

PRAISE IS HIS GRACIOUS CHOICE

CORPORATE WORSHIP
EXPRESSING BIBLICAL TRUTH

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Tom J. Nettles



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Corporate Worship Expressing Biblical Truth

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PREFACE

This is a book about the most important thing that a human being can do—worship the triune God. In his grace God has made a way that disobedient creatures, who have forfeited their position of free entrance into the glorious presence of God, may once again enter. It called for nothing less than infinite wisdom to devise the manner and an infinitely gracious condescension to be willing to do it. The sole mediator between God and man, the eternal Son of God who is the man Christ Jesus, paid the ransom for all who will come and worship.

It should be obvious, however, that worship of him must be in accord with his nature; he alone can describe what is acceptable worship. The sin of Adam and Eve and the murder committed by Cain arose from humans perpetrating an alternate idea of how we can know him, be like him, and please him. In ransoming his people, therefore, God has made it plain, not merely by command but by the very nature of the transaction, that we are ransomed, redeemed, forgiven, justified, and finally glorified only through the person and work

of Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other!” In accord, therefore, with that principle of God’s jealousy for his name he has regulated the way in which redeemed sinners approach him in worship. Since only he knows himself fully, he alone can determine the way humans can best express their submission to him, worship of him, and love to him. That he has done so is a great grace.

This book, therefore, arises from a joyful commitment to what has been called the regulative principle of Christian worship. To paraphrase Augustine’s *Confessions*, God has made us for himself and we are restless until we rest in him and are unfulfilled until we praise him in a way that accords with who he is. He has told us what is involved in this. His instructions and provisions for worship give a virtually inexhaustible expansiveness and challenge to every aspect of redeemed humanity’s desire to worship and love him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Nothing good and right for that purpose is omitted; all that is idolatrous, man-centered, prone to corruption, and of vain imagination is either expressly forbidden or silently passed over. All that he has commanded we must do with all our strength. That will be satisfactory to God and will give a greater challenge to the human spirit than can be fully executed in this lifetime.

At certain places in this book, I mention “Scripture-guided worship.” This is a manner of corporate worship developed by Dr. Joe Crider, Dean of the School of Church Music and Worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In brief the principle is this: worship must be ordered in a way that gives the greatest opportunity for a full display of all the Scripture-mandated elements of corporate worship. Historic rituals are admirable attempts to do this, but do not allow for the week-by-week scripturally and spiritually driven

spontaneity of church life. In addition, in churches where the regular expository preaching of the word is emphasized, the other portions of worship frequently are not supportive of and expressive of the ideas contained in the text for the day's sermon. The principle of Scripture Guided Worship employs a biblical text parallel in thought to the sermonic text for the day. Each element of worship—prayers, confession, doctrinal affirmation, texts of music, intercession—expresses some aspect of that text selected to guide worship. It is a method that gives full sway to the Regulative Principle of worship—Scripture elements arising from a specific biblical text. At the same time the congregation is involved in giving a preparatory exposition of the sermonic text. A few examples of some elements of this principle are presented in the discussion of the different biblical elements of corporate worship.

Every aspect of this will be described—as well as defended biblically and theologically—by Dr. Crider in an upcoming book on this subject.

With that explanation, this author prays that the ideas expressed in *Praise Is His Gracious Choice* will serve to give biblical pleasure and spiritual joy in the great blessing of corporate worship.

Tom J. Nettles

Prologue

WHY SHOULD WORSHIP BE AN EXPRESSION OF BIBLICAL TRUTH?

By his revealed truth and eternal purpose, the Holy Spirit has led us to trust, know, love, and worship the triune God. The life of humans as described in the narratives of the Bible show that humans are fallen and in desperate need of a way out. After things began in Genesis—creation, fall, murder, infidelity, destruction, division, idolatry, promiscuity, redemptive covenant, divine faithfulness—we find that God’s people need an Exodus. We need a way out of this desperate captivity to the idols of this world and the passing, but powerfully destructive, pleasures that capture our senses here. We need to be led above ourselves and above the magnetic deceit of the present into the truth of the eternal divine fellowship that we, by our sin, have forfeited.

God invades our placid destructive satisfaction with a call to turn from all that determines and deserves death. He rescues us from this by the immediate historic work of Christ and leads us to union with that once-for-all redemption by his Spirit in the context of his Truth. This is our way out.

By this union with Christ, God takes away the condemning power of sin and initiates a journey in which we escape from the debilitating, destructive, and corrupting power of sin. In the truth of God—the Bible—we are taught how to adore and what is indeed adorable in our saving God. As Scripture

more and more invades the recesses of our dark minds and alters the perverse attitudes and affections of our hearts, we find the operations of the Spirit more delightful and more desirable for an ever-increasing holiness. Idols fall away and the service and worship of God is the very definition of joy.

One of the most important aspects of finding our way out of darkness into his marvelous light is the experience of corporate worship with fellow pilgrims. God joins us with others that we might be of one mind, have the same love, believe the same truth, speak with one voice as we worship the one God. Contrary to our past way of living, we do not make a god of or unto ourselves; nor do we come to him in a way contrived by our own misled and self-driven perceptions. We know him as he has revealed himself and we worship him as he requires. He revealed his truths and inspired his selected penmen to preserve that revelation so we would know our sin, know our Savior, know our brothers, and know how to know God and worship him in the full light of truth. As we walk together with our fellow pilgrims finding together the narrow way that leads to life, we are energized by the Spirit and guided by Scripture.

Besides the commands that come to each individual concerning the practice of holiness (e.g. Psalm 1; Philippians 4:4-9; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8), God gives several specific commands of deep ethical importance that are carried out most pertinently in the body of the church (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; Ephesians 4:25-32). Beyond that, he gives several commands that are to be practiced as elements of corporate worship. We are to meet together, pray, read Scripture, confess the faith once-for-all given to the saints, hear preaching, give for the support of gospel proclamation and relief of the poor, teach and admonish one another through singing,

practice the ordinances, confess our sins, and proclaim our love for and confidence in God's truth and his saving purpose. All of these things give growing unity and spiritual blessedness to the called-out ones who have come together to have like-minded company on our way out.

Not only do we practice all these revealed ways of reclaiming the lost holy ground, but we should practice them in a way that gives the most profound biblical order and expression to each element and shows them to be a unit in restoring us to obedience to and worship of God. The regulative principle of worship, expressed each week in accord with a text of Scripture parallel to the sermonic text, constitutes Scripture-guided worship. If the various elements of worship are regulated, would it not be edifying and wise to express these elements in a way that gives expression to a particular passage of Scripture? Such a practice gives coherence to the entire experience of corporate worship through the medium of biblically suggested order. Based on the consistency of Scripture and the analogy of faith, Scripture-guided worship sets every element of worship within a coherent biblical framework and serves as a co-exposition for the sermonic text. When we listen to the sermon, we hear the word (Romans 10:14-17); when we embrace the regulative principle, we conform to the word (1 Corinthians 14:36-38); when we worship together by the Scripture-guided text, we express the word (Colossians 3:16, 17).

I pray that you will find this idea, as it has been for me, enriching spiritually, serviceable practically, and profoundly submissive to Scripture in its overall impact. This approach to corporate worship—expressing the regulative principle through Scripture-guided worship—is highly accessible. Churches of all sizes, all levels of staff size, or lay worship

leaders may form worship services of unending variety but always regulated by biblical authority. Investigate these pages and contemplate whether this is a biblically sound way to maintain gospel-focused, Christ-centered worship at the heart of the weekly gathering of the body. As fellow-pilgrims on the way out of this world to the city that cannot be shaken where the immutable and inexhaustibly glorious triune God dwells in uncreated splendor, you are invited to enrich the journey through Scripture-guided worship.

Tom J. Nettles

SECTION ONE

**THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR WORSHIP CONTENT**

Chapter One

SALVATION IS THE RESTORATION OF PRAISE

*“Praise the Lord; Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise
the Lord as long as I live.”*

Psalm 146: 1, 2

At choir practice one evening, when rehearsal focused on the arrangement of “Come Christians, Join to Sing,” a teenage girl asked, “What does the phrase mean, ‘Praise is his gracious choice?’” Ah, the provocative power of a well-stated poetic exclamation. Without going into the answers given on the spot at that time, I would like to affirm that the question caused some important meditation on the idea. If we discern all that is involved in a full answer to that question, we have unlocked the depths of worship.

IT IS FITTING TO PRAISE GOD

There is no more fitting response to God than praise. We love to praise that which is beautiful, talented, pleasing, well-formed, and has some transcendent quality. Cars, athletes, foods, faces, physiques, harmony, melody, visual arts all evoke certain kinds of delight. Friendship, loyalty,

reliability, unerring honesty, unalloyed kindness, tested maturity, brave virtue, wisdom—these traits of goodness and exalted character are admired and, in the best sense of the term, coveted. The apostle Paul summarized the impetus to praise in writing, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8). The life of meditation, mental and spiritual exercises that form godly character, focus on that which is “worthy of praise.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) in his *Treasury of David*, giving exposition to the 135th Psalm, expressed the fitness of praise through singing:

Yea with our best thoughts, and words, and hymns let us glorify his name. ‘*Sing praises unto his name; for it is pleasant.*’ The adjective may apply to the singing and to the name--they are both pleasant. The vocal expression of praise by sacred song is one of our greatest delights. We were created for this purpose, and hence it is a joy to us. It is a charming duty to praise the lovely name of our God. All pleasure is to be found in the joyful worship of Jehovah; all joys are in his sacred name as perfumes lie slumbering in a garden of flowers. The mind expands, the soul is lifted up, the heart warms, the whole being is filled with delight when we are engaged in singing the high praises of our Father, Redeemer, Comforter. When in any occupation goodness and pleasure unite, we do well to follow it up without stint.

Nothing, indeed, is more appropriate for the Creator to expect of his creatures than praise, for as Spurgeon wrote,

“We were created for this purpose.” “Praising God is pleasure,” Spurgeon noted; “Laboring for Him is the highest bliss a mortal can know. Oh, how sweet it must be to sing His praises and never feel that the throat is dry!”¹

We all heartily and truly sing, “All creatures of our God and King, lift us your voice and with us sing . . . O praise Him!” All beauty should lead one to expect a singular beauty that consists of absolute moral perfection. In a fallen world, however, we fail to infer moral symmetry as an absolute and infinite reality. In fact, we even find ways to resist the clear evidence for the existence of a Creator having sufficient power and intelligence to produce the natural order. Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) considered the beauty of the world as a sure indication of holiness as the consummate and all-embracing beauty. Were the heart not manacled by sin such a response should be obvious to mind and heart. “Holiness is a most beautiful and lovely thing,” even “the highest beauty and amiableness, vastly above all other beauties.” It is “too high a beauty for any creatures to be adorned with,” but when present in the soul it makes it “a little sweet and delightful image of the blessed Jehovah.”

As Edwards contemplated the relation between the beauty and harmony of nature as coming from a holy God and as analogous to how such holiness should affect the human soul, he painted a verbal portrait of the beauty of holiness.

It makes the soul like a delightful field of garden planted by God, with all manner of pleasant flowers growing in the order in which nature has planted them, that is all pleasant and delightful, undisturbed, free from all the noise of man and beast, enjoying a sweet

1 MTP, 45:sermon #2607 “Foretastes of the Heavenly Life.”

calm and the bright, calm, and gently vivifying beams of the sun forever: there the sun is Jesus Christ; the blessed beams and calm breeze, the Holy Spirit; the sweet and delightful flowers, and the pleasant shrill music of the little birds, are the Christian graces.²

Everything in all creation lifts its voice, as it were, in its presentation of the infinite glory and wise arrangement of every particle brought into being by the God who created all things. Birds and brooks, lions and lambs, stars and stones, elephants and eggs, rhinos and rabbits, magnets and mice, bitumen and beeswax, clouds and clods all join their peculiar qualities to imply praise. In light of the complex arrangement of atoms and molecules and elements that make them what they are, they virtually have a voice to say, “A God created me.” Surely it is true that “Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:2, 3 NKJV). So clear is the truth that this is what we should hear from created things that the psalmist personifies them in the exhortation, “Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them” (Psalm 69:34 NKJV). How strange, that as his image-bearers, we have lost the moral ability to draw such conclusions; His praise is not on our lips.

The rational order of angels and men also shows the greatness of their Creator, and not only by the purposeful arrangement of all their parts, but in their capacity to use their intelligence, their senses, their intuitional powers, and the gift of language to praise. Fallen angels know God well, but every aspect of the excellent intelligence given them in their creation sets itself in opposition to his praiseworthiness

2 *Yale Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 13:163, 164.

and opposition to the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). They will not praise him. One of the most ominous aspects of their expulsion from heaven is that they are shut off from the experience of the ineffable loveliness of eternal holiness and goodness and, thus, will never, ever, sense the urge to praise the triune God. Satan and his fellows are liars; they will remain liars; they are murderers; they will remain murderers. They are deceivers; they will remain deceivers; they are unjust, and will be unjust still; they are filthy, and will be filthy still. Nothing comes from the arch-deceiver's lips or from the lips of those whom he empowers but words of vilest blasphemy—"Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name" (Revelation 13:6 NKJV). No grace will be given them to restore the praise of God to their lips. Imagine the doom and horror of seeing nothing better than themselves, nothing to draw forth admiration to any being other than their wretched selves.

WE ARE UNFIT TO PRAISE GOD

Humans are now born with a punitive corruption that dominates their spirit, senses, and intellect. Like the heavens and the earth and all created things, however, image-bearers cannot help but show forth the greatness and praiseworthiness of God, for, indeed, we are "skillfully wrought" and "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14, 15). Every natural part of every created being, including Satan and his fallen cohorts, manifests the infinite power, beauty, goodness, intelligence, and consummate holiness of their Creator by their simple being, even though such praise is not volitionally given. So it will be with the saints in heaven who without ceasing praise such all-consuming holy love. God will find delight, not only in that which in the moment flows from

their glorified tongues and purified spirits, but in the as yet unmanifested praise-in-potential of which his image in them is capable as they increase in capacity throughout eternity. He finds pleasure in the knowledge that his redeemed image-bearers will yet praise him, for he has made them capable of such perceptions of true glory and of ever-expanding manners of expression within which this praise will be couched. The water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb giving unending nurture to the “tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.” In accordance with this continued provision of grace, healing comes to the nations, nothing there is accursed, and “his servants will worship him” (Revelation 22:1-5). The continued flowing of the “river of the water of life” with the ongoing fruitfulness of the tree of life shows the ever-expanding nature of the saints’ worship as they without ceasing experience the glory of “God and of the Lamb.” The extrinsic praise given volitionally through present capacities always is supplemented by the intrinsic potential of each created-and-redeemed nature.

Redemption, therefore, forms the key to the renewal of purposeful praise. Presently, fallen creatures give themselves to the will of Satan in matters concerning God in denying the infinite beauty, excellence, and desirability of God’s holiness. As a result, these fallen creatures are subject to the god of this age and easily duped by his wiles. At the highest level of their resistance to the glory that is present all around them and in them, they may be called the children of the devil—like him murderers, liars, and blasphemers (John 8:37-44). Because they did not receive a love of the truth, but instead embraced the deception of

the lawless one, “God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie” and thus be condemned as those who take no pleasure in truth but in unrighteousness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

This sinful condition shuts us off from the most exalted use of mind and tongue. Anselm contemplated the loss involved in the fall of man and lamented:

O pitiful lot of man, who has lost that for which he was made! O hard and frightful Fall! Alas, what he has lost and what he has found! What has departed from him and what has remained! He has lost the blessedness for which he was made, and has found the misery for which he was not made. That without which nothing is happy has deserted him, and that which by itself is nothing but misery has remained.³

We have been given senses so that we might internalize the experiences gained through them and relish the inward reality to which they witness in the material world. These should develop that intuitive sense of the wholeness, simplicity, and unity of the true goodness of God and flow out in praise, endless and inexhaustible, to Him who made us in his image. Instead the smog of our corrupt inwardness presses our sense to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.

We have lost the moral capacity to see the transcendent implication of light and color as but faint reflections of the beauty of God. A touch of hardness does not lead us to adore divine steadfastness and the feel of softness does not make us desire all of our comforts in God alone. A flood of melody and harmony leads us to cold analysis of numbers of sound waves and their relations without, at the same time, causing

3 Anselm, *Proslogion*, Chapter 1.

us to marvel in how God shows us that dissonance and resolution, simple melody and lush harmony demonstrate the final beauty of the multiple and complex manifestations of his perfect unity and simplicity. Taste, which lets us know how pleasant our necessary food is, seldom, if ever, leads us to the knowledge that our life, which depends on the will of God at every moment, also finds its eternal sustenance in the endless pleasure of tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. Smell, that delicate sense shows us that the things that sustain life and give it beauty (such as the aroma of food and flowers), spread their fragrance all around to show that we can never escape the presence of God, and his laudable attributes interpenetrate every space we occupy and every moment we live. We finally must confess, “But the senses of my soul have been frozen and stupefied and blocked up by the ancient enfeeblement of sin.”⁴

FITNESS TO PRAISE MUST BE RESTORED

The psalmist looked at the salvation wrought by the Messiah as a restoration of praise. As we were made “very good” in the image of God, a restored knowledge of the infinite goodness *in God* of all those highest aspirations of soul *in us*, naturally produces praise. Joyful praise expresses a continual and spirit-saturated desire for fellowship with the infinitely excellent Divine Being. “Let your salvation, O God, set me up on high. I will praise the name of God with a song and will magnify him with thanksgiving” (Psalm 69:29, 30). To what then does the salvation that God gives restore us? It restores us to a position in which the highest privilege of the creature becomes the natural response of his heart—knowledgable

⁴ Anselm, chapter 17

praise of his Creator. Another psalmist embraced with fervency of soul the relation between the beauty of God and his praiseworthiness when he wrote,

*“How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise!”
(Psalm 84:1, 2, 4).*

Commenting on that psalm, Matthew Henry noted, “If there be a heaven upon earth, it is in praising God, in continually praising him.”⁵ As the prophet Isaiah was led by divine revelation to deeper knowledge of the purpose of God’s sovereignty as a redeemer (Isaiah 43), he heard the Lord himself declare the end of his saving intervention (verses 19-21):

*“Behold, I am doing a new thing;
Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert,
The wild beasts will honor me,
The jackals and the ostriches,
For I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
To give drink to my chosen people,
The People whom I formed for myself
That they might declare my praise.”*

PRAISE IS HIS GRACIOUS CHOICE

Praise, therefore, is his gracious choice. No sinner deserves to have such a restoration. His grace, nevertheless, abounds to us for this very purpose, that we might be restored to such a sight and experience of his goodness that the praise of his

5 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing House, [1970?]) 3:558.

attributes becomes the occupation of our lives. Paul prayed, therefore, in this way: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruit of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11 NKJV).

Paul’s reference to the “day of Christ” in the context of our living to the “glory and praise of God” shows that praise is the “fruit of righteousness” and is our eternal occupation. The writer of Psalm 146 calls others to praise for this very reason. While there are some activities to which we have no right to call others, the praise of “Yah” is a duty intrinsic both to our status as his creatures and to his character as infinitely praiseworthy. While we have breath, we call on others to praise the Lord. We glory in his truth and commend it to others; we discern the lavish advantages of his mercy, and seek to inculcate in others that sense of dependent gratitude; we are kept from a deserved judgment in order to seek him while he may be found, and urge the quest on others.

Then the psalmist calls on himself (“O my soul!”) to praise. He does not call others to an intrinsic duty to which he does not admonish his own soul. Though the psalmist himself is a prince or gifted leader, he recognizes that all he has is from the Lord, and he does not exempt his own soul from seeking to express the purest and most knowledgeable praise possible. We must often chide ourselves for our lack of fitting response to God and urge ourselves on in this most blessed, because graciously restored, of all privileges—to know and praise the Lord. Before his grace reached us, we were unfit to praise and found the duty reprehensible. His grace has shined in our

hearts and opened our eyes to see the loveliness and holiness which we could not see and could not love (2 Corinthians 4:6). Having been restored to praise, let us urge our souls to this most fulfilling and eternally expanding occupation.

“I will praise the Lord as long as I live” (Verse 2). God is worthy of our praise in every conscious moment of our present life. While we live here, nothing transcends praise as a high calling for creatures made in God’s image. We have many things that fall within the realm of duty and stewardship that occupy energy and time, but none of them excludes praise to God while in their doing. Whether we eat, drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

“I will sing praises to my God while I have my being” means that the chorus of praise will never end. Psalm 145 ended, “My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever.” Psalm 146 ends (10), “The Lord will reign forever, your God O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!” The book of Revelation paints verbal pictures of scenes in which God is praised for his wisdom in creation and providence (4:9-11), his mercy in redemption (5:9, 10, 12, 13), his perfect equity in judgment (11:16-19), and his glory in wrath (15:3, 4; 16:5-7). We join the endless exultation of praise for ever and ever.

A PASTOR’S PERSPECTIVE

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) saw clearly how conversion renewed the propensity of God’s image bearer to praise his Maker. “When sin is pardoned, our greatest sorrow is ended, and our truest pleasure begins,” Spurgeon taught. “Such is the joy which the LORD bestows upon His reconciled ones,

that it overflows and fills all nature with delight. The material world has latent music in it, and a renewed heart knows how to bring it out and make it vocal.” He continued, teasing out the idea of the praise implicit within the ordered universe.

Creation is the organ, and a gracious man finds out its keys, lays his hand thereon, and wakes the whole system of the universe to the harmony of praise. Mountains and hills, and other great objects, are, as it were, the bass of the chorus; while the trees of the wood, and all things that have life, take up the air of the melodious song.

When sinners are converted, their hearts are tuned to sing his praise. The chorus, consequently, expands among the redeemed. Unity of heart in the common adoration of a saving God enriches each individual in purity of praise and increases its dimensions exponentially.

When God’s Word is made to prosper among us and souls are saved, then everything seems full of song. When we hear the confessions of young believers and the testimonies of well-instructed saints, we are made so happy that we must praise the LORD, and then it seems as if rocks and hills and woods and fields echo our joy-notes and turn the world into an orchestra. LORD, on this happy May Day, lead me out into thy tuneful world as rich in praise as a lark in full song.⁶

DEFINING WORSHIP

Sovereign grace is given in order that unadulterated praise

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1996), 122.

might flow from his redeemed creatures. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which he made us accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:4-6 NKJV). The redemptive blood of Christ the Beloved, covenanted by grace, not only *demonstrates* his infinite grace, but was *designed* to restore the *praise* of the glory of his grace.

We define worship, therefore, as an individual and a corporate matter. For the individual, *worship is a response of the redeemed manifested in a gracious state of increasing conformity of both understanding and affections to biblical revelation of the divine purpose in redemption through Christ. Each person moves toward a perfect state of such conformity in giving adoring submission to and seeking enjoyment in the infinite excellence of the triune God.*

All of these aspects of individual worship will, by their very nature, be expressed and nurtured in corporate worship. The additional benefit of corporate worship, as designed by God, comes in the form of gifted leadership in affirmation and instruction, mutual encouragement in the body, and unanimity in vocal expression of truth. How all of this may be sustained most edifyingly and economically in the local church composes the subject matter of this book. In that light we define corporate worship:

Corporate worship consists of *united affirmation of the infinite excellence of the triune God with a view to encouraging a grateful response to his redemptive and revelatory initiative in Christ. This involves the praise of heart and lips,*

the deportment of life, and corporate expressions of heartfelt repentance, transparent trust, conformity to truth, earnest hope to be like Christ, and anticipation of living eternally, body and spirit, in the glory of the presence of the triune God.

*One thing have I asked of the Lord,
That will I seek after:
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 inquire in his temple.
Psalm 27:4*

We gaze and we inquire; we seek to heighten our affections, but always in light of more profound understanding. So shall we continue to do.