

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH XXI: 3-6

(Reading: John 4:1-26)

Worships' Wherewithal

We have seen that Article 1 is about why there is the worship of God. We saw there that everyone is inherently religious and so has that sense that they have to worship God. Because of the fall into sin, however, the only way we may know how to truly worship God is through His own Word and only by following His Word.

Article 2 then dealt with whom we worship. That is, we saw that it is only God Himself whom we must worship and it's is only through His Son, Jesus Christ that we can do this.

Now we turn in the next four Articles to what this true worship is made up of. That's why I have used the title "Worship's Wherewithal" for this sermon. For this is about the resources we need to do this. This is the practicality of worship.

But it's a practicality that must have a spirituality. That's what Article 3 deals with. And so our first aspect is that **GOD TELLS US HOW TO WORSHIP.**

God Tells Us How To Worship

Because, let's face it, most of us are okay with Articles 1 and 2. We don't worship false gods, we don't use images, and we haven't invented our own ways of worshipping God. We try to worship according to Scripture. But Article 3 is asking us about what's inside us - not what we show outside. It's getting us to have a look at our attitude.

"It's about praying, though," you might say. That's something the Bible tells us to do. And the Bible tells us what to pray for, as we read in Article 4. Yet it's something only you can truly do! I have met church members who know exactly what's in the good book. I have been in church services where the people were extremely zealous that everything was done by the regulative principle. And yet I have to say that some of them weren't worshipping God.

This is what the prophet Malachi shows us. He was addressing a people of God who had come to the place where they were worshipping the true God, in the right way, with the wrong attitude. Their hearts weren't in it. To quote the Lord Jesus in John 4 verses 23 and 24, we aren't only to worship God "in truth", which means according to His Word, but also "in spirit" which means that it comes from our hearts.

Prayer especially in the new covenant age is the response of love to the Lord. It's a duty, for sure, but it's only that because of the relationship we have with God in Christ.

Thomas Chalmers described it well. He said, "Prayer does not enable us to a greater work for God. Prayer is a greater work for God."

It's all the difference between being a son and a servant. For the servant can only come to his master in a certain way and time. The son can come anyhow and any time.

I mean, think of the help you have. For as that son has automatic access so You have not only God's Son constantly interceding for you but also God's Holy Spirit helping you to pray.

So while Jesus in John 4:23 means that it has to come from our hearts we straightaway know that that means the Holy Spirit is bringing it out in us. You see, we can never be left to ourselves to pray according to our will. That would be false worship. And so we may only truly pray out of our own hearts because God gives a special assistance by His Holy Spirit so that we pray as He wills. In the words of Romans 8 verses 26 and 27, "We do not know what we ought to pray, but

the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

As G. I. Williamson notes, "If the form of our prayers were required to be exactly the same as those that can be found in Scripture, our particular needs and desires would not be recognised. But if our prayers were not formed by the special assistance of the Holy Spirit in accordance with the Word of God they would be useless."

And so we see why the Lord's Prayer is described as the model of all our prayers. True prayer will always follow its basic structure. Yet each prayer is uniquely your own. It comes from your heart. And it's in your own words.

This is what we see brought out in Article 3. But it goes on to show how much we must be keeping in step with the Spirit in our prayer. That's why there must be "understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance."

The Westminster Larger Catechism addresses how we are to pray most aptly. It says in Answer 180, "To pray in the name of Christ is, in obedience to his command and in confidence in his promises, to ask mercy for his sake not by a bare mentioning of his name but by drawing our encouragement to pray and our boldness, strength and hope of acceptance in prayer, from Christ and his mediation."

So having seen what comes from within we turn in Article 4 to how it is to come out. This is about the scope of prayer, for we are to pray for our legitimate needs. A legitimate need is whatever helps us to serve as instruments for the saving purpose of God with His whole creation. For if we aren't praying we aren't open to be those instruments of God. Not praying is shutting the door in God's face!

And we wonder then what's happening! Shouldn't we think first about what's **not** happening!

Article 4 goes on to make a division between the living and the dead. It shows that the saying is true which goes, "While there is life there is hope." That's why we pray for the living.

This is what David did for his son while he was so terribly ill. You remember, the son borne him by Bathsheba which we read about in 1 Samuel 12. But when the child died he stopped fasting and praying. He said, in verses 22 and 23 there, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast?"

This is why Article 4 confesses that we are not to pray for the physically dead or those who are dead spiritually. Those dead spiritually are those who have sinned against the Holy Spirit.

This is what we know from Matthew 12 verse 32. For that sin - the unforgivable sin - occurs within the Christian community. In a situation of genuine love, where God's Word is faithfully followed, here is one who deliberately turns his back on it all.

Nowadays we hesitate to highlight God's Word when it speaks about this. But while we must be careful not to judge let's not forget that God's Word hasn't changed. It actually shows how much we have been affected by this world.

God Tells Us What's In Worship

So in the Articles 3 and 4 we have seen that GOD TELLS US HOW WE ARE TO WORSHIP. Next in Article 5 it flows on because GOD TELLS US WHAT'S IN WORSHIP.

There continues here this underlying attitude of godliness. But you can really see it now. When you're in a church which worships this way you know about it.

I had someone speak to me after he had attended the worship services of a number of denominations. And the thing that stood out for that person between those other churches and ours was the Bible.

You might be wondering a bit here. Perhaps you've been to other services. Or you know Christians who do. And they believe in the Bible. But what this person noted was that the majority of people in those churches simply didn't have a Bible with them. They didn't need to!

Oh, there were verses flashed up through the digital data projector. Yet no real reference to Scripture. The preaching was topical not expository – cute little pep talks.

And as for the rest of the service, well, the songs were either pretty poor left overs from the 70's - or you were hip-hopping through the 90's!

Others have said much the same. They have come out of different services wondering if the teaching owed more to Anthony Robbins' tapes and books than to what God says in His book.

We, however, are always showing how everything relates to God's Word. A number of you have commented about the way I show that every part of the worship service is scriptural. In particular it has been noted that I also use a relevant passage from the Bible when the offerings are taken up. Now, I have been ribbed a bit about that. It's been jokingly suggested that it helps to get the offerings up! But it has shown them how much every part of our worship is there because God is quite specific in what we're to do when we're together before Him.

The songs we sing have to be scriptural. That already makes what we sing a lot different than many other churches. And Article 5 even says something else about what we sing. Because it says that it's psalms we have to sing.

This is a phrase that has led to some dispute in Presbyterian churches. Some denominations have held strongly to the view that this means exclusive psalmody - so the songs we sing in worship should only be the psalms of David. They point to the fact that at the time the Confession of Faith was written there were only psalms sung in the churches. The Westminster Assembly aided that further by publishing a book of metrical psalms.

Others have said that we have to sing psalms but that what this means is that we do our singing with biblical understanding and with our hearts believing what we sing. This would mean we can sing other biblically correct hymns.

Our churches have the former view. In our denomination's foundational basis it is prescribed that there must only be psalms sung in our worship services. All our songs must be directly scriptural, and from that part of Scripture which is the Songbook of Scripture.

Mind you, some see this as also including what is found elsewhere in Scripture. This is why John Calvin and other reformers also sang the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the songs of Zechariah, Mary, and Simeon. And yet isn't the whole of doctrine of Scripture contained in the psalms? In those songs you'll find God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There you will sing of what Christ would do and why only that would do!

Indeed these were the songs the Lord and His Apostles sang in the early New Testament Church. Indeed, with major biblical revivals there has been a return to the singing of the psalms – and of the psalms alone. That's because the Holy Spirit brings them back to the Word.

This is what lies at the heart of Article 5. God's Word is central to worshipping Him. Not what man says and does but what He has said and done. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Whenever the

Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. +With its recovery will come unexpected power.”

That’s why in Reformed-Presbyterian Churches you’ll notice the pulpit is in the middle. And it is raised. This is not only so you can see and hear the preacher. It’s especially so that you will meet the Living Word through the proclamation of His Word.

That’s also why Article 5 speaks about “the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ.” For this is what the Lord Jesus has told His Church to do. In Matthew 28 verse 19 He instructed His disciples to baptise. And in 1st Corinthians 11 verse 24 the apostle mentions what Jesus said about celebrating the Lord’s Supper.

So scriptural worship is very simple. But that doesn’t mean it has been easy to keep that way. The traditions of men have quickly come in over the years.

God Tells Us Where To Worship

This is where Article 6 fits in. In the words of the third aspect to the sermon this afternoon, **GOD TELLS US WHERE TO WORSHIP.**

Now you might wonder at first how this helps deal with the traditions of men that came into the church. But you think about what those wrong traditions do. Because don’t they get you to focus on a particular object or way of doing things? Perhaps it’s the beautiful design of the church building. Maybe it’s the way the worship area is described. Reformed Churches in America call this ‘the sanctuary’.

That’s a term from the Old Testament in reference to the Temple. Often people mention the temple and what was in it when these things come into the church and into worship. They say that there should be no expense spared on having the best things in a church because that’s what God’s people did in the Old Testament.

Now, I think a church should be built with good material. And it’s good to have qualified tradesmen building it. But when it comes to any human art or imagination to help create a sense of worship inside that building we step beyond scripture. For though one may quote the skilled craftsmanship and expensive materials that went into the different fixtures of the temple that was for a certain time and place. With the coming of Christ the whole ceremonial system of visible things has been wiped out. The tearing of the temple curtain with the death of Christ meant our access is directly to Christ.

And then let’s remember that the ceremonial system was not created by human wisdom but by divine inspiration. As Exodus 28 verse 3 says, the Lord gave wisdom to those men in their work then.

Again we come back to John 4, for Jesus there told the Samaritan woman about a time when worship wouldn’t be in any particular place. Soon, He said, it would be “in spirit and in truth”. So wherever God’s people gathered together with the right desire and according to God’s Word, there God would be. It’s the worship together that comes out of how we live our whole lives. That’s what Hebrews 13 tells us. In the verses 15 and 16 there it says, “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name. And don’t forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

You see, your true worship on Sunday isn’t separate from the rest of your life. If you think that you can live any way you want on Monday through Saturday and then go to church on Sunday and worship, you’re dead wrong! Worship doesn’t come out of nowhere. Nor is it stimulated by

artificial means. If you have to be in a church building or hear a certain kind of mood music to worship, what you're doing isn't worship.

You should be able to worship God on the motorway during rush hour. But to do that your heart must be right, because when we come together in the congregation of Jesus Christ to worship God, if it isn't already the way you're living your life, true worship doesn't happen. Then it's not "in spirit".

Doesn't Article 6 say exactly this? It takes worship into everything - our families, ourselves personally, and public worship.

I pray that this day has been a true day of worship. But if it didn't start out that way, then I pray that that's not the way you stay. Instead, may this sermon have so confronted you with the truth that you're stirred in your spirit.

Let's all go from here in the right spirit – the Holy Spirit.