

In previous articles I made the point that the worship of the Lord's people together on the Lord's Day is a great engine of the Christian life. It is Sunday worship's influence over our daily living that explains the great deal of attention that is paid to its regulation and its reformation in the Bible. Christians will be, to some significant degree, what their Sunday worship makes them to be. Then I described our "liturgy" here at FPC. Our worship service contains various elements, some representing God's Word to us or action toward us (e.g. the call to worship, the absolution or assurance of pardon, the sermon, and, His feeding us at the table) and some our response to God (e.g. praise and thanksgiving, prayer, offering, coming to the Lord's Table to eat and drink). These elements, all taught and illustrated in the Bible as belonging to the worship of God's people, are then placed in a gospel or covenantal order. The importance of order in worship is also taught in the Bible. A proper order makes our worship *dialogical* with God speaking to us and we responding to him. This makes our worship, every Sunday, not only the recapitulation and renewal of our covenant with the Lord, but also the practice of our relationship with God.

It is a matter of great practical importance to think about our Sunday worship in this way. For, clearly, this biblical worship is not a spectator sport. It requires our full involvement at every point. You see the necessity of involvement emphasized everywhere in the Bible. To offer but one example, in the sacrificial ritual of the Law of Moses the one bringing the sacrifice was fully involved in making it. Read Leviticus 1:3-9 and note how much the worshipper himself or herself *does*. A recent book on worship was entitled *Worship is a Verb*. True worshippers are never spectators in the Bible! They are either listening to God with that rapt attention that the Almighty deserves, or they are speaking to him with reverence, gratitude, and joy, or they are coming to participate in the feast the Lord Jesus sets for us at His table.

Here at Faith we have worked to be sure that at every point we are active participants in our worship. We sing together, we pray together (either by using a written prayer or by adding our "Amen" to prayer offered on our behalf by one of our number – these are the two methods of corporate prayer taught in the Bible and we employ them both), we read God's Word together aloud. The postures we assume for prayer and praise – standing, kneeling, and the raising of hands – all serve to effect and emphasize our personal participation. They also serve to cultivate the proper states of mind and heart that sincere involvement requires: reverence, humility, boldness, and a living sense of *coram Deo*, that we are in the very presence of God and are speaking directly to Him. The short introductions to the various elements in the service that are provided by the minister ("rubrics") are also designed continually to remind the congregation that they are doing nothing less than speaking to God or hearing Him speak.

Nothing creates more vitality in a worship service, nothing adds more power to its witness to unbelievers present, nothing is better calculated to carry believers participating in that worship up into "the sanctuary of the Most High," than for the entire congregation to be personally, eagerly, sincerely, joyfully, and reverently participating from beginning to end.

As with everything else in the Christian life, so with worship, faith is required above all things. We must *believe* that God is present to receive our worship as he promises to be in his Word. Otherwise a worship service becomes merely a meeting of Christians. But, when a congregation of Christians practices its faith in the presence of God, when believers *know* that "the Lord is

enthroned on the praises of Israel,” (Psalm 22:3) – when they are sure that their worship is a throne for God and not a platform for man – every element in the service is supercharged with meaning, with privilege, and with sanctity. David was a man with a strong faith in God’s presence with his people when they gathered for worship in his house. No wonder he should have said, “One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.” (Psalm 27:4)