

Psalm 95.1-7: “Worshipping With Our Bodies”
(The Worship of God, Sermon #8)

Introduction

Dualism (rooted in Greek philosophy) divides reality into two categories: spiritual and material. Dualism denigrates the material/physical realm.

When dualism creeps into Christian thinking, worship can be thought of as a purely *spiritual* experience unrelated to the *physical* aspect of our being. This is unbiblical, as is seen by Scripture’s teaching on:

- the goodness of creation
- the reality of Christ’s incarnation and resurrection
- Paul’s command: “Glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6.20)

Question to be addressed: How can we glorify God in our bodies in worship?

I. Worshipping With Our Bodies: Biblical Precepts and Precedents

Begin by considering 4 basic prayer postures in Scripture.

A. Standing

Most common Biblical prayer posture

2 Chronicles 20.5-6, 13 (Jehoshaphat)

Could cite examples of Job, Abraham, Hannah, Nehemiah

Mark 11.25 (Jesus teaching)

Luke 18.11, 13 (Pharisee and tax collector)

B. Kneeling

Today’s call to worship: “Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.” (Ps. 95.6)

2 Chronicles 6.13 (Solomon)

Daniel 6.10 (Daniel)

Ezra 9.5-6 (Ezra’s prayer confessing sin)

Luke 22.41 (Jesus in garden of Gethsemane)

Acts 9.40 (Peter)

Acts 20.36 (Paul)

C. Prostration

More extreme posture than kneeling.

Joshua 7.6 (Joshua and elders of Israel)

1 Chronicles 21.16 (David and elders)

Matthew 26.39 (Jesus in garden of Gethsemane)

D. Sitting

Rarest prayer posture in Scripture → only one *possible* example

2 Samuel 7.18 (David)

Biblical principles for posture in prayer for worship:

1. The congregation should generally stand during prayer.
2. Kneeling is an appropriate posture, esp. for prayer of confession of sin.
3. In times of great distress, prostration would be appropriate.
4. Sitting should generally be avoided during prayer in corporate worship.

E. Lifting Hands

Common practice during prayer and praise.

2 Chronicles 6.13 (Solomon) & Ezra 9.5 (Ezra)

Psalm 63.4 (David)

Nehemiah 8.6 (Ezra and all the people in worship)

1 Timothy 2.8 (Paul's instruction)

Biblical principles for lifting hands in worship:

1. The worship leader will sometimes lift his hands in prayer on behalf of the people.
2. It is appropriate for worshipers sometimes to lift hands during prayer or praise.
3. This should be a corporate act, not something individuals do on their own.

F. Standing for the Reading of God's Word

Nehemiah 8.5 (all people during reading of Book of the Law)

Cf. standing when judge enters courtroom as sign of respect for his office.

G. Other Bodily Expressions in Worship

1. Singing

Singing = a physical activity

(Consult last week's sermon)

2. Clapping

Psalm 47.1

Might be a practice to be introduced if church recovered the vibrant, rhythmical singing that characterized first generation of Reformed believers (cf. Calvin's Genevan psalms → "Genevan jigs").

3. Dance and Drama

What about Psalm 149.3 (command to praise in dance)?

No Biblical examples of dance in tabernacle or temple worship, which sets pattern for church's primary services of corporate worship.

Exodus 5.20 (Miriam and other woman celebrating exodus)

2 Samuel 6 (David dancing in festal procession with ark)

Suggestion: church should find opportunities outside services of covenant renewal worship for glorifying God in dance, drama, and other artistic expression.

4. The Lord's Supper

God's instituted dramatic ritual for New Covenant worship (along with occasional baptisms).

All senses employed in celebration of the Lord's Supper.

II. Worshiping With Our Bodies at Covenant Presbyterian Church

Applications of Biblical principles and precedents:

1. Don't Be a Dualist

Worship in the fullness of your humanity – body and spirit in unity.

2. Think About Bodily Expressions as You Worship

Be self-conscious about how you use your body in worship to glorify God.

We can express with our bodies what is going on in our hearts, but we can also allow our bodies to remind us of what *should* be going on in our hearts.

3. Be Open-minded About Biblically-based Changes in Worship Practice

Presbyterian “regulative principle of worship” = *sola Scriptura* applied to worship

Tradition and personal preference in matters relating to worship must be submitted to evaluation on basis of Biblical teaching.

Session has called for two new Biblical practices in our corporate worship:

a. Lifting Hands in Praise

- during singing of the *Gloria Patri* after assurance of pardon
- during singing of the *Doxology* during offering

b. Kneeling for Prayer of Confession of Sin

- appropriate expression of humility
- transition from kneeling to confess sin to standing to hear assurance of pardon will accentuate joy in our cleansing

4. Be Committed to the Corporate Character of Corporate Worship

Our corporate worship should express the reality of our spiritual unity (Eph. 4.4-6). We can do this in the *unified* use of our bodies in worship (by all who are physically able to do so).

Reflecting on worshiping God with our bodies can help us remember the cosmic scope of Christ's redemption.

We will one day be clothed in glorified resurrection bodies to worship the Lord for all eternity in a renewed heavens and earth. As we glorify God with our bodies in worship now, we are preparing for and experiencing a foretaste of eternity.

[Outline of sermon preached by Pastor Steven Wright at Covenant PCA, 12 March 2017.]