



New Covenant Fellowship and the Worship of God

There is nothing more important in life than worship. If we are not worshipping the One True God, we are inevitably worshipping something else. Worship, therefore, is the defining mark of who we are, what we do and where we're going as a congregation. At New Covenant we want all of life to be worship to God (Rom. 12:1-2, 1 Cor. 10:31). And it is our supreme goal that corporate worship on Sunday inspire and instruct our all-of-life worship Monday through Saturday.

With that goal in mind, New Covenant holds to a number of values when it comes to corporate worship. The list below is far from comprehensive or complete. Rather, it is a provisional summary of convictions upholding our theology and philosophy of the worship of God.

1. **Glorifies God** – God alone is worthy of our worship, and our worship is ultimately for Him. When we worship we have an audience of One, and He is the most important audience at every worship service (Rev. 4:9-11, 5:2, 8-14). Our very existence dictates a worship response (Psalm 19:1, 48:9-10, 100:1). Worship is a foretaste of what takes place in heaven (Heb. 12:22-24). And the way we worship, what we say, how we pray and sing, is what we really believe about God. Our weekly gatherings—whether small or large, beautiful or forgettable—are to remind us of why God is worthy to be worshipped.
2. **Gospel-Centered** – Ultimately our worship leader is Jesus. His work is what makes our worship acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:4-5). He is the only mediator between God and man and the perfect man who sings God's praise in our midst (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 2:12, 10:19-22). The heart of worship is to magnify the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. His atoning work—his life, death, and resurrection—is the object of our praise. The host of heaven never tire of peering into the mystery and wisdom of the gospel (1 Peter 1:2). Nor should we. When we focus our worship on Christ we bring gospel truth to bear on the Christian and non-Christian alike. It is the gospel of Christ that renews and revives His church.
3. **Transformational** – No amount of preparation can replace the humble dependence on the Holy Spirit to worship God (Jn. 4:20-24). Only God's Spirit can do what He does—bring light and truth to darkened hearts and minds (2 Cor. 3:18). The Holy Spirit reveals God's presence and draws us closer to our Savior (Matt. 5:7, Ps. 51:17). He, the Spirit, sanctifies us, illuminates God's truth, and applies the redemptive work of Christ to our lives. Music doesn't transform us but, rather, God's Spirit working through His word does. The end of being led and aided by the Spirit is to give us a powerful confidence before God by bringing us to the Lamb who was slain (Rom. 8:15-17). Each Sunday we come having asked the Holy Spirit to work and expecting His involvement and allowing Him to lead us in our time of worship together.

4. **Reformed (Orthodox)** – As a PCA church, our worship resonates with the guidelines outlined in The Directory for the Worship of God (see the PCA BCO, Chapters 47-63). We want our worship service to be winsomely Reformed, rooted in history and true to the Scriptures. The regulative principle states that “the acceptable way of worshipping God is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will” (WCF 21.1). In other words, corporate worship should be comprised of those elements we can show to be derived from the Scriptures. The regulative principle simply states, “let’s worship God the way he wants to be worshiped.” But the heart of the regulative principle is not about restriction. It is about freedom.
5. **Accessible** – The principle we seek to be in worship is “all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22). Worship arises from the community of God’s people, and it is directed out toward the world and up toward God (Isaiah 2:2-4, 56:6-8). On any given Sunday we expect both “unbelievers” and the “unlearned” to be present in our worship service (1 Cor. 14:23). We strive to worship and preach in the vernacular, clearly give explanation through the service, acknowledge their presence, mind our aesthetics, celebrate deeds of mercy and justice, articulate the gospel in the sacraments and above all, preach grace. God commends us to worship him in a way that is accessible to the non-believer and the unlearned including the new believer and the young, therefore worship must be in a language and form that communicates effectively to each generation in our culture. The gospel is God’s timeless message revealed in time (1 Cor. 9:19-23, 14:16-19).
6. **Dialogical** – Worship is simply a dialog between God and us, His people. God calls us. We respond in gratitude. This dialog creates movement, direction, and meaningful participation in worship. God has called us to Himself, but He has also called us to each other in the expression of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:5). Each worship service should be designed to call each individual to active participation through responsive readings, corporate confessions, the involvement of children and other participants to read scripture, pray, give testimonies, etc.
7. **Beautiful** — Music and singing are essential because the realities of the gospel are too great to simply discuss and analyze. The loveliness of God demands a response of mirth through poetry, music, and song. “There is no other reason why we should express ourselves to God in verse rather than in prose and with music, except that these things have a tendency to move our affections” (Jonathan Edwards). The immediate result of being filled with the Spirit in Ephesians 5 is singing and making melody to the Lord with all our hearts. We are called to worship “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23). New Covenant recognizes the “subjective” and “objective” emphases in worship are not mutually exclusive and therefore seeks a rich merging between heartfelt and contemplative types of music (Col. 3:16a, 1 Cor. 14:14-19). Our God is a singing God (Zeph. 3:17), and we reflect His glorious nature when we lift up our voices and sing his song back to Him.

The debate over church music most often focuses on subjective matters of taste that aren’t addressed in the Scriptures. Choosing appropriate musical compositions and lyrical content for worship is a task which requires careful attention to aesthetic beauty, accessibility, and

theological fidelity. We believe there are new songs to be sung to Jesus. In fact, we see new music as a sign of spiritual life. We also believe there is a great heritage of church music that we should embrace. Some songs of earlier centuries retain every bit of their truth and power. We use a variety of instruments, but the most important sound is that of congregational singing.

8. **Biblical** — Jesus Christ is the preexistent, incarnate, eternal Word of God (John 1:1). The Scriptures are the very self-disclosure of God revealed in the embodiment of Jesus. God has exalted above all things his name and his word (Ps. 138:2). In corporate worship we read the Bible, preach the Bible, memorize the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, and see the Bible in the sacraments. Every element in the service must be evaluated based on God's revelation in the Scriptures: are we singing, saying, and hearing what is true? We make God's Word a priority because we know it has the power to save, transform, and endure.
9. **Liturgical** — Worship, in its essence, is a re-presentation of the gospel. Therefore, we plan to retell this story consistently through the structures of adoration, confession, assurance, thanksgiving, petition, instruction, and blessing. This does not mean that every element will be emphasized evenly, nor does it imply that there is never room to change the structure. It means that each week New Covenant will utilize this common liturgical structure, not artificially imposed, but with the freshness and reality of the progressive nature of the gospel in our lives. Our worship is a medium shaped by the message of the gospel.
10. **Excellence** — In corporate worship, the focus is to be on the gospel and the all-surpassing glory of Jesus Christ. If the instruments are out of tune, the vocals are garbled, the mixing is bad, the preacher fumbles over his sentences, or those up front draw attention to themselves and make everyone else feel nervous or in a performance, then the focus will be in the wrong place. Because doing things decently and in order is helpful to others and pleasing to God, we should "do worship" with excellence (1 Cor. 14:40). But it must be an undistracting excellence.