



Worship Philosophy Oasis of Truth Church

Scripture recounts many examples of public worship services, but does not list a set of requirements for those services. While this absence of a "divinely ordained order of service" allows some room for flexibility, creativity, and personal preference, we can infer from the Scripture a relatively clear picture of the elements that should be included in a worship service, even if the extent and emphasis of those elements must remain a decision about which godly men and leaders of churches will differ.

Considering church history when making these decisions is also helpful. While we do not consider church history to be regulative in this matter (or in any matter--see "Worship Services in the Early Apostolic Church" and "Importance of Studying Church History" at <http://oasisoftruth.org/resources/history>), an understanding of what godly men in the past have decided on this issue (and which excesses led to difficulties) will be instructive. Note that the elements included in our services mirror those which (from what we can tell) were present in the apostolic church. Once again, this is not because we strive to follow the historical church but because both we and the early apostolic church follow Scriptural example, principle, and mandate.

It is important to note at this point the difference between personal and corporate worship. Much more flexibility exists in personal worship since the very living of our lives to please God is an act of worship. This philosophy centers, though, on corporate worship, so all of the elements discussed are overt, explicit acts of worship rather than the implicit ones which should be present in every facet of our individual lives.

While there are certainly other elements that could legitimately be a part of a corporate worship service, the primary elements that are present in Scriptural worship services (and those that will be emphasized at Oasis) are (in no particular order): public reading of scripture, prayer, preaching, communion, and music. We will consider each in turn.

Public Reading of Scripture

We place a very high priority on the public reading of Scripture at Oasis because we place a very high priority on Scripture itself. During the planning of our ministry and throughout its daily operations, our mantra has been (and continues to be), "We just want to do what the Scripture says." While we are not by any means anti-traditional, we are against any tradition that infringes in any way upon Scriptural authority. If "no one" does something a certain way, but the Scripture says to do it that way, we will do what Scripture says because it is our ultimate authority.

Because of our insistent stance on Scripture and its authority, we want to bring the Scripture before the people on a regular basis. We sincerely believe that God's Word is living, active, sharp, piercing, and discerning (Hebrews 4:12) and that it gives all answers to all questions that "pertain to life and godliness" (II Peter 1:3 ESV). Given the centrality of Scripture to our beliefs and the early church's example of public reading of Scripture, it would be easy to conclude that this practice should be followed in our worship services.

Our primary reasons for emphasizing Scripture reading, though, are based directly on Scripture (as is our intent for every decision made at Oasis). First, public Scripture reading is a practice followed both by Christ (Luke 4:14-21) and by the Apostles (Peter—Acts 2, Stephen—Acts 7, Paul—Acts 13, James—Acts 15). Second, we are given Scriptural evidence of the importance of Scripture: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17 ESV). Third, and most important, we have a clear Scriptural mandate for the public reading of Scripture. I Timothy 4:13a states, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture” (ESV). Paul’s command couldn’t be any clearer. We must be reading Scripture publicly.

Preaching

In addition to the public reading of God’s Word, Oasis places a high importance on the systematic teaching and preaching of God’s Word. I Timothy 4: 13-16 emphasizes the centrality of careful teaching that is the result of the immersion of the teacher into the Word. This focus on preaching is the result, once again, of our view of the Scripture as the ultimate authority of our teaching and practice. If it is important that our people hear the Word of God read, it is even more important that they hear the Word of God explained and that they learn to study and to understand the Word of God for themselves. (This goal of the preaching ministry of Oasis flowing down into small groups and further into families and individuals is more thoroughly explained in the teaching philosophy.) While the other regular elements of the worship service (Scripture reading, prayer, and music) are certainly elements of worship in and of themselves, they can also be (and we strive to make them be, when possible) amplifiers of the message of the preaching. In that way, preaching is the central element of the worship service at Oasis.

Prayer

I Thessalonians 5:18 commands the believer to be in a constant state of prayer, and there is no reason that state of being should change when a worship service begins. More specifically, though, we believe that corporate prayer is an important element of corporate worship. Corporate prayer should be as humble, simple, sincere, and focused toward God as private, personal prayer. Longwinded, showy prayers are ineffective at best and a show of pride at worst (Matthew 6:5-8). This pride flies in the face of the beautiful picture of dependence upon God that is one of the primary benefits of prayer.

Yet, clearly this command does not preclude public prayer because in verse 9 not only does Christ pray in public, but his “model” prayer is obviously intended for public use because all of the pronouns (Our, us, we, etc.) are plural! The example of the Apostolic church is that corporate prayer was a regular function of their meetings (Acts 2:42-44, 4:31). The early church also met for special occasions of public prayer when one of their number was in dire need (Acts 12:5-11). In addition, corporate prayer brings a body of believers together and imparts the unity in which we are commanded (by Ephesians 4) to live. II Corinthians 1 is an interesting example of a church being blessed and unified because of their corporate prayer for Paul in his difficulties.

Sadly, too often proud, showy prayers that seek to draw attention to the one offering prayer rather than the One to Whom it is offered can rob the church of this unity of common dependence upon God. Instead, humble, sincere prayer offered to God before the congregation pleases God and yields unity. Every public meeting of Oasis includes a time of corporate prayer.

Communion

Communion, or the observance of the Lord's Supper, is an extremely important component of corporate worship. At Oasis our desire is to commemorate our Lord's sacrifice frequently but not so often that the practice is likely to become routine or rote. We do believe that to take the Lord's Supper out of a sense of duty or obligation or in a flippant manner not regarding the unity of the body is not only sinful but is dangerous to one's physical and spiritual well-being (I Corinthians 11:27).

The purpose of Communion is a visible, tangible representation and remembrance (not an actual physical or spiritual presence) of the breaking of the body and the shedding of the blood of our Lord. This remembrance not only serves as a reminder for the church of what was done for her but proclaims the Lord's death to the church and her surroundings until our Lord returns (I Corinthians 11:23-26). Because of the warning against observing the Lord's Table unworthily, regular observance also provides an opportunity for thorough self-examination so that we can identify and confess any practices in our lives that detract from the unity of the body.

Music

Definition of Terms:

For the purposes of this statement, the following definitions of terms will be used. When these terms appear in the text, they will be italicized to remind the reader to read these terms as defined here and not necessarily as they are typically used.

Lyric: the text component of *song* that contains the message and is the central and primary of the two components

Music: the purely *musical* (non-*lyrical*) component of *song* which must be offered in such a way that it amplifies and does not distract from the *lyric*

Perform: to offer *song* to God in a public setting; focus must always be on achieving the purposes and goals outlined below and never on drawing attention to oneself or one's abilities

Song: the synergy of *lyric* and *music*

Concise Statement:

We believe that the primary purpose of *song* in the church is to glorify and worship God (I Chronicles 16:9, II Chronicles 5:12-14, Psalm 9:11, 47:6-7, 100:2, Isaiah 42:10, Romans 11:36, James 5:13). While offerings of *song* offered by individuals or small groups certainly can and do glorify God, we believe that the foundation of *song* in the church is and must be congregational singing because this seems to be the primary example of the early church and seems to be the emphasis of the commands of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19. We believe that a secondary purpose of *song* in the church is to teach, admonish, and edify the members of the body but that this must always be done in such a way the primary emphasis is on glorifying God and not on pleasing man. We believe that *lyric* is the central component of *song* in the church. As such, *song* with an aesthetically pleasing *musical* setting that contains vain, humanistic, or theologically inaccurate *lyric* must not be considered for use in

the church. We believe that the primary purpose of *music* in the church is to amplify *lyric* and that the ultimate foible of *music* in the church is to distract from the *lyric* and draw attention to the *music* itself or to the *performer*. That being said, Scripture mandates that *music* be *performed* skillfully (Psalm 33:3b) and that it be *performed* with vigor (Psalm 33:3b) and joyfully (Psalm 100:2). Therefore, we believe that *song performed* before the church body should be offered after diligent practice (II Samuel 24:24) and to the best ability of the *performer* (Ecclesiastes 9:10) as an offering of praise regardless of the *musical* ability of the *performer*. We also believe that a musical style should be chosen that will not hinder the congregation and *performer* in their desire to offer vigorous, joyful praise.

Discussion of Styles of Song:

We believe that the existence of a variety of styles of *song* provides an opportunity to glorify God and edify believers in a multitude of ways and that the variety helps to inhibit the worshippers from falling into a stagnant state where *song* is offered not with the joyful vigor of true worship but by mere rote or tradition. We embrace a multitude of styles of *song* both in the *lyric* used (concise offerings of praise, deep, doctrinal hymnody, ballads of the experience of God's grace, etc.) and in the *music* used (a variety of *musical* styles). We believe that *music* without *lyric* can communicate but that the separation from *lyric* severely limits *music's* ability to communicate. For instance, we believe that *music* has the inherent ability to communicate imprecise emotional mood (i.e. sorrow, joy, varying levels of intensity) but not specific characteristics (love, hate, purity, immorality) without the aid of *lyric* or a learned association. We reject the claims of musicologists and musical performers who claim *music's* ability to communicate extremely specific messages and even control minds as attempts to over-inflate the importance of their discipline. Decisions about *musical* styles to use in the church must be made prayerfully, wisely, and culturally with the admonition that "all things are not profitable" (I Corinthians 10:23) always in mind. *Musical* styles which distract the body from the message of the *lyric* or draw attention to the *performer* or to the *music* itself are musical styles which must not be used in the church. Obviously, practical decisions will have to be made by the church leadership on this matter since *musical* styles, methods of *performance*, and cultural relevance and association will be constantly changing. Above all, the decision of which *musical* style to use must be based on both the purpose of *music* itself (to amplify *lyric* in *song*) and on the purpose of *song* (to glorify God and edify believers) while observing the pitfall of *music* which is to distract from that which it is intended to amplify.