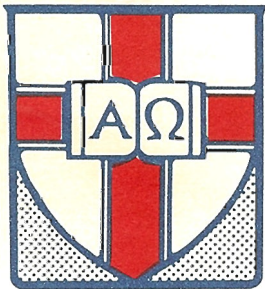


Worthy Worship in the Book of Common Prayer



REFORMED
EPISCOPAL



Perhaps you have heard the expression, "There are many ways to worship God." Indeed, every religion and every generation has devised its own rituals and forms of worship. But are all these ways of worship acceptable to God? This is a crucial question, and to discover God's answer we must go to His written word, the Bible.

Worthy Worship

God commands us to "worship Him in spirit and in truth" John 4:24. God further defines for us these two important words, spirit and truth. He declares that all Scripture was written by "holy men of God who were moved by the Holy Spirit." II Peter 1:21. *Spirit-filled worship*, then, is Scripture-filled worship. And when Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father He declared, "Thy word is truth," John 17:17. *Worship in truth*, then, is worship rooted in God's word, the Bible.

God has clearly spoken, with a double emphasis we dare not ignore. The only worship worthy of almighty God is worship that is built upon Scripture. Imaginative dramas, carnival-like celebrations, or afternoon sessions on a grassy hill with folk songs and personal testimonies may be offered to God with the best intentions, but they fall far short of that worship which God Himself commands.

Scriptural Authorship

The Book of Common Prayer used in the Reformed Episcopal Church is composed almost exclusively of selections from Scripture, because God has decreed that worship must be Scriptural. In II Timothy 3:16, 17 God gives us the reason for this command: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." God's word was given for our benefit. Its purpose is to change us, to perfect us. Jesus Himself testified to this, for when He prayed for His followers shortly before His death, He implored His Father in Heaven, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" John 17:17. The Book of Common Prayer, often called the Prayer Book, simply orders the Scriptures into a form suitable for worship. We are confident that our order of worship is acceptable to God, for we speak to God in the very words which He has given us.

An Orderly Framework

The Prayer Book provides an orderly framework through which the Holy Spirit can apply God's Word to us in specific ways. It calls us to worship and repentance; it leads us to confession, and assures us of the forgiveness of our sins. It fills our hearts with the desire to praise God with psalms and hymns. We are instructed and reproved through the lessons from the Bible. It orders the petitions of our prayers, that they may be worthily offered in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

As we worship, our triune God works in our behalf. The Holy Spirit applies God's sovereign word to believers in Christ, directs the preaching of the Gospel, and opens the ears and hearts and minds of the hearers, that we may be sanctified, being conformed more and more to the image of Christ Himself.

An Accurate Picture of God

The Book of Common Prayer gives us an accurate picture of God as He has revealed Himself through the Scriptures. There are many distorted views of God today. Some people see Him primarily as the Creator of the earth and universe; others focus on the compassion and tenderness of Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry, and ignore His commands and authority; still others seek the Spirit of God in emotional and mystical experiences, or through meditation and self-awareness. But God is God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit inseparably One, eternal, holy, and sovereign. Our worship must declare His perfect nature, not our incomplete and often mistaken notions.

The Prayer Book also depicts us as we truly are, unworthy sinners in need of His forgiveness and grace. We do not address God in casual or familiar terms, for we are not His equal in holiness.

Intelligent Participation

The Book of Common Prayer allows the intelligent participation of all worshippers regardless of age, background, or spiritual maturity. The service is both responsive and corporate. That is, in certain parts of the service the minister speaks and the people respond. In other portions of the service the minister and the people together (corporately) confess, pray, and sing their praise to God.

As the name of the book affirms, the prayers are common, or shared by all the believers. There is then less influence of the personal viewpoints or bias of the minister. God's revelation in the Bible remains central.

The Articles of Religion are printed in the front of the Prayer Book, so that one can immediately determine the truths of doctrine and worship adhered to by all the churches in the Reformed Episcopal denomination. These Biblical truths are sustained in every element of our liturgical worship.

Some Objections Answered

The Book of Common Prayer has qualities that may seem objectionable at first but are in fact of great value. You may say, for example, "It is mechanical vain repetition..." All repetition is not in vain. As young children we learn the language and values of our earthly family by repeating "please, thank you, I'm sorry" and "my father always says." So too by repeating Scripture in prayers and creeds we learn the language and values of our spiritual family. (The Prayer Book encourages us to apply these spiritual values to our everyday lives by providing a section on family prayer, so that we may continue in right worship even in our own homes.) The teaching value of repetition is apparent in Scripture; for example, Psalm 118 and 136 remind us over and over again that God's mercy endureth forever.

You may ask, "Why have special seasons like Advent, Epiphany, Lent . . .?" These seasons remind us of all that Christ has done for us. Thus we fix our attention on the major events in the life of Christ and in the essential doctrines of our Christian faith. As we worship we are being taught, for all the elements of the service are in harmony with each other on these major themes. Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Boy Scout Sunday may be more popular on our everyday calendar, but they are not Biblical. We do not focus on them because they draw our attention away from Jesus Christ.

Your objection might be, "Those pre-composed prayers are just not as sincere as spontaneous prayer . . ." We unite in pre-composed hymns for praise and adoration without feeling insincere. In fact, many of us have favorite hymns that express our thoughts better than we could ourselves. Cannot the same be said for spoken prayers of confession, petition, adoration? Scripture again provides us with examples. Psalm 51, David's cry of confession and plea for God's mercy has been echoed by penitent sinners for many centuries. And Christ Himself gave us the Lord's Prayer, which has been used by Christians since those Apostolic days. In the Book of Common Prayer provision is also made for Biblically sound extemporaneous prayer to be used where appropriate.

You may think, "The emphasis on the Bible is old-fashioned, and doesn't meet the needs of man in today's society." We are all born sinners just like every man since Adam, including such church notables as St. Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin. We need God's forgiveness and salvation through the blood of Christ just as those men did. When God saves us, He gives us an identity as His son in Christ. We now have a new purpose for living: to bring glory to God. And it is the written word of God that brings us this life-giving message of love and mercy. We dare not neglect the use of Scripture in public worship, for that would deny man the very things he is seeking — forgiveness, identity, and purpose.

What About Other Liturgies?

Perhaps you wonder how our worship differs from the Scripture-filled liturgical forms of other churches such as the Roman Catholic and Protestant Episcopal Churches. The primary difference is this, that our Reformed Episcopal liturgy has not added teachings and traditions that are contrary to the truth of the Scriptures. Both the Old and New Testaments verify the words of Christ: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" John 14:6. We can approach God in only *one* way: not through rituals, not by having our sins forgiven by a priest, not by reliving the actual sacrifice of Christ's body and blood through the bread and wine of communion; but *only* by personally trusting in the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross for our sins and desiring to walk in obedience to His word. Our liturgical worship accurately teaches this central truth of the Bible.

The Book of Common Prayer contains both the spirit and the very words of Scripture. We do not worship the book, but we do use it fully for its intended purpose. We worship God in spirit and in truth, rejoicing in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving...

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: let the whole earth stand in awe of him...

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

(from The Order for Morning Prayer)