

The “Both” of Worship

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When discussing worship in the context of Sunday morning services, the topic tends toward polarization. “Worship wars” have been common throughout church history. A few examples:

- Singing the Psalter vs Hymns
- Amplification vs Natural Voices
- Organ vs Piano
- Live music vs cassette tracks
- Hymnals vs Slides/Screen Projection
- Choruses vs Hymns
- Regulative Principle vs Normative Principle in Worship¹
- Communion served up vs Communion around a table²
- Weekly Communion vs less frequent Communion
- Verse by Verse vs Topical Preaching
- Clerical Robes vs Standard Dress in preaching

Each period of the church faced unique challenges with the balance between what is biblical and what is contextual. Adding to this problem is the subjective nature of the discussion, and the fact that many people approach worship with some level of reaction to something in their past. Some fear being unbiblical because their previous church’s doctrinal slide followed its worship practice. Others are concerned about the church being stuck in the past such that the gospel loses its relevance. And still others fear that the church will become indistinguishable from the world in its worship services.

Choose a period of church history and you will find controversy typically marked by polarization and often paralysis.

Churches have attempted to address these challenges in a variety of ways. Over a decade ago, the trend was to have two unique services with different styles of music. In some mega-churches, four to five different musical styles are offered in unique rooms or settings (e.g., a classical service, country western service, contemporary service or a jazz service). Other

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulative_principle_of_worship

² John Knox controversially served communion with congregants around the table as the elements were passed among them versus being directly mediated by a pastor or priest.

churches, especially in the Reformed and Puritan tradition, use the regulative principle to limit worship to only what is specifically prescribed in the Bible (e.g., no parent/child dedications, liturgical dance, drama, etc.). Other churches believe that there should be no restraints and that the church should do whatever is necessary to reach unbelievers (e.g., “secular” music, culturally-driven sermons, “we’ll do anything short of sin to reach a lost person,” etc.).

The tendency toward polarization and “either-or” categories make it very challenging for church leaders and especially worship pastors/leaders. The issues are not new, and the solutions are not simple.

So here is the question: ***What should characterize the Sunday worship service at College Park Church?*** This paper attempts to lay out my thoughts on corporate worship, a perspective that does not solve all the problems, but establishes a framework for moving us toward mutual understanding, decision-making, and planning.

The History and Trends of College Park Church

College Park Church was planted in 1985 through the *General Association of Regular Baptist Churches* (GARBC). The Association broke from the *Northern Baptist Convention* (now the *American Baptist Convention*) because of modernism and liberalism in the 1920’s. This movement of churches was strong in its commitment to the faithful proclamation of the Scriptures, an emphasis on local church autonomy, a focus on global missions, and a fellowship among like-minded churches.

However, the weakness of the GARBC was its historic over-emphasis on separation. The result was that GARBC churches became known more for what they were against than what they were for. The movement became associated with the Fundamentalist Movement of the 70’s and 80’s in tone.

Kimber Kauffman, the planting pastor of College Park Church, was a pioneer in the GARBC. His preaching style was deeply biblical and expositional (“verse by verse”) but it was also uniquely authentic. The church was committed to orthodoxy but also an unusual unity in diversity. There was a strong message of the authority of the Word, but there was also extravagant grace offered to hurting people. The church preached the gospel strongly but erred on the side of love. The combination was rare and welcomed.

The effect was that College Park Church became known within the GARBC as a bit of a “maverick church.” In the city of Indianapolis, the church was known a preaching center, a “hospital for sinners,” and a refuge for those who loved the Word but longed for freedom

from the legalistic strictures of the fundamentalist movement. College Park attracted people from various walks of life, most of whom came out of historically conservative churches. Sometime in the 1990's College Park dropped "Baptist" from its name, a move that was about 10 years ahead of the national trend in other Baptist churches.

I joined the ministry of College Park in 2008, and the congregation was comprised of three groups of people: 1) those coming from conservative churches looking for freedom and grace, 2) those coming from seeker-oriented churches who were looking for depth of teaching, and 3) new believers or those in crisis who were simply looking to grow and change.

Over the last nine years, a shift has taken place in the body and the dynamics of College Park Church. A few observations:

- The number of people coming from ultra-conservative and Baptist churches has dropped since those churches have fewer and fewer people than they did 10 years ago
- A significant number of people continue to either come from more seeker-oriented churches or who have some significant fears about the seeker-sensitive movement
- An increasing number of people are coming from mainline churches and non-Baptist churches
- The ethnic diversity, while still far from ideal, has changed significantly and increased
- The number of people in crisis and who are coming to faith in Christ has increased significantly since 2008
- The church moved into a new sanctuary in 2012 which was double the seating capacity and triple the scale of our last worship space

These dynamics make the opportunities and challenges of Sunday morning services a unique and moving target. Therefore, it is helpful to consider the core philosophical center of Sunday mornings at College Park Church.

The Beauty of "Both"

The thesis behind this document is the belief that the church must attempt to avoid the historical polarization of worship philosophies by highlighting the biblical and contextual value of "both."

By using the word "both," I'm not referring merely to "blended worship," although that certainly could be an aspect of "both." Rather, I mean ***a philosophy which recognizes that the***

values regarding worship are on a continuum that must be balanced and then also prioritized for the spiritual health of a particular body of Christ in its unique setting and changing context.

We find this beauty of “both” highlighted through Scripture, and it is often connected with worship. A few examples:

1) Jesus himself was described by John as “full of grace and truth.”

¹⁴ *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, **full of grace and truth.** John 1:14 (ESV)*

2) The early apostles, amid challenging ministry demands, committed themselves to the ministry of prayer and the Word.

⁴ *But we will devote ourselves **to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**” Acts 6:4 (ESV)*

3) To the woman at the well, Jesus highlighted worship as involving “spirit and truth.”

²³ *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship **in spirit and truth.**” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” John 4:23–25 (ESV)*

4) Paul encouraged the people at Colossae to admonish one another through multiple means

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, **singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,** with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)*

5) Paul charged the church at Ephesus to be filled with the Spirit and to address one another in a variety of ways

¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one **another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,** singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart... Ephesians 5:18–19 (ESV)*

I would suggest that “both” is a category that is a vital part of a church philosophy of ministry and especially a philosophy of Sunday worship. Additionally, I believe that many of the worship wars stem not just from categorical disagreement but from the challenge of balance.

In other words, understanding the “both of worship” could help in bringing unity to the church and help to chart a philosophical framework as we move forward.

The Orientation of “Both”

My philosophy of “both” in worship involves two orientations. The first is the **biblically-driven orientation** which carries more weight and a greater prioritization in terms of where the focus lies. The Bible has more direct affect on this focus, and it is therefore more deliberate and prescriptive. The second is the **contextually-driven orientation** which is more influenced by the setting, the history and the background of the church. Both orientations have levels of fluidity to them, but the contextual orientation has a greater level of fluidity because it is less tied to biblical principle and is more subjective.

Within each of these orientations are a continuum. As you will read below, a church service will have both Christians and non-Christians in attendance. Therefore, both groups must be considered. However, that does not mean that they are necessarily given equal consideration. It would be a mistaken to design a service exclusively focused on believers or on unbelievers. But the critical question is: “To what *extent* should the presence of either drive what we do?”

While acknowledging the spiritual value and benefit of various perspectives, there is a need for a prioritization toward one value over another. “Both” does not mean that everything is balanced out 50/50. One aspect of the continuum may need greater focus or a higher priority than the other. For example, given my previous church’s history we initially emphasized more historic songs and less contemporary while valuing both. But over time, the style of worship changed as the church changed. The categories remained the same, but our prioritization shifted over time.

The point here is to simply recognize 1) the biblical value of the category of both and 2) the reality of the need of an orientation in emphasis depending on the context or need. The balance and the prioritization of “both” is what makes Sunday morning worship so glorious and potentially challenging.

Biblically-Driven Orientation

The gathering of God's people on Sunday morning for worship is a unique moment in the life of a church. The following categories should shape the Sunday experience:

- **Vertical and Horizontal**

A vertical focus is a God-centered approach to everything in the worship service. It reflects a priority of gathering with God's people in God's presence and leading them before him - together. A horizontal focus is more directed toward ministering to one another and speaking to each other. It emphasizes the relational connection that believers share in worship.

² Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. ³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! Psalm 96:2–3 (ESV)

"...be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart... Ephesians 5:18–19 (ESV)

Focus: Given the uniqueness of Sunday morning worship from all other settings, I believe the Sunday morning orientation should generally be tipped toward a vertical, God-centeredness. Our singing, praying, preaching, and response should reflect a priority of directing our worship to the Lord – that we are coming before him and that he is our audience. Horizontal elements are an important part of our gathering, and they contribute to the goal of God-centeredness in all that we do.

- **Special and General Revelation**

Special Revelation is the self-disclosure of God through the Word of God. It is through the Bible that the church hears the very words of God, can hear the gospel and be saved. The Word of God is the means and the end of true worship as people come to see, hear, sing, and recite the inspired word. General revelation is the self-disclosure of God through the created world. It provides a valuable and memorable context for the Word of God. It serves to illustrate the message of the Word.

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 (ESV)*

Focus: Since the Word of God is foundational to the Christian life, I believe worship services should be informed by and driven by the Scriptures.³ Service elements should be anchored in biblical principle, and people should leave services with a renewed love for the biblical truth that will carry them for another week, motivating them in their own study of the Word. We should teach the Word, sing the Word⁴, read the Word and pray the Word such that people come love the Word in new ways.

- **Congregational and Individual**

The congregational nature of church worship is one of the most unique and powerful aspects of Sunday morning. There is also a place for individual focus and personal application. However, the Sunday gathering in Scripture is particularly oriented toward the gathered people as a whole. Individuals are called to participate in something bigger than themselves; something they cannot do on their own. This makes corporate worship unusual, counter-cultural, and very special.

²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)*

¹⁶ *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)*

Focus: As the church gathers as individuals, special emphasis should be made on the corporate and congregational nature of Sunday morning. While recognizing the value of the individual, I believe that the unique opportunity for corporate worship and togetherness should be the primary focus.

- **Believer and Unbeliever**

Sunday morning worship will always involve believers and non-believers. Preaching Pastors and Worship Pastors must remember that there are people in the room who are unconverted

³ I am not using this term for regulative worship.

⁴ By this I am not suggesting songs should only be scripture, but that they should reflect the teaching of the Bible.

and investigating the claims of the Bible. However, the reality is that the unbeliever cannot truly worship. Only a believer can truly meet with God in worship.

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Romans 12:1 (ESV)

²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed, and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you. 1 Corinthians 14:24–25 (ESV)

Focus: The believer must take precedent in the overall emphasis of the worship service. I believe that a Christian should be the main audience with care and understanding that non-believers are watching, listening and searching.

Summary

The Biblically-driven orientation involves at least two categories – the “both” of worship. Each category is important, helpful and informed to some extent by the Scriptures. Without diminishing the value of either category, it is appropriate and right to have focal points or “leanings” in each category. The chart below provides a summary of the kind language that could reflect our unique focus.

Category	CP Sunday Focus	Category
Vertical	God-Centered Togetherness	Horizontal
Special Revelation	Word-Driven	General Revelation
Corporate	Uniquely Corporate	Individual
Believer	Believer-focused Unbeliever mindful	Unbeliever

Contextually-Driven Orientation

The second area of “both” is less tied to biblical principle, and it is more driven by contextual decisions related to the needs of the congregation. In other words, while the previous categories had some level of subjectivity in them, the following have much more. Thus, there are likely even greater fluidity and change in this arena over time and even week-to-week.

- **Contemporary and Historic**

The beauty and character of God is expressed in older, historic songs and in newer, contemporary songs. Both have value, meaning and usefulness. The value of historic songs is their time-tested quality, theology, and familiarity. Historic songs connect the church of the present to the rich tradition and history of the past. The weakness is the fact that historic songs have the potential to be out of touch with present challenges or give the impression that the church is not addressing the present culture. The value of a contemporary songs is their vibrancy, clarity, and relevance. Songs that connect biblical truth in a contemporary manner have a special power and connection to them. They tell the gospel and the story of the church in a new and creative way.

Focus: Both contemporary and historic songs have great value. Given the landscape of Evangelicalism and our history, I believe that College Park Church should strive to have a worship that balances the importance of both but with a strong leaning toward the contemporary. Our diet will be closer, by design, to 80/20 in terms of the balance.

- **Structured and Spontaneous**

Every church has a liturgy of some sort, and that structure forms the basic flow not only of the service but also of the message to be communicated.⁵ The elements and order of the service are all important and careful thought should be given to ensure that the service has an overarching message that fits well with the weekly theme and connects in some way to the retelling of the gospel.

⁵ For a more in-depth look at liturgy and it’s significance, see James K.A. Smith’s book, *You Are What You Love* (Brazos Press)

Focus: We should think very carefully and biblically about the total message of the Lord's Day. I believe that we should plan, practice, and pursue excellence while remaining open to the spontaneous leading of the Holy Spirit.

- **Celebratory and Contemplative**

The Lord's Day is first and foremost a celebration of the gospel and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Sundays should reflect the joy of forgiveness, restoration, and hope. ⁶At the same time, we must recognize that our people are inundated with shallow celebration throughout the week. Additionally, it is important to remember that a large portion of the church family are more helped by contemplation and that the circumstances of their life have created fresh tears.

Focus: I believe that worship services should be designed mainly as a celebration of the gospel while finding important moments for contemplation and the expressions of "sorrowful yet rejoicing" (2 Cor 6:10). The services should be designed to help people "rejoice in the Lord" while considering the unique and potentially painful circumstances of the people gathered.

- **Familiar and Creative**

The church is a place to belong, a home for believers, and an anchor for the soul. The regular gathering with God's people creates a helpful rhythm for the soul. Central to this belonging, family, and spiritual stability is a reassuring familiarity. Assembling in a familiar place with familiar people singing familiar songs and being led by people you know and trust is a vital foundation for the soul of God's people. At the same time, creativity can make the familiar even better. Embedding familiar forms with freshness, vibrancy, and new clarity has the potential to minister to even more people and to do so with greater effectiveness.

Focus: Trust is the currency of ministry. People come to church, join the church and invite a friend to church due to their trust in our ability to faithfully minister to them. But they also trust that we are not going to be stuck in the past. Therefore, I believe we should strive for a trusted creativity.

⁶ See my past sermon, *The Purpose of Worship* (<http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/north-indy-the-purpose-of-corporate-worship/>)

Summary

The Contextual Orientation also involves two categories – the “both” of worship. Each category is important, helpful and informed in a more significant way by the setting, the history and the composition of the church. This arena will have greater fluidity and subjectivity to it as the church grows, changes and adjusts to culture. At the same time, it is helpful to identify what level of “both” is our target. The chart below provides a summary of the kind of language that could be used to describe our philosophy:

Category	CP Sunday Focus	Category
Contemporary	Balanced contemporary	Historic
Structured	Intentional but open	Spontaneous
Celebratory	Thoughtful celebration	Contemplative
Familiar	Trusted creativity	Creative

The Worthiness of Pursuing Both

Worship is far more than just the gathering of God’s people on Sunday. It is a lifestyle that encompasses every aspect of life and one’s entire person. Worship is the gathering of God’s people and the lifestyle of every believer. Worship is both, and it involves more than one category. That is the beauty and the challenge of Sunday worship.

“...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” Romans 12:1 (ESV)

³¹ *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)*

The purpose of this document is to attempt to avoid the historical polarization of worship philosophies by highlighting the biblical and contextual value of “both.” This paper seeks to posit a philosophy which recognizes that the values regarding worship are on a continuum that must be balanced and prioritized for the spiritual health of a particular body of Christ.

It seeks to present an opportunity for the church to fulfill Paul’s vision in Romans 15:6 – “...that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” – identify the reality, challenges and beauty of the “both” of worship.

This paper also seeks to put language to College Park’s Church orientation in each of the valuable categories for the purpose of clarity, freedom and unity. The aim is not to answer all questions or settle all controversies. Rather, the objective is to establish a basic foundation from which we can lead our people, and through which they can interpret their experience. The hope is that we can continue to steward the gospel while navigating a changing culture in a way that facilitates “worshipping in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

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Vertical	<i>God-Centered Togetherness</i>	Horizontal
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