The Parts of Biblical Worship (part 4)

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[0:00] Well, we've covered a lot of ground in our study of worship so far, and I want to begin this! with a brief review, and this will be very brief. I won't attempt to recap everything from the last! seven weeks. We really began with a simple yet all-important question, does God care how we worship Him? And I believe we've seen that He does. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, God consistently reveals that worship should not be determined by human creativity or personal preference. He alone commands what is acceptable in worship of Him. And that leads us to what we call the regulative principle of worship, which says we should do in worship only what God has revealed in His Word, either by explicit command or by necessary implication. Now, we've also considered why this matters. The church is a holy people set apart for God, and worship is the most distinct thing we do as His people. At the same time, the Bible is both authoritative and sufficient, which means God has not left us to guess how He is to be worshiped. And so, when we combine these two truths, it becomes clear that worship must be shaped and governed by God's Word. If left to ourselves, we will innovate, we will innovate, and ultimately we will distort both our worship and our understanding of God. And on the practical side of things, we consider that not everything the church does constitutes worship. Therefore, it's not necessarily regulated by the same principle. Corporate worship, formal worship, is uniquely holy. And in that worship, the Bible gives us very specific parts or elements. And so far, we've looked at the reading and preaching of the Word, prayer, singing, giving, the Lord's Supper just a bit, and we'll continue that this morning, and even our corporate response to God's Word. And last week, I made a distinction between the elements of worship and the circumstances of worship. The parts or elements of worship are fixed by Scripture. Again, they're either explicitly commanded in the Bible or implied through either example or apostolic approval. But the circumstances of these elements, they're not always clearly defined, right? So, they require wisdom guided by biblical principles. And one of the examples I gave was determining what time of day we should meet for worship. We are commanded to worship, and through necessary inference, we know that our day of worship is properly Sunday, but we're never told what time on Sunday we should meet. So, for that, we use basic human reasoning, Christian wisdom, and we study any biblical principles that might be relevant.

And lastly, I'll remind us again that true worship must be in spirit and truth. It must be according to God's Word, that is truth, but it also must be sincere, it should be humble, and it should be reverent. And let me emphasize that. I don't know that I have so far, but it should be reverent. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 28 and 29 tell us, let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. In other words, acceptable worship is defined at least in part by the reverence and the awe in which we come to God. Obviously, careful obedience to His Word is implied in that. If we reverence God as we should, we should obey His Word, we will obey His Word, but even more than that, it speaks to our posture, it speaks to our spirit. Are we approaching God flippantly or carelessly, or are we approaching
Him in humility with reverence? In short, there should be a seriousness to our worship. Now, that's not to say we should always be straight-faced and somber as though we're attending a funeral. There should be immense joy in our worship. But as the Apostle Paul shows us in 1 Corinthians 14, joy is not going to be the same thing as disorder. It's certainly not disobedience. It's not carelessness. We can approach our worship of God with great joy, but still do so with reverence and awe, taking what His Word says about worship very seriously. And we should take it very seriously because, as the author of Hebrews says, our God is a consuming fire. And that's in the New Testament, mind you. So that, to me, is an essential governing principle in all of this. In many ways, it's the very foundation of the regulative principle of worship. Let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. In other words, worship is not first

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and foremost about our subjective emotional experience.
This has often become the priority in contemporary churches, but acceptable worship is not first about what we feel. Acceptable worship requires humility before God and careful subjection to what He defines as acceptable worship. And with that, let's pick up where I left off last time. We were considering singing as an element of worship as an element of worship, and specifically, we were looking at the circumstances of singing. Again, the circumstances are those details that we don't necessarily have explicit commandments for. We are commanded to sing, but we're not told whether we can have choirs or whether we should sing from hymnals or from a screen. And now, let's consider the subject of musical instruments. Now, the use of musical instruments is not necessarily a given. I originally came from a church that did not and would not use musical instruments. And their argument was simply that we do not see the apostolic church of the first century using musical instruments in their worship.
And that much is true. So, before we even talk about which ones might be acceptable or how to use them, maybe we need to consider whether or not they should be used in the first place.
[7:20] Now, many people might have a gut response to this that says, you know, the church has been using instruments for a long time. Why would we ever debate this? Why would we even take the time to think about it? Well, no matter what conclusion we come to, again, we always want to offer acceptable worship with reverence and awe. Solomon says, guard your steps when you go to the house of God.

It will never be unwise to pause and to think very carefully about not only the parts of worship, but also the circumstances of worship. Again, I know I've said this several times already, but our first thought should not be, what can I do in worship? Another way of asking that question is, what's the limit? How far can I go before I'm violating one of God's commandments?
No, if we are approaching worship with reverence and awe and we are guarding our steps when we go to the house of God, our first question should be, what does God want?
So what does God want regarding musical instruments? Well, first of all, let's remind ourselves that the element that is actually commanded is to sing. Now, I, for one, love music. I like a lot of music. A lot of the music I listen to for pleasure does not even have words in it. So I love musical instruments. Sometimes I even pretend I can play a guitar. I have my kids fooled anyway. But in worship, we have to remember that instruments are not the priority. They may be acceptable. They may even be important to us and important in practical ways, but they're not the priority. According to the New Testament, singing is the priority. So whatever use we have for musical instruments in worship must be in service to the singing, and that is congregational singing. So that's our starting point. Now, if we have no clear command in the New Testament regarding instruments, how do we determine whether we should use them? Well, let's think this through. Remember what the Baptist Confession says.
[9:45] We recognize that some circumstances concerning the worship of God are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian wisdom following the general rules of the word, which must always be observed.

So the light of nature, or human reasoning, if you will, would suggest that musical instruments are profitable in our singing. I don't know about you, but it's a great help to me to be able to sing along to music. Even so, we have to apply Christian wisdom following the general rules of the word. So what help does the word give us? Again, we see a complete absence of musical instruments in the early church. In fact, I don't know that we have any historical evidence of instruments being used until at least the third century. Sometimes you'll read things that say the seventh century, but we have now found hymns that were written with musical annotations dating back to the third century. So it's very well possible they were using them in the third century.
And we could speculate all day long as to why that was, why they were not using instruments if, in fact, they were not. But what's most important to us is what the Bible says.
Now, if nothing else, we can definitively say that musical instruments are not necessary in worship. If they were, we'd have a command, we'd have an example from the early church, so they can't be necessary. And that also means that we can't be, or shouldn't be, dogmatic about it. If another church down the street doesn't want to use musical instruments, I'm more than willing to say I can respect that.
I may not agree wholeheartedly, but I respect your decision. So we don't see instruments used in the New Testament, but we have a very clear precedent for their use in the Old Testament. And let

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me give you just a couple of examples.
[11:47] The first comes from 1 Chronicles chapter 23. At the start of the chapter, we read, David assembled all the leaders of Israel and the priests and the Levites.

The Levites, 30 years old and upward, were numbered, and the total was 38,000 men. 24,000 of these, David said, shall have charge of the work in the house of the Lord.
6,000 shall be officers and judges, 4,000 gatekeepers, and 4,000 shall offer praises to the Lord with the instruments that I have made for praise.
That's a pretty big band. Of course, they didn't play all at the same time. In chapter 25, David puts them into 24 divisions, so they would take turns playing during various worship times.
And it seems they used three primary instruments, lyres, harps, and cymbals. So they primarily used stringed instruments, but they also had a little percussion, which can be worth noting because sometimes we can have some pretty strong opinions about which instruments can or cannot be used in worship.
[13:04] At my last church, which was a Reformed Baptist church, we didn't use any musical instruments. Not because we objected to them, but because we didn't have anyone to play them.

I guess I could have strummed a guitar, but at my skill level, I just felt we were better off without them. So we didn't use any instruments. However, we did talk about them, and the other elder in the church expressed that he was basically okay with most any instrument, except for drums.
And he had his personal reasons, and frankly, I understood where he was coming from. I have often listened to recorded worship music, where I felt that the drums were too pronounced, too heavy.
It just didn't sound right to me. It didn't feel right. But does that mean a church should never have drums? Well, evidently, God accepts the use of at least some kinds of percussion, so we really can't make a blanket rule in that regard.
Now, the doctrine of carefulness, as I've called it previously, would implore us to think very critically about how we use percussion in our music, but that doesn't mean we can make a blanket rule forbidding it necessarily.
[14:21] And again, this is where we have to distinguish between personal opinions and biblical guidelines. Ultimately, when the church has questions about the circumstances or details of worship, we can discuss them, always in humility and always striving for unity.

But at the end of the day, we are called to trust in the oversight and wisdom of our elders or pastors. Paul tells the elders in Ephesus, the Holy Spirit has made you overseers to care for the church of God.
Of course, whatever decisions they make, they will be held accountable for. Peter says, I exhort the elders among you, shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight.
And the author of Hebrews says, obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls. You see, the Lord knows that we will not always have the same opinions.
So he has given the church overseers to do their very best to exercise Christian wisdom according to the general rules of the word and to lead the church by making some of these decisions.
[15:36] And I'll remind you again that when we're talking about circumstances of worship, not commanded elements, we should never let them be a point of contention or disunity because in many cases, there is simply no right or wrong.

God forbid that we should ever disrupt the harmony of the church over a matter of what is essentially Christian liberty. So I've given one example from the Old Testament.
Let me give you one more. This is Psalm 150. Praise the Lord. Praise God in His sanctuary. Praise Him in His mighty heavens.
Praise Him for His mighty deeds. Praise Him according to His excellent greatness. Praise Him with trumpet sound. Praise Him with lute and harp. Praise Him with tambourine and dance.
Praise Him with strings and pipe. Praise Him with sounding cymbals. Praise Him with loud crashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
[16:45] Praise the Lord. So this is perhaps the fullest list we have in the Bible of instruments being used in the worship of God. And what do we have here? We have wind instruments.

We have stringed instruments. We have percussion. So there's a full spectrum of sound here. Some of these instruments are loud. Some are melodic. Some are mostly for rhythm.

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And when all of these are brought together in the right way, for the right reason, of course, they become the means by which the people of God are able to praise God. Now, I've always found this psalm intriguing because the psalmist doesn't mention singing in the praise of God.
I think it's implied. He does say, let everything that has breath praise the Lord. But he doesn't explicitly mention singing. And why do you think that is?
Well, I won't presume to know what the author was really thinking, but I can't help but wonder. However, clearly, singing is essential in both the Old and New Testaments.
[17:51] So is it possible that the psalmist already knows that everyone already knows that singing should be done in praise to God? And maybe what he's getting at here is that God is so worthy of our praise that we can lift up even more than our voices.

Yes, sing. But those of you who can play an instrument, grab it. Let's make a joyful noise to the Lord. Let's utterly fill the sanctuary with our praise. Let it reach to the expanse above, or as the ESV says, the mighty heavens.
Have you ever felt that way? Now, I said that worship is not first and foremost about the emotional experience. Even so, worship is an emotional experience.
And there are times when I want to turn to the congregation and say, sing louder. Sing with all you've got. Tom, Mark, Megan, play your hearts out on that piano.
Where's Kelly? We need her violin. Mark, Charlie, get your guitars. Let's fill the sanctuary with a joyful noise. And you'll notice that the psalmist even mentions dancing.
[19:07] Now, I don't think there's much biblical evidence to suggest that dancing was ever an element or a routine part of worship. And dancing in the Bible is probably not what most of us think of when we think of dancing.

But the mention of dancing might suggest there are times when words alone just don't feel sufficient to express our joy when we're praising God. It's like we can't even contain it, you know?
We have to move. This is one of the reasons I like to stand when we sing. Not only do I feel like I can project my voice better, but it gives me more flexibility to move.
Sometimes it's just a subtle swaying. Sometimes I'm pumping my arm or tapping my foot. I don't know that I've ever felt compelled to dance necessarily, but I've come close a few times. The right hymn, the right moment, sure.
Sometimes you'll see people raise their hands when they sing. The point is, tradition or simply the church's culture may dictate that we should be sitting very still, staring at our hymnals.
[20:18] And tradition or personal preference may say that we shouldn't have musical instruments or that we should only have very specific instruments. But the precedent set in the Old Testament says that instruments can be used to worship God and a variety of instruments can be used to worship God.

Why? Because we're attempting to, as the psalmist says, praise God according to His excellent greatness. So we give Him the best of our singing and we give Him the best of our playing to make a beautiful sound of praise that comes as close as we can to matching the praise He deserves.
Now, those who oppose the use of musical instruments would remind me here that the Old Testament is describing worship under the Old Covenant. And that's true.
But let's think ahead to the book of Revelation. When we read about worship taking place in heaven, do we see them using musical instruments?
As a matter of fact, we do. We see them singing, of course, which again is the priority, but we also see them playing harps. So we see the use of instruments in Old Covenant worship and we see the use of instruments in heavenly worship, but they're absent in the worship of the early church.
[21:46] Again, we can only speculate why. Maybe they had very practical reasons for not using them. Maybe they didn't have anyone to play them. Maybe they did use them, though it's not recorded for us.

Is that enough reason to prohibit their use in the church today? And I would argue it's not for at least two reasons. First of all, the apostles were very careful to weed out any lingering practices of both the Jews and the Gentiles that didn't belong in the church's worship.
And if the Jews, and really the Gentiles as well, had used instruments for a long time in their worship, and if those instruments were not permissible in the New Testament church, you would expect the apostles to address this as they did so many other subjects.

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You would expect them to say, don't use instruments in the church, and here's why. But they're silent on the matter. Second, there are things carried over from Old Covenant worship, and there are things that are not carried over from Old Covenant worship.
And what's the difference between the two? Well, the difference is Christ. So, study the book of Hebrews. Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial law, namely all the types and shadows.
[23:14] That's why we don't, for instance, still offer animal sacrifices. But evidently, though musical instruments were used in temple worship, they are not part of the ceremonial law.

How do we know? Well, for starters, the New Testament gives us no reason to believe that Christ fulfilled the use of musical instruments. And beyond that, they were not instructed to be used prior to temple worship, even though the ceremonial law had already been given and was enforced. When David announced his 4,000-man praise band, that came at temple worship. not the tabernacle worship before. In other words, Israel worshiped according to the ceremonial law with and without musical instruments.
So, musical instruments do not seem to be tied exclusively to the ceremonial law. They were outside of that ceremonial law, if you will. You see, those who would argue that musical instruments were a part of the ceremonial law really want to treat them as though they are parts or elements of worship rather than circumstances of worship.
And I believe we have more than enough reason to treat them as circumstances, not elements. And as circumstances, we are free to use them, but we must do so while applying Christian wisdom according to the general rules of the word.
[24:51] So, very briefly, let me give you some things to consider regarding the use of musical instruments. And to be clear, these are not hard rules, these are not commands of Scripture, but they are an attempt at applying Christian wisdom.

Perhaps the most important thing that could be said is that musical instruments should never distract from or discourage people from singing. And this could be applied to everything from the volume of our music to the songs that we choose to sing.
If the music is too loud, people will be discouraged from singing. We won't be able to hear one another, which defeats part of the purpose of singing.
According to the Bible, we are addressing and teaching one another through these songs, but we can't do that if we can't hear one another. We also want to choose songs that were made for congregational singing.
If we try to sing songs that were made for professional singers, what are the chances that the entire congregation is going to be able to sing them? And along those lines, it's probably not a good idea that we try to introduce a brand new set of songs every time we worship.
[26:15] even if you have worship leaders who know those songs and maybe have rehearsed them throughout the week, the congregation won't know them, and they probably won't sing.

Now, I'll say again that a variety of songs is good, and it's great that we're learning new songs as we go, but it only makes sense that the vast majority of what we sing are going to be songs that are already familiar.
I'll also say that we always want to avoid turning worship into a spectator event. Again, the priority of music in worship is congregational singing.
That is the entire church singing. So there's no explicit rule in Scripture that says the musicians must sit off to the side, excuse me, or avoid playing from a stage at the front and center of the room, but as with all of worship, we simply want to be careful.
The last thing we want is to slide down that slippery slope where eventually we're adding stage lights and fog machines and the guitarist is performing a 20-minute solo.
[27:28] We want to avoid music becoming a performance that people watch rather than participate in. Ultimately, the music is not a required element of worship.

So its primary function as a circumstance is to help the congregation sing. If it's not helping the congregation sing and has become its own entity in worship, something has gone wrong.
And lastly, I'll just briefly say that I don't think it's wise to divide the church between worship styles, traditional worship services and contemporary worship services.
Over the years, many churches have done this because they found it to be a practical solution to the debate between these different styles of music primarily. But the Bible implores us time and time again to strive for unity within the church.

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As Paul tells the Ephesians, we should be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
[28:51] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. So, dividing the church into different worship services may seem like a very practical solution to the problem, but it's clearly not ideal.

There is one body, Paul says, and dividing the church in half effectively splits the body into two. And over what exactly? A mere circumstance of worship, that is a matter of detail that in this case comes down to personal preference, not anything biblical.
gospel. Now, having said more than enough about music, though probably not everything that could be said about music, let's move on to the final parts of worship.
Next, let's talk about the Lord's Supper and baptism. And I'll begin by reading from the 1689 Confession, which says, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances of positive and sovereign institution.
They are appointed by the Lord Jesus, the only lawgiver, and are to be continued in His church to the end of the age. Unfortunately, I won't give either of these nearly the time they deserve, but first of all, I should at least clearly establish them as parts of worship.
[30:19] You see, we might think of these things as separate from the church's corporate worship, but there is a strong argument to be made that they are actually elements of worship itself. Regarding the Lord's Supper, listen to what Sam Waldron writes.

The first celebration of the Lord's Supper was in the original church composed of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles at what is now called the Last Supper. And here he cites Matthew 26, 19 through 30.
The Lord's Supper symbolizes the unity of the church and thus is and must be celebrated in the context of the gathering of a local church where that unity is visible.
See 1 Corinthians 10, 16 and 17. The apostolic directions with regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper emphasize that it was and is to be celebrated in a meeting of the church in which careful regard was to be had for the visible unity of the church.
And here he directs our attention to 1 Corinthians 11, 17 through 34. And 1 Corinthians 11 does emphasize the fact that the Lord's Supper is meant for the formal corporate gatherings of the church, i.e.
[31:43] worship, as opposed to other informal, non-worship gatherings of the church. church. So even though we may not share in the Lord's Supper every time we meet together for worship, that is one of those circumstances which the Bible doesn't prescribe explicitly, we should not think of it as distinct from worship.

In fact, just think about what the Lord's Supper is for. Paul says, the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, this is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.
In the same way also he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. So in the Lord's Supper, we are frequently reminding ourselves of Christ's atoning work on the cross, we are reminding ourselves of how the Lord has saved us, and not to mention how we continually stand in need of Christ.
And of course we are openly proclaiming his death every time we break that bread and drink from that cup. And this is what unites us in the church. So it stands to reason that this would be part of our corporate worship together.
[33:13] Now baptism is a little different. baptism is like prayer. Never do we see the Lord's Supper practiced apart from corporate gatherings of the church. Part of its significance is to underscore the unity of the church.

But baptism, it focuses more on the individual being baptized. And the Bible gives us examples of people who were baptized apart from the corporate gathering of the church.
And I believe Sam Waldron explains this well when he says, baptism is like prayer, singing, and the preaching of the word. It may properly be practiced both in informal settings outside the church and

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in the formal gatherings of the church.
Even so, what I want us to see is that baptisms can be, and in the vast majority of cases, should be an element of the church's formal worship, the gathered formal meetings of the church.
Now, under the regulative principle, that means we should be able to show that scripture is, that show in scripture that, number one, it is positively instituted by Christ. We're told to do it.
[34:24] Two, it belongs to the gathered church. And three, it functions in a way that is consistent with other recognized elements of worship.

Well, first of all, it's clearly commanded by Christ when he says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them. Second, we see that baptism was, in fact, entrusted to the church.
This is the pattern throughout the book of Acts. In Acts 2.41, those who received the word were baptized and they were added to the church. In Acts 8.12, believers are baptized as part of their visible identification with the church.
In Acts 10.47, verses 47 and 48, baptism is administered under apostolic oversight. So, clearly, baptism is tied to church membership, to the visible inclusion in the church under the church's authority and not merely a private spiritual act such as prayer, something you, you know, do at home on your own.
The church should be a part of that. We might also consider Romans 6, which says, we were buried, therefore, with Christ by baptism into death, in order that we, too, might walk in newness of life.
[35:52] Well, that would suggest that baptism is a visible and public testimony, but it can't be visible in public without a gathered body of people, namely the church.

And lastly, it certainly functions in a way that is consistent with other recognized elements of worship. Think of preaching. Think of the Lord's Supper. Preaching proclaims the gospel in words. Baptism proclaims the gospel visibly, visibly, with illustration. Again, in Romans 6, baptism portrays union with Christ, death to sin, resurrection to new life.
These are truths that are ordinarily taught in preaching, but they're dramatized, if you will, before the congregation in baptism. And it parallels the Lord's Supper, which also visibly, illustratively, if that's a word, proclaims the gospel.
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death. So, preaching is an audible proclamation. Baptism is visible initiation into that reality, if you will.
[37:08] And the Supper is its ongoing, visible proclamation. All three elements proclaim Christ, and I believe all three elements belong in the church's worship.

Now, very quickly, let me mention one more element of worship, and that is the benediction. And I call this a distinct element of worship because it is explicitly instituted by God, publicly pronounced over His gathered people, and functions as a distinct act of divine blessing, as opposed to, say, our other prayers in worship.
So, in Numbers 6, verses 22 through 27, the Lord commands the priests to bless Israel with specific words and promises to act through that blessing, and this pattern continues into the New Testament as the apostles frequently pronounce blessings on the churches.
And unlike prayer, which speaks to God, the benediction declares God's favor to His people, and it usually serves as the final word to the assembly.
So, it's commanded, it's corporate, and I believe it can rightfully be called an element of worship.
And with that, we conclude our study of worship.
[38:34] I pray that it's been both helpful and a blessing to you. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank You that You have not left Your church to wander in our worship according to the inventions of man, but You have shown us in Your Word what honors You, what pleases You, how Your people are to draw near to You through Christ.

Thank You for Your authority, for Your wisdom, for Your kindness, and giving us truth that really steadies us and keeps us from going astray. And as we now move from this class into the gathered worship of Your church on this beautiful resurrection morning, help us to fix our eyes on our risen Christ, the mediator of the new covenant through whom we draw near with confidence and awe.
Let Your Word be received with faith. May Your praise be offered with sincerity from us and may Your name be exalted above all.
And we ask this in the name of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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