

O Come, Let Us Worship – I

Aspects of Corporate and Cultural Worship

Introduction – So, you’ve come to church. What does that mean? Where do we turn to define this gathering? How are we to evaluate what goes in to this service, and how are we to think of ourselves in this gathering?

As in everything, the Word of God must direct our answers, and especially it must regulate our worship. But the Word does not come to us like a training manual or a curriculum guide. It comes to us presupposing our reverence and fear of the Lord, for only then will we begin to receive wisdom.

Brief Exposition of Psalm 95 – Our worship is to be full of singing, shouting, joy, thanksgiving, and psalms (vv1-2). Our worship is to be a response to the revealed knowledge of our Creator (vv3-5). Our worship is our devoted service to our Covenant Head; He is our God and we are His people (vv 6-7). Our worship is never based on our previous confession, but our confession and service “Today” (v 7b). It must be rooted in faith that is expressed in faithful works, trusting always in the God of Creation and Covenant and not in our own strength. Our worship may never be presumptuous (vv 8-11).

Corporate Worship – “O come, let us worship” we are told in Psalm 95. The gathering of the saints together is at the heart of Christian worship and is not to be forsaken (Heb 10:25). The ultimate worship time is not when you can get away all by yourself, unless the god you are ultimately worshipping is yourself.

Sheep and Goats – To emphasize the ‘corporate-ness’ of worship is not to lessen the importance of individual faith. Reformation of the church must begin with individuals. It is the individual who will give an account for every idle word (Matt 12:36f). Jesus will be separating goats from His sheep. But those who are His elect will constitute corporately one body, one bride, not many bodies, or many brides. One rampant sin that individuals must repent of individually is the sin of individualism. We are organically connected to Christ (John 15:1) and to one another (1 Cor 12:26).

Assembled Order – We live in a day that worships ‘spontaneity’ as more virtuous than well-planned order. We live in a day when breezy informality is considered to be more sincere than solemnity and formal celebration. But lack of ‘order’ (*taxis* in the Greek) is why the Corinthians were being chastised (1 Cor 14:40), while ‘order’ in the church at Colosse was commended (Col 2:5). The assembled order of Jerusalem was a thing of beauty and glory to God and His people (Ps 122), and we are the New Jerusalem.

Conclusion – While we come and are cleansed, saved and sanctified as individuals, we are baptized into the body of Christ. We are connected to the historical church and we are to understand much of the Lord’s instructions as instructions *to us*. This has several implications.

God-Centered Worship – Everyone who is asked “whom is worship for” knows how the question is to be answered. Certainly, our service does not look like the ‘seeker-friendly’ types now so popular. Psalm 95:6 instructs us to ‘kneel before the Lord, our maker’. Our worship is to God, for God, and according to the instructions of God. But, let’s be careful not to fall into the other ditch. This gathering of God’s people is initiated by Him, and it is for His beloved. This is the place of covenant renewal, where God rejoices over us with singing as well (Zeph 3:14-17). Therefore, we should see the whole service as something initiated and coordinated by God to which we respond.

Renewing Our View of the Order of Service – The Call to Worship, then, is God’s call, coming through His appointed elders. The Confession of Sin is God’s cleansing of His people – we can’t gather on holy ground wearing dirty shoes. The time of prayers and of the Word preached can be considered our consecration, a time where God equips, strengthens, and prepares His people – these are His sheep and He is the Good Shepherd leading us to greener pastures. Communion is the time where God nourishes His people – He brings them to His Table, to His feast. The Benediction is the final Commissioning in the service – placing His name upon us again, He sends us to the good works appointed by Him.

God-Centered Worship – does not mean that we act as though we have no need to receive. It does mean that we are not providing a cheap form of entertainment to fill our Sunday (Mal 1:8). *“Entering His presence to seek His mercy, to receive His gifts, to listen humbly to His Word and to feed thankfully at His table – that is genuine Christian theocentrism”* – Leithart.

Culture-Changing Worship (Rom 12:1-2) – We are to be changed by this worship, offering our bodies as living sacrifices (so we die), and being transformed by the Word and presence of God (so we live). Getting our worship right here, therefore, is the first and most important step in transforming families, reaching out in evangelism and missions (even if they are not here right now).

Removing the Sacred/Secular Distinction – When worship is understood this way, we do not see this time as a small offering of my week to appease God. I gather on the Lord’s Day because all seven are His. I tithe because everything I own is His. I don’t leave here to go do something else. Our worship leaves us in the same place as Isaiah *“Here am I, send me”*.