

Let us worship God



Welcome to the Free Church of Scotland. It is our prayer that you will enjoy your worship with us and that we will all benefit from the presence of the living Lord Jesus among us. Perhaps you have not been in a Free Church before and you are not sure of what will happen – this leaflet helps to explain what we do and how we do it.

Our worship is simple – we aim to worship God through Jesus Christ and we do so through his Word. We sing *a cappella* (without instrumental accompaniment) from the Bible, we pray and we listen to the Word of God being taught. That is the basic simplicity of what we do – but why do we do it? Does it matter?

It certainly matters *whom* we worship. Like other Christian churches, the centre and focus of our worship is Jesus Christ. We worship him because he is our Saviour; he is the Son of God and

he is the only way to God. But how do we know who he is? We know from his Word - the Bible. We believe that God has inspired the Scriptures, so that, although written by men, they are his Word - without error. Our worship is also spiritual. We need the Holy Spirit to be among us, so that we can experience the presence and truth of Jesus Christ.

It also matters *how* we worship. Jesus told us that God was seeking those who would worship him in spirit and truth.

Worship matters to God. It is why he made us. It is the greatest act we can ever be involved in. Because it is so important, God has given us guidelines and principles to guide us in our worship. It is not the case that we can do as we please, or that we just do what our tradition dictates. We must ask - what pleases God? What does God want?

Scriptural worship

For that reason our worship must be **Scriptural** - that is, according to the Word of God. One of the ways that we seek to ensure this is by singing the words of Scripture. God has given us a song book in the Bible, known as the book of Psalms. Therefore we use it to praise him. This has obvious advantages. Firstly, we know that we are singing his Word and therefore we are not singing error or what is false. Secondly, the psalms speak of a variety of human experiences in relation to

God - for example, doubt, fear, love, questioning, anger, pleas for help, praise. There is a depth, variety and quality within them which is unsurpassed by any 'uninspired' materials of praise. But what about Jesus? Are we not a church which worships Jesus Christ? How can we do so when the psalms were written before Jesus Christ was born? The answer to that is that there

is a great deal of Jesus Christ in the psalms. They are often cited in the New Testament as being prophecies of Christ and he himself sang

"...let us be thankful and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

Hebrews 12 v 28

them as his material of praise. While the Psalms are the usual material of praise in the Free Church, some congregations also sing other portions of Scripture or paraphrases of Scripture. The overriding principle in all of this is that what we sing is the Word of God.

There is another advantage in this - by singing we memorise. Over years of singing Scripture it is the case that you will hide many parts of God's Word in your heart.

The version of the psalms that has been sung for many years in Scottish Presbyterian churches was the metrical version produced in 1650 - you will perhaps be aware of Psalm 23 "The Lord's my Shepherd" or Psalm 100 "All people that on earth do dwell" from this version. The Free Church, while acknowledging this tradition and continuing to use this older psalter, also recognises that the English language

has changed considerably over the years, and it has therefore produced a contemporary translation of the psalms into metre. You will find that some of our congregations will use these as well as, or instead of, the traditional psalms. There are also many other versions that can be used. There is variety, but the principle remains the same. We sing the inspired Word of God.

This means that we are ecumenical. The psalms and the Scriptures belong to the whole Christian Church. In that sense they are truly catholic. You need only read the early Church fathers to realise just how important the psalms are. They are for the whole church today. The songs of the Bible are not confined to one area or tradition of the world. They are not western. Nor are they eastern. They are not of the north or of the south. They are for the whole world.

Simple worship

But what about music? How can we sing songs which tell us to praise God with the tambourine, organ etc and yet sing unaccompanied? That brings us on to another requirement of New Testament worship - it is to be **simple**.

Old Testament worship was complex, ceremonial, and elaborate and involved detailed animal sacrifices. When Jesus came, he fulfilled the ceremonial

law - he was the sacrifice, he was the ultimate priest. The Old Testament worship foreshadowed Jesus Christ. Now that he has come in the flesh, we no longer need that. Therefore we no longer sacrifice animals in our worship (because Christ has been sacrificed once for all), we do not have a priestly class (now all believers are given access to God and made priests) and we do not have the Old Testament temple worship (because we do not have the temple). What is clear from the New Testament is that worship is not to be centred on one earthly temple or a series of special buildings, but rather people all over the world are to worship God in spirit and truth. In order to achieve that, worship must be simple, though not simplistic. In the New Testament we find that there

are no detailed or elaborate rules for worship - just basic, simple guidelines. The worship God requires is to include, prayer, preaching, the

reading of God's Word, the offering, the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper) and praise. While many Christians do praise God with instrumental accompaniment, it is surely not without significance that the early Church did not use musical instruments - a practice which has continued in many Christian traditions. Therefore we sing unaccompanied.

You may find this strange and indeed difficult. The truth is that

"God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

John 4 v 24

unaccompanied singing can be truly awful or truly awesome. That is because when we use the human voice as our instrument, we have no other instrument to drown us out or to hide us. Coming to worship God is not coming to listen to an organ recital or as a spectator. All who are believers are to join together in singing God's praise. Of course you may not know the tunes or you may feel you cannot sing. That applies, to some extent, whether musical instruments are used or not – however, you can learn by following the precentor or the people beside you. If you can read music, there are music editions of the psalms available.

Spiritual worship

Finally our worship is to be **spiritual**. Even when we sing God's Word, even when we do so simply, it is still possible that our worship may not be pleasing to God, that it may not be 'pure'. It needs to be 'spiritual'. In our society and culture this word is often misused and misunderstood. 'Spirituality' is equated with a mystical feeling. In the New Testament that is not the case. Spiritual is always used in connection with the Holy Spirit. So spiritual worship

is 'charismatic' worship - worship in the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? It means that we require the presence of God among us. It means that we must not grieve him. It means that we

cannot worship God unless we come to him trusting in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation. It means that every one of us must answer

the question - what do I think of Jesus Christ? If your answer is that you love him and that you are here to give him thanks, to ask him for guidance and to hear of all his wonderful deeds then you are ready to worship. (If your answer is that you are unsure or that you do not believe in Jesus Christ, then pray that as you take part in worship he will reveal himself to you). We worship by the Spirit, using the Word he has inspired, together with his people, confessing our sin, desiring to please, honour and glorify him.

We pray that you will enjoy the worship of God with us. If you have any questions or things you want to discuss, please feel free to talk to the minister, one of the elders or one of the people at the church door. They will be more than happy to help you.

Let us worship God!

"Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness"

Psalm 29 v 2