

Dear friend,

In case you've forgotten, the plan for my newsletter articles for this year is to write about one of our "Core Values" each month during 2006. I've already written about the centrality of God's word and the priority of loving relationships in the life of our church. This month I will address our core value regarding corporate worship. The value as it is written in our membership material and Welcome to RHCC brochure says this: "*We believe in God-centered, Christ dependent, Holy Spirit empowered, biblically faithful, historically connected, musically diverse corporate worship (John 4:24, II Chronicles 5:11-14; Psalm 150; Acts 2:42-47, I Peter 2:4-5).*"

In this article I want to make a brief statement describing each of the explanatory phrases in this Core Value. Before I begin let me make a brief aside. The biblical concept of worship is far larger than merely what happens when we gather together in corporate worship. There is a sense in which our whole life is a response of worship to God. However, as we are attempting to describe those principles that govern our life together as a church, this value is only about our corporate, public acts of worship, the main one being our gathering together on Sunday morning. Also, this value is about everything we do in corporate worship, not just the music.

*God centered corporate worship:* God is to be the center of attention when we come together for corporate worship. We are together as his people in order to express our joy in him, our need of him, our sorrow for the sins we have committed against him. We come to hear from him through his word preached and taught. While drawing near to God with his people in worship ought to affect us, yet the main question we are to ask in evaluating our worship service is not how did it make me feel? Or what did I get out of it? We rather ask ourselves if we are coming near to God for the right purposes and if we are listening to him by faith.

*Christ dependent corporate worship:* Our acts of worship are not acceptable to God because of who we are but because of who Christ is and what Christ has done. The acceptability of our acts of worship is not dependent upon our sincerity or the fervency of our emotions or the skill of our musicians or that we use all the "right" words or "right" style of music. Rather, every act of worship performed by true Christians and by a true Christian church is acceptable to God because of the life, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and present intercession of Jesus Christ. Therefore, while we want to express true delight in God, we will not seek to "work up" the right emotional pitch or set the correct "environment" to achieve the most inspiring worship. We will worship by faith in the risen Christ, knowing our singing, praying, giving, listening, etc. is acceptable "through Jesus Christ."

*Holy Spirit empowered corporate worship:* Contrary to much mistaken thinking in the modern church, worship that is Holy Spirit empowered is not necessarily highly emotional. We must ask what the Holy Spirit's chief work is. In John 16:8-15 Jesus says there are basically two things that the Holy Spirit aims to do. First, he aims to convict us of our sin, our lack of righteousness and of our incorrect judgments about God and his

work in and through Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit's ambition in our lives to make sure we know that we are justly under God's wrath and cannot save ourselves. Second, he aims to glorify Jesus Christ by making known to us the mighty things he has done for us in his life, death, resurrection and present intercession. The Holy Spirit is God the Son's biggest fan and he is empowering all the worship that keeps Christ and his sufficiency central.

*Biblically faithful corporate worship:* The main "control" on the content of the music we sing, the prayers and readings we use, the sermons we preach, the various forms we use in corporate worship is the Word of God. We aim to use material that is rich in biblical language and full of true biblical doctrine that helps us to know the truth of Christ so we are responding to Christ himself and not a god made in our image or according to our own imagination.

*Historically connected corporate worship:* We believe that it is critical, especially in a culture as enamored with the "new" and the "different" as our culture is, that we maintain a strong connection to the 2000 year history of worship in the Christian church. The Holy Spirit has been working in the church for centuries. He did not just show up when we were born. Therefore, we think it is wise to use music, prayers, readings, and other forms of worship that connect us to the varied and rich history of Christian worship.

*Musically diverse corporate worship:* It is our conviction that we are together as a church of Christ because of our common faith in and affection for Jesus, not because we all like the same kind of music. We also believe there is no biblical reason to say that God prefers one style of music to another. We want to use as much diversity in the style of our music as our musical abilities and resources and cultural diversity allow. We believe it is good for all of us to express our love for others and our common faith in Christ by gladly singing music that we don't prefer but that others in our congregation do prefer.

As we say and pray each Sunday morning it is our ambition that God would use our corporate worship, every part of it, to exalt Christ in such a way that our hearts are drawn to him in faith and love.

Worshipping with you,