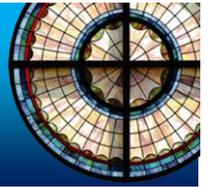


First Presbyterian Church



BIBLICAL WORSHIP PRINCIPLES **and PRACTICAL GUIDANCE for OUR WORSHIP**

... The sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ~ 2 Timothy 3:15-16

The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. ~ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Answer 2ⁱ

The church Session is charged with maintaining the spiritual government of the church, for which purpose it has power: to exercise, in accordance with the Directory for Worship, authority over the time and place of the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, over all other religious services, over the music in the services, and over the uses to which the church building and associated properties may be put; to take the oversight of the singing in the public worship of God; to assemble the people for worship when there is no minister; to determine the best measures for promoting the spiritual interests of the Church and congregation. ~ PCA Book of Church Order, 12.e.

INTRODUCTION

The following document reflects your Session's contemplative and prayerful consideration of their responsibilities for the ordering of worship at First Presbyterian Church. The two-fold purpose of this document is to provide a: 1) summary review of the Biblical principles directing God's people in worship, and 2) guidance in terms of how these principles are to be applied in our congregation's worship.

Obviously this document does not provide an exhaustive explanation of the Bible's worship principles. (Any believer desiring further explanation/clarification is encouraged to bring this need to the attention of the Session.) Neither is it intended to provide an exhaustive list of what First Presbyterian Church will do in worship. Instead its purpose is provide guidance for understanding what we do and don't do in worship, as well as why (based on the biblical principles). This guidance does *not* answer the question, "what can we or can't we do in worship." Rather, it is directed toward answering the question, as children of God, "what should we do in worship."

This document is formatted into two sections: I) Biblical Principles, and II) Applied Guidance. Before turning to the first of these, it is important to understand the Session's motivation/concern which led to the preparation of this document.

Remember, the word of God provides a guide (rule/direction) for faith (both what we are to believe, and what we are to do). The Bible neither delivers God's blessing in our lives when we ignore it or when we try to live by it via self-reliance. In the ordering of worship, the Session is not assuming this authority to itself. Instead it does so following the command of God Who holds His elders accountable for such shepherding (*cf.*, Heb 13:17; Ac 20: 28; 1Co 14:40; Tit 1:5).

GIVING THE GOSPEL AWAY ... FOR THE JOY OF HIS GLORY ~ Rom 1:16

Accordingly, we wish to stress the somber reality of considerations and increasingly alarming conditions in the Church today which prompted us to put together this document. A growing number of churches and denominations worldwide are undergoing distractions, dissention, disunity, division, etc., not dissimilar to that which was experienced by our forefathers during the Reformation era. These factors often result (sometimes unintentionally, usually insidious) in worship which does not honor God and which is not conducive to healthy growth in Christian maturity. Your Session does not want this to happen in congregation!

We recognize that worship matters/issues continue to be a source of contention and disturbance for many of God's people. This causes us great sadness and much distress, as what is supposed to be a means of increasing the reality of the gospel and the overflowing joy of Christ's redemption can become a circumstance that troubles God's children. Being convinced of our obligations to you, we've prepared this document with great humility and abiding faith in the God we worship.

Our prayer is that God will sanctify and honor this "work of faith" in His congregations' lives. We pray He grace you with insight and understanding where we have faithfully, accurately and adequately taught His word. We pray He grace you with mercy and patience toward us where we have not. Above all, we pray He will grant you the joy of offering Him worship in Spirit and truth (Jh 4:24). May His fame and renown grow in your hearts, His joy in your lives, and His praise in your mouths.

Soli deo gloria (to Him be the glory alone)!

The Session of 1st Presbyterian Church, May 31, 2010, RE Meade Guy, RE Wade Greene, and TE Reed DePace

I. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

We do not propose that the following list of biblical principles of worship is exhaustive. Nor do we propose that this is the only way to arrange these principles. We do believe that these particular principles and this arrangement is what God would have us emphasize for the on-going ministry of worship at First Presbyterian Church.

In seeking to order First Presbyterian Church's worship, we believe there are three cardinal principles. Worship that rightly praises the Trinity is: 1) rooted in Scripture, 2) in Christ's name, and, 3) the Spirit's work. Each of these has a number of subordinate and/or corollary principles that provide relevant emphases for worship at First Presbyterian Church.

Rooted in Scripture

This principle is foundational. This is probably most obvious in Jesus' words to the woman at the well in John 4:24:

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and *truth*. (emphasis added)

As developed in John's gospel (and throughout the Scriptures), the repository of truth is God's word, the Bible. First and foremost this means that all our worship must be rooted in God's word. This means not simply following the principles of worship found in the Bible. It also means that the Bible itself forms the content of our worship. If the child of God is to meet with God in worship (the biblical goal for worship), then both what is done in worship and the content of what is done in worship must be rooted in the Bible, the only sure and certain source of truth.

These two ideas (form and content) are further developed and reflected in two additional related principles: *first*, the "dialogical principle of worship," and *second*, the "regulative principle of worship."

Dialogical Worship Principle

As demonstrated in Scripture, at its most basic form biblical worship is a conversation between God and man.

When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. ^{Ps 91:15}

Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. ^{Isa 65:24}

Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. ^{Jer 33:3}

Worship at First Presbyterian Church is built on this basic principle. We come to worship to talk with our God and hear Him respond to us. This conversation is rooted in the Bible; it provides for both the subject matter and the correctness of that conversation.

An important consideration easily overlooked in this regard is the requirement that worship be conducted in forms that are intelligible to the congregation.

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ^{Mk 15:34}

And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ^{Ac 8:31}

What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say "Amen" to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ^{1Co 14:15-17}

Services must be conducted in the language common to the congregation. Efforts should be taken to see that even the tenderest are able to follow the order of worship. If they cannot understand what is being said, if they do not know the songs being sung, they are unable to engage in biblical worship.

In worship God talks to His children through various applications of the Bible. In response, God's children talk to him through various forms of prayer. All the things we do in worship at First Presbyterian Church are to be rooted in this dialogical principle.

Regulative Worship Principle

Our understanding of Scripture leads us to conclude that what is called the regulative principle of worship is essential to the right ordering of worship at First Presbyterian Church. This principle is best summarized as follows: we are only to do in worship what God expressly commands us to do in worship. This principle is seen in both the Old and New Testaments:

Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it. ^{Dt 12:32}

And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. ^{1Sa 15:22}

The primary reason for this principle is the ongoing propensity for idolatry. Even after being saved, God's children are still prone to offering worship that is rooted in their own creativity rather than God's word.

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ^{Mt 15:8-9}

(referring to things that all perish as they are used)- according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. ^{Col 2:22-23}

The regulative principle of worship applies beyond merely giving a list of acceptable activities. Indeed, its primary value is to tell us what we should do in worship. To be sure there are things we should not do. Yet the real value of this principle is that it helps us determine what is best in worship, verses what is questionable.

“Only when we follow what God has commanded us do we truly worship Him, and render obedience to His Word.”ⁱⁱ

Thus, all worship is to be ordered by Scripture and is to be an expression of Scripture. In this dual manner worship is rooted in the Bible.

In Christ's Name

Worship also must be offered in the name of Christ. It is because of His life, death and resurrection that we have the Spirit's gifts by which we are enabled to recognize and worship God in the first place (*cf.*, John 4:23-26). Further, worship that is acceptable to God must be premised on this redemptive work (*cf.*, Rom 12:1). It is not the work of our hands, but Christ's work that makes us acceptable to God.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ^{Eph 5:18-20}

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ^{Heb 13:15}

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ^{1Pe 2:5}

This principle suggests two corollary principles that support and express what it means to worship in Christ's name in concrete ways: *first*, reverence, and *second*, gospel patterning.

Reverence

By reverence we mean to denote the character or demeanor of what is offered in worship. It is only in consideration of the great redemption that God the Father has authored for us, God the Son has accomplished for us, and God the Spirit has applied to us that we are enabled to offer worship which truly expresses the glories of God.

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ^{Heb 10:19-22}

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. ^{Heb 12:28-29}

Reverence involves orderliness and intentionality in worship:

For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. ^{Col 2:5}

But all things should be done decently and in order. ^{1Co 14:40}

Reverence, however, does not mean that worship is to be marked by a gloomy, hard-faced performance of duties. Far from invoking mournful sourness, worship marked by reverence involves expressions of joy.

The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises! ^{Ps 98:2-4}

Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, ^{Dt 28:47}

A growing understanding of both one’s sinfulness and Christ’s sufficiency is essential to the reverence that should characterize worship. This is available to the child of God in Christ’s name.

Gospel Patterning

The actual ordering of the elements of worship are also informed by the principle of worship in Christ’s name. We are not gathered merely to worship God as our Creator, or even the One Who has ordained our redemption in the covenant of grace. No, we gather to worship the God who has redeemed us, who has kept His covenant. We worship because the gospel, the good news that God has redeemed us, has been effectually pronounced in Jesus.

This gospel provides then a pattern for ordering what we do in worship. Worship begins with God’s calling us to do so. It then proceeds through cleansing us of sin, consecrating us for His service, communing with us, and then commissioning us to go back into the world to proclaim His gospel. This gospel pattern to worship is seen throughout Scripture:

	<i>Worship service in:</i>			
	<u>Mosaic Era</u>	<u>Hezekiah’s Renewal</u>	<u>Nehemiah’s Renewal</u>	<u>Heaven</u>
GOD				
Calls Us	Ex 24:1-3	2Ch 29:20	Neh 8:1-2	Rev 4:1-11
Cleanses Us	24:4-6	29:21-36	8:9-11 (ch. 9)	5:1-14
Consecrates Us	24:7-8	30:1-12	8:3-12	6:1-19:4
Communes With Us	24:9-11	30:13-27	8:13-18	19:5-10
Commissions Us	24:12	31:1-21	chapters 9-12	19:11-20:15

Worship in Christ’s name characterizes and distinguishes Christian worship from all other forms of worship. It is worship marked by reverence because it is praise for God Who has saved His people. It is worship following the gospel pattern because this is the pattern reflecting on the great redemption which enables us to come to God in Christ’s name and be accepted.

The Spirit’s Work

It should be obvious from both the history of the world and the Old Testament that to rightly worship one needs the enablement of God Himself.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. ^{Ps 14:2-3}

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ^{Amo 5:21-23}

Indeed, the NT teaches us the necessity of the Spirit's enablement for worship:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ^{Jh 4:23}

For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. ^{Php 3:3}

The Spirit is the one Whose presence makes our worship truly worship that pleases God. This emphasis on the Spirit's necessity informs two essential sub-principles: *first*, worship is the primary context for the means of grace, and *second*, worship is to be marked by simplicity.

Means of Grace

The phrase "means of grace" refers to those ordinary means that God promises to use as means to give His children a growing experience of Christ's redemption in all its fullness.

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ^{Ac 2:41-42}

These are primarily the ordinary functions that occur in worship, the ministry of the word, the sacraments, and the prayers offered:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ^{Ps 19:7}

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ^{Col 2:11-12}

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ^{1Co 10:16}

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. ^{Jh 16:23}

These are the means in worship that the Spirit has promised to use to bless God's children with more of Christ. Correspondingly these very same things are the means that God's children use in worship to exercise their faith that God will indeed keep His covenant promises.

Marked by Simplicity

If the Spirit is the one who makes worship what it is, man is relieved from any effectual role in worship. In other words, man’s role in worship is one of responding in faith to the Spirit’s work, not one of working to earn the Spirit’s response. Accordingly, there is no need for the pomp and circumstance, the ornateness that is characteristic to worship ritual in which man must “call down God’s presence (cf., 1Ki 18, and Elijah’s encounter with the prophets of Baal).

This notion of simplicity in worship is particularly emphasized by the discontinuation of the Old Testament worship system, a system steeped in ceremony and pomp:

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Col 2:16-17

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Heb 10:1

Because Christ, of whom and Whose ministry all these things were pictures, has come, the pictures have no more use in worship. Instead worship enabled by the Spirit is simple:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:41-42

The idea of simplicity particularly marks the worship of the earliest Christians. Discipled by the Apostles, the early Christians followed the pattern of the two-fold ministry of the word and the ministry of prayer practiced in the synagogues. To this, as taught by the Apostles, they added the ministry of sacrifice from the pattern of worship in the temple. Thus the earliest worship include the ministry of these three elements: word (reading and preaching), sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), and prayer (spoken and sung. These all were presented in the simplest of manners that so that even the tenderest of God’s children could participate in by faith.

Simplicity guards against the notion that worship is man’s work to earn God’s presence. It is the worship of children who know that they can only offer their Heavenly Father the love of their attention to His words. His Spirit promises to be with them to enable such worship:

For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. Php 3:3

To summarize, these then are the basic principles that have particular relevance for worship here at First Presbyterian Church:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Rooted in Scripture</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogical Worship Principle (DWP) • Regulative Worship Principle (RPW) |
| <i>In Christ’s Name</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverence (Rvc) • Gospel Patterning (GP) |
| <i>The Spirit’s Work</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Means of Grace (MoG) • Marked by Simplicity (Mbs) |

These principles provide guidance for applications to what we actually do in worship.

II. APPLIED GUIDANCE

For simplicity, we've listed applications under two broad categories: order and music. Where appropriate, we've also included references to the relevant principles (parenthetical abbreviations as used above).

In keeping with the enumerated principles of this document, and consistent with the Presbyterian Church in America's *Book of Church Order*, "Directory for Worship": worship at First Presbyterian Church will be ordered by the following guidelines:

Order

Worship at First Presbyterian Church will consist of biblical expressions of God's talking with His people (ministry of the word and the sacraments) and His people responding to God (ministry of prayer). (DWP)

- Only such forms as fit this principle will be used.
- Worship will always be rendered in a manner and form that is understandable to the congregation.
- Given that God's voice is heard through the ministry of the word and sacraments, it is fitting that men called by ordination to the office of elder perform any function in worship in which God's voice is heard. Ordinarily such functions will be performed by a teaching elder (sacraments always), occasionally by a Session approved ruling elder.
- In those functions in which God's people are responding back to Him (always a form of prayer), Session approved laymen may assist the congregation in a guidance capacity (e.g. singing).

Worship at First Presbyterian Church will follow the regulative principle of worship. (RPW)

- The following are proper elements of worship: reading of Holy Scripture, singing of psalms and hymns, the offering of prayer, the preaching of the Word, the presentation of offerings, confessing the faith and observing the Sacraments; and on special occasions taking oaths. No other elements will be used in worship at First Presbyterian Church.
- The form which these elements take will be guided by the other principles noted here; (DWP, GP, MbS)
- The circumstances in which these elements occur will also be guided by the other principles listed herein, and the Session's consideration of congregational needs for the support of their worship.
- A worship service will always be held in the AM of the Lord's Day (Sunday), and regularly at other times on that day as called for by the Session, as well as occasional special days as per the need of the congregation.

Worship at First Presbyterian Church will be ordered according to the gospel pattern of worship in Scripture. Each element will be ordered to lead the congregation through the following movements, in this order:(GP, MbS)

- God calling His people to worship.
- God cleansing His people of their sin.
- God consecrates His people through His word.
- God communes with His people in the sacraments.
- God commissions His people to return to the outside world to serve Him.

Music

In Scripture singing in worship is marked by two necessary characteristics: 1) such singing is a form of prayer, and 2) the lyrics in songs used in worship are to reflect the breadth and depth of the doctrinal expression in Scripture (*cf.*, Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). This is most clearly seen in the book of Psalms. These 150 psalms comprise the Church's first hymnbook, a collection of sung prayers used in worship. Covering the breadth and depth of the Bible's teaching, the psalms offer God's children a full expression of prayer for worship.

Singing in worship at First Presbyterian Church will be marked by these two Biblical characteristics. In worship our singing is an offering of prayer to God, reflecting the breadth and depth of what he has done for us in the Covenant of Grace. (DWP, RPW, Rvc)

Accordingly:

- Congregational singing will be the priority of music used in worship. Any form of music that tends to displace this priority will not be used.
- The use of a choir consistent with this priority is appropriate. A choir may be used to support the congregation's singing, as well as provide assistance in learning new songs. Occasionally a choir may be used in a form of prayer in which the congregation is praying silently.
- The use of a musically skilled layman as song leader is appropriate, provided such service is limited to assisting the congregation in the actual singing of the songs in worship.

Songs used in worship will reflect both the character and the content of prayer in Scripture.

(DPW, RPW, Rvc, GP, MbS)

- Psalms will be regularly sung in worship (at least one psalm per service).
- A preference will be made for hymns whose lyrics are both consistent with the biblical expression of the covenant of grace and serve to mature the congregation's prayers in worship.
- Occasional uses of simple praise songs, *e.g.*, Doxology, Gloria Patri, *et.al.*, can be used where appropriate. Praise songs which involve repetition of simple choruses should be used infrequently at most.
- Priority will be given to styles of music, arrangements, and instrumental accompaniment that are supportive of the congregation's singing. Styles, arrangements, and/or instruments that are not common in the congregation's experience should only be used with intentional consideration as to: 1) whether there is strong potential for uncommon blessing in the congregation's usage, and 2) how to equip the congregation in their usage.

These reflect our prayerful understanding of what God would have us do in worship in this era of First Presbyterian Church's history. As we continue to grow and mature in our understanding of the Covenant of Grace, the record of the Bible, we may find need for adjustment and/or addition to these applications. For now, we believe these will suffice to help God's children at First Presbyterian Church grow in their ability to offer God worship that is reverently joyful.

ⁱ The Westminster Shorter Catechism, along with the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Larger Catechism and the PCA Book of Church Order form the constitution of our church. These documents contain substantial advice and guidance regarding the Bible's teaching on all matters of faith and practice.

ⁱⁱ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians, ed. D.W. Torrance et al., Grand Rapids, Michigan (Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.), 1973, p. 118 (on Romans 5:19). For further information on this principle, see, "The Regulative Principle of Worship, Summary and Support," available from the church office.