to purify for himself a people"</p> <p>"The thought that the Church at worship is an accidental convergence in one place of a number of isolated individuals who practice, in hermetically sealed compartments, their own private devotional exercises, is foreign to the New Testament picture." (Donald Whitney, <i>Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life</i>, p. 77)</p>	<p>Individual (Ps. 63:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:14-20; Ps. 23) "who loved me and gave himself for me"</p> <p>"When Jesus Christ died, He literally had my name in His mind. He actually knew the one for whom He was dying." (Jim Eliff, <i>The Glory of Christ</i>, p. 84)</p> <p>Both: Ps. 35:18</p>
<p>Event (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 10-14; Acts 2:42) "When you come together" Liturgy OT Covenant Renewal continuity</p> <p>"There is a difference between what we do to the glory of God and what we do in the special activity of worship." (Edmund Clowney, <i>The Church</i>, p. 126)</p>	<p>All-of-life (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Amos 5:21-24) "Whatsoever you do" Life Categories transformed by the Gospel</p> <p>"In the New Testament there is a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship. And there is, at the same time, a radical intensification of worship as an inward, spiritual experience that has no bounds and pervades all of life." (John Piper, <i>Worship God!</i> 9/9/97 Sermon)</p> <p>Both: Heb. 13:15-16</p>

<p>Build the Church (1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:11-16) Instruction, community life, maturity is expected</p> <p>Can tend towards “Christianese,” lack of evangelism, and stagnation</p>	<p>Reach the Lost (1 Cor. 14:24-25; Psalm 67) Evangelism, salvation testimonies, altar calls, immaturity is expected</p> <p>Can tend towards shallow teaching,, lack of distinctiveness from the world, the church “in the world and of the world”</p>
<p>For God (Ps. 115:1) For God in its End “The primary reason we’re redeemed is to worship God – not to make us happy.”</p> <p>“We worship God because He is worthy and not because we as worshipers get something out of it.”</p>	<p>For Us (Ps. 37:4; 2 Cor. 3:18) For us in its Effect “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”</p> <p>“My soul will be satisfied...and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.” Ps. 63:5 Worshipping God is meant to make us humble, holy, and happy. Both: Ps. 40:16</p>
<p>Already (Heb. 12:22-24) “Though you do not now see him, you... rejoice with joy” (1 Pet. 1:8).</p> <p>Deposit guaranteeing...</p>	<p>Not Yet (Rev. 21:1-4) “They will see his face...and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4-5).</p> <p>...our inheritance</p> <p>This life is a brief preparation for an eternal occupation.</p>

III. Things to remember when your church is experiencing more tension than health:

- A. Distinguish between major and minor issues.
- B. Seek to understand those with a different perspective before challenging them.
 - 1. Don't carelessly lump neutral practices with errant theology.
 - 2. Sometimes people hold to a right perspective for the wrong reasons.
- EX Wanting to sing hymns because they're familiar or sentimentally appealing, rather than because of the rich truths they might contain.
- C. Always seek to address issues biblically and theologically.
- D. Different perspectives can sharpen our own thinking.
- E. Truth presented humbly glorifies God more than truth presented arrogantly.
- F. These truths must not only be taught and retaught, but modeled.