

HEALTHY TENSIONS IN WORSHIP

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I. Introduction

A. Conversations about worship often produce much more heat than light.

B. Different reasons we tend to “take sides” in worship discussions:

There is only one worship war, and it is between God and Satan, each the supreme object of someone’s worship, either redeemed or lost. We are self-absorbed when we use the “war” word as a working term for the petty and overly self-indulgent skirmishes that we enter, almost always over transient, not eternal, things. (Harold Best, *Exploring the Worship Spectrum*, pg. 60)

C. We must not be afraid to dialogue with and learn from those who disagree with us.

D. There are certain truths about worship that don’t exist in tension with other truths, but rather oppose falsehood.

1. Worship must be directed to the God of Scripture.
2. Worship centers on God’s saving work through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.
3. God’s Word, not our preferences or opinions, governs our worship.
4. God alone determines how we approach Him, what we call Him, and how we relate to Him.

E. However, there are a significant number of perspectives and nuances that exist in healthy tension as we worship God.

II. Healthy Tensions

Transcendence of God (Is. 6:1-6) God is distant, other Holiness and righteousness “Holy, Holy, Holy” Cathedral	Immanence of God (Heb. 4:14-16) God is near, Emmanuel Mercy and grace “Jesus, Friend of sinners” Store front church Both: Is. 54:5; Is. 57:15
Head (Jn. 4:22, Col. 3:16) “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” Teaching, Didactic, Mental Doctrine “Immortal, Invisible”	Heart (Mt. 15:7-9, Col. 3:16) “with thankfulness in your hearts to God” Experiencing, Affective, Emotional Devotion “I Love You Lord” Both: Mt. 22:37

<p>Prostration (Heb. 12:28-29; Rev. 1:17) “in reverence and awe” “let us worship and bow down” Ps. 95:6</p> <p>Reflects the meaning of the most common Hebrew and Greek words for worship.</p>	<p>Celebration (Ps. 150, Ps. 100) “trumpet...harp...tambourine...dance!” “let us make a joyful noise!” Ps. 95:1</p> <p>Reflects the tone of many Psalms and the reality that the tomb is empty.</p> <p>Both: Ps. 2:11 “rejoice with trembling” Mt. 28:8 “fear and great joy”</p>
<p>Vertical (Mt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10) “making melody to the Lord”</p> <p>Glorification “Crown HIM with many crowns” Can lead to Gnosticism, individualism, and spiritual pride</p>	<p>Horizontal (1 Jn. 4:7-12; 1 Cor. 14:26) “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...” Edification “His glories now WE sing” Can lead to emotionalism, man-pleasing, and a social gospel Both: Rom. 15:5-7</p>
<p>Planned (Mt. 6:7 1 Cor. 11:17-34)</p> <p>Opposing view seen as transient, exhausting, and temporary</p> <p>Strengths: thoughtful, consistent, thematic, responsive to the broader needs of the church</p> <p>“Forms are a means to an end, and if they are constantly changing they obscure the end rather than lead to it.” (Hughes Oliphant Old, <i>guides to the Reformed Tradition</i>, p. 162)</p>	<p>Spontaneous (1 Cor. 14:29-32; 1 Th. 5:19-21)</p> <p>Opposing view seen as stale, boring, and irrelevant.</p> <p>Strengths: can change direction to suit the need of the moment; fosters awareness of God’s active presence; contributes to a present dependence on the Holy Spirit</p> <p>“A man ought not to be so confined by any premeditated form as to neglect any special infusion, he should so prepare himself as if he expected no assistance, and he should so depend upon divine assistance as if he had made no preparation. (Isaac Watts, <i>A Guide to Prayer</i>, p. 183)</p> <p>Our plans are not the Holy Spirit. Both: 1 Cor. 14:39-40</p>

<p>Rooted/Historic/Liturgical (Phil. 4:9; 2 Thess. 2:15) Other view seen as unbiblical, dangerous, man-pleasing, and compromising.</p> <p>“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death (G.K. Chesterton, <i>Orthodoxy</i> 64-65).</p> <p>Strengths: comprehensive, unaffected by fads, regulates the theological diet of the congregation, guards against doctrinal impurity, helps people develop a collective memory through repetition</p> <p>We shouldn’t expect non-Christians to be totally comfortable with our meetings. .</p> <p>All meetings are liturgical to some degree.</p>	<p>Relevant/Contemporary/Emerging (1 Cor. 9:22) Other view seen as unbiblical, boring, rigid, insensitive, and out-of-touch.</p> <p>“At its best, contemporary worship was born not simply out of a desire to swap the organ for a guitar, but out of an intense longing to somehow move from the casual, disinterested reciting of creeds and singing of hymns into an authentic time of loving and grateful interaction with the One who shed his blood for us.” (Joe Horness, <i>Exploring the Worship Spectrum</i>, pg. 102)</p> <p>Strengths: responsive, culturally engaging, more natural, more easily accessible</p> <p>The concern is not familiarity but intelligibility.</p> <p>Both: Mt. 15:32</p>
<p>Excellence/Skill (1 Chron. 15:22, Ps. 33:3; 1 Chron. 25:7) Emphasis on practice, rehearsals, and gifting</p> <p>Associated with orchestras, trained organists and paid musicians</p> <p>Bach B Minor Mass</p> <p>Can drift towards arrogance, formalism, and art-worship</p>	<p>Authenticity/Love for the Lord (Ps. 51:17; Ps. 147:10-11) Emphasis on sincerity, engagement, and heart</p> <p>Associated with 22 year old guitarists, kid’s choirs, and volunteers</p> <p>Amazing Grace</p> <p>Can drift towards sentimentalism, sloth, and pride in “genuineness”</p> <p>Excellence has multiple meanings. Both: Ex. 36:2</p>

<p>Corporate (Heb. 12:22-24; Ps. 111:1; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Pet. 2:9-10) “who gave himself for us...to purify for himself a people”</p> <p>“The thought that the Church at worship is an accidental convergence in one place of a number of isolated individuals who practice, in hermetically sealed compartments, their own private devotional exercises, is foreign to the New Testament picture.” (Donald Whitney, <i>Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life</i>, p. 77)</p>	<p>Individual (Ps. 63:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:14-20; Ps. 23) “who loved me and gave himself for me”</p> <p>“When Jesus Christ died, He literally had my name in His mind. He actually knew the one for whom He was dying.” (Jim Eliff, <i>The Glory of Christ</i>, p. 84)</p> <p>Both: Ps. 35:18</p>
<p>Event (Heb. 10:25; 1 Cor. 10-14; Acts 2:42) “When you come together” Liturgy OT Covenant Renewal continuity</p> <p>“There is a difference between what we do to the glory of God and what we do in the special activity of worship.” (Edmund Clowney, <i>The Church</i>, p. 126)</p>	<p>All-of-life (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 10:31; Amos 5:21-24) “Whatever you do” Life Categories transformed by the Gospel</p> <p>“In the New Testament there is a stunning indifference to the outward forms and places of worship. And there is, at the same time, a radical intensification of worship as an inward, spiritual experience that has no bounds and pervades all of life.” (John Piper, 9/9//97 Sermon)</p> <p>Both: Heb. 13:15-16</p>
<p>For God (Ps. 115:1) For God in its End “The primary reason we’re redeemed is to worship God – not to make us happy.”</p> <p>“We worship God because He is worthy and not because we as worshipers get something out of it.”</p>	<p>For Us (Ps. 37:4; 2 Cor. 3:18) For us in its Effect “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”</p> <p>“My soul will be satisfied...and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.” Ps. 63:5 Worshipping God is meant to make us humble, holy, and happy.</p> <p>Both: Ps. 40:16</p>
<p>Already (Heb. 12:22-24) “Though you do not now see him, you... rejoice with joy” (1 Pet. 1:8).</p> <p>Deposit guaranteeing...</p>	<p>Not Yet (Rev. 21:1-4) “They will see his face...and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4-5).</p> <p>...our inheritance</p> <p>This life is a brief preparation for an eternal occupation.</p>

III. Things to remember when your church is experiencing more tension than health:

- A. Distinguish between major and minor issues.
- B. Seek to understand those with a different perspective before challenging them.
 - 1. Don't carelessly lump neutral practices with errant theology.
 - 2. Sometimes people hold to a right perspective for the wrong reasons.
- EX Wanting to sing hymns because they're familiar or sentimentally appealing, rather than because of the rich truths they might contain.
- C. Always seek to address issues biblically and theologically.
- D. Different perspectives can sharpen our own thinking.
- E. Truth presented humbly glorifies God more than truth presented arrogantly.
- F. These truths must not only be taught and retaught, but modeled.