Examining Our Corporate Acclamation

Robert D. Pace

Introduction

Recently, I scripted an opening acclamation that I want to invoke from time to time when we meet for worship. It's something that helps define the Biblical objective for assembling as the church.

You might ask, *Does God require an opening Confessional, Doxology, or Profession of Faith as worship services begin?* No, the Bible doesn't mandate them. But they do pull together Scriptures that define the purpose of the public assemblage of Believers. So, with that stated, I want to summarize the objective for this practice.

(Objective) This *Acclamation* is a solemn corporate expression that our worship is to the Most High God. It's both doxology (praise) and orthodoxy (doctrine) that entreat the Lord to accept and interact with our worship.

I've worked diligently to get each stanza of this *Acclamation* right. That's why I want to examine each line, elaborate on it, and explain its reason for being in the text. Ultimately, I hope it will maintain an ongoing presence in our worship services.

Before investigating this Corporate Acclamation, I first want to read it, and then I will proceed with closely examining its contents:

Corporate Acclamation

Almighty God,
We gather to worship in Jesus' Name;
Recognizing your LORDSHIP as
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Disclose your Word and transform us
by its immutable truths.
Descend with your Spirit and send his
love, glory, mercy, and miracles.

We reverence Jesus Christ as
Sovereign and Savior of the world;
Forever enthroned as the
object of praise.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

(Transition) Let's begin with, "We gather to worship in Jesus' name."

I. "We gather to worship in Jesus' name"

There are instructions throughout the Bible that extol the merits of verbal confession. In the OT, Moses shows Israel's High Priest pronouncing a blessing over the worshipers. In the NT, as Paul communicated with churches of the NT, his opening statements would include a statement of doctrine, doxology, and blessing to his hearers. And even today, when we appear before God in public assembly, it is important to know that God reserves a blessing when we orally acknowledge that we have gathered *in, by,* and *for* the name of Jesus. And that's what this opening confession does.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 18:20 and let's see what Jesus says about this. Jesus said:

> **"Where two or three gather *in my name,* there am I with them."**

I am so glad that Christ's promise here not only pertained to his disciples of 2,000 years ago, but it also applies to his disciples today and to those who live at the close of human history. So, what is the meaning of Christ's words when he said, **"Where two or three gather *in my name,* there am I with them"?**

> First, it means he can transform an insignificant group of two or three Christians into a divinely empowered convention that guarantees his awesome presence—the presence of **Immanuel.** And when "God with us" arrives, it makes "all things possible"!
>
> But not only that, when "two or three are gathered in Christ's name," someone else shows up. And that's **the Holy Spirit!** The Holy Spirit birthed the church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and this means that he lives and operates among his people. And he can operate in sovereign and wondrous ways! Besides that, he has dispensed "spiritual gifts" that can heal, work miracles, instruct, and forecast the future. This is what happens when Believers meet "in Jesus' name"!

But there's also a special delegation of divine beings that join Christians when they gather "in Christ's name." It draws the attendance of **the mighty angels of Heaven**. I know there's no mention of angels in this verse, but when you combine all the Scriptures about the ministry of angels, it's evident that they attend the worship services of mortals (1 Timothy 5:17—21; 1 Corinthians 11:10; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 3–4 (Note that God assigned an overseeing angel for each of these seven churches. There is no reason to doubt each church today has an angel watching over it)).

Now, do you see the value of Christians opening a worship service by purposely stating, "We [have] gathered to worship in Jesus' name"? We are calling for the manifested presence of (1) the Lord Jesus Christ, (2) the presence of the Holy Spirit, and (3) the ministry of angels. It's the hosts of Heaven that can transform an insignificant presence of "two or three" Believers into a supernatural convention.

(Transition) Now let's move to the second stanza, which says, "Recognizing your LORDSHIP as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

II. "Recognizing your LORDSHIP as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"

This stanza discloses both orthodoxy and doxology. **Orthodoxy** is what we believe; **Doxology** is praise toward the One in whom we believe. So, as Trinitarians, our orthodoxy exclaims that we believe in the mystery of one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is fully God; the Son is fully God; and the Holy Spirit is fully God. And yet, somehow, they are One.

Orthodoxy is important for Christians to profess! For example, imagine a visitor attending a worship service who doesn't know what we believe. It would bring them comfort to hear us profess pure Biblical orthodoxy. So this acclamation benefits not only *us* but also *outsiders*!

But now let's look at the second aspect of this stanza, which is **doxology.** Doxology has been part of public profession in worship services for centuries. And I'm sure most Christians are familiar with the most famous English doxology of the Christian Faith. It was penned in 1674 by Thomas Ken, a priest of the Church of England.

Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow

"Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye Heavenly Host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Amen.

(Transition) Now let's move to the third stanza of this corporate prayer, which appeals to God to: "Disclose your Word and transform us by its eternal truths."

III. "Disclose your Word and transform us by its eternal truths."

One of the chief aspects of corporate worship regards the Word of God. It is of such importance that it would be impossible to rightly worship God without having the Scriptures as our guide. That's why it must be given a preeminent place when we gather for worship. Knowing this is so, how should we utilize God's Word in corporate worship?

There are several ways to give preeminence to the Word: (1) by reading Scripture and letting it speak for itself; (2) by singing the Scriptures; and most importantly, (3) by preaching the Word.

On most occasions—especially when planning a worship service—God's Word demands the highest precedence. And it's for several reasons, which I'll mention momentarily, but first, I want to share something from personal experience.

(Example) When I was a young preacher, I was told that the "altar" was the central aspect of worship. Although I was young, I knew something was wrong with that standpoint. I even had a close friend (many years my senior) who wrote a book for our denomination's ministers entitled "Down at the Altar." The essence of that book suggested that everything done in a worship service should lead to the "altar." And whether Pentecostal, Methodist, Baptist, or Presbyterian, much does occur during an "altar" experience. It is used for baptism, anointing the sick, public repentance, "the laying on of hands," or ministering to the suffering. But while the "altar" ministry is very important, I finally realized that the most important aspect of a worship service is the clear presentation of the Word of God. As you read the NT—whether worship occurred at synagogues or homes—you consistently find the Scriptures claiming a place of eminence.

There is a reason God ordained his Word to take precedence in the assembly of worshipers:

1. First, the Word of God is transcendent. What does transcendent mean? It describes something that comes from above this world; it's outside the sphere of the natural. Here's how the Apostle Peter described the Scriptures in 2 Peter 1:21. "For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God (from above) as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (from above)."

No other book, no national Constitution, no set of ordinances are its equal! The Bible stands worlds above all else. And that's because it was issued from the throne of God!

2. Second, because the Word is transcendent, it is absolutely true!

> According to Jesus, in John 17:17, he said the Word of God is truth.
>
> Psalm 119:160 says, **"The entirety of your word is truth,** each of your righteous judgments endures forever" (CSB).

As the source of truth—the Bible—we have what no other organization in the world has: **We have the book that is the final authority on every issue of life!** And yes, that fact really disturbs the "world"!

There is a reason this Book disturbs rebellious people as it does. There is a reason that dictators and despots have reviled it and sought to suppress it. It's because God's Word has built-in authority! It has built-in authority because God is One with his Word. John 1:1 says this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Being one with his Word, this makes the Scriptures the voice of Almighty God!

3. But there is a third reason God ordained his Word to take precedence in corporate worship. Since his Word is transcendent and true and is One with God, it possesses transformational power! It has power to take the weak and strengthen them; it can take the in-firmed and heal them; it can the fearful and infuse them with courage; and it can remake the timid and recluse into spiritual giants.

If I listed every example of Scripture that validates the power of the Word, we would be reading for hours! So I'll only read four:

> Genesis shows that God created the universe with his Word.
>
> 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

James 1:21 says, "… receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls."

1 Peter 1:23 says, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."

(Emphasis) In summary, because God's Word is transcendent and is One with God; because it is truth; because it is transformational; because it is alive; because it is all-powerful, because it can probe into the deepest parts of our heart and soul (ad infinitum!) it deserves to be presented and preached and read and sung in keeping with its worthiness. It is the very oracles of God! And that's why we must exalt it to an eminent place in our worship services!

(Transition) Let's move to the next stanza in our Acclamation, where it turns into a petition to God, saying, "Move by your Spirit and fill us with his power and joy."

IV. "Descend with your Spirit and send his love, glory, mercy, and miracles."

In the opening stanza of our Acclamation, our confession states that we have convened in the name of Jesus. However, I need to clarify something: A mere utterance from our lips does not indicate that our worship *lives* before God.

There are people across America who assemble to worship each Sunday, quote the doxology, sing hymns with the congregation (and even sing in the choir), but it's nothing more than a vain exercise of religiosity! Thankfully, Jesus told us how to avoid this type of ineffectual worship. It's found in Mark 7:6 where he said this:

"Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honor me *with their lips,* but *their hearts are far from me."*

Those are strong words! But there's more than a warning here. They also disclose the *proper* way to worship God. Notice the final phrase of this passage. It says, "but their hearts are far from me." If improper worship occurs when one's heart is "far from" God, then it makes sense that acceptable worship occurs when we draw near God with a sincere heart. And this is exactly what Hebrews 10:22 says:

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

But there's another occasion when Jesus explained the right way to worship God. It's in John 4:23—24.

> "The true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. (24) God is spirit, and his worshipers *must* worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Humans are composed of body, soul, and spirit. Of that human faculty, the *spirit* is our highest part. One day, our body will die, but not our spirit. Our spirit is the immortal part of us that lives forever! God wants the highest part of our being to engage him in worship.

We have to be honest with a passage like this. When Jesus said we "must worship in the Spirit and in truth," this is not a self-interpreting, easy-to-understand statement. I think we "get" the part that says we must worship God "in truth." That's when we come before him without hypocrisy or pretense; we are being honest with God as we worship him. But what does Jesus mean when he commands us to engage our *spirit* in worship? That's the difficult part to understand. This is so important that Jesus says our worship fails without utilizing our spirit.

It is easy to understand what physical worship involves. That's when we show up in body to worship the Lord. We will sing, pray, kneel, and lift our hands. But how do we engage our spirit in worship?

(Insight) Here's the best answer I have: Remember that Jesus said his Heavenly Father is Spirit. He is not a material being. Since God is Spirit, he wants us to utilize "spiritual things" to worship him. He wants us to utilize that which is "of the Spirit"; things that originate from God, the Holy Spirit. And there *is a way* to know worship that is "of the Spirit."

> First, we know that the **"fruit of the Spirit"** is "of the Spirit." Thus, when we worship him "in Spirit and in truth," we employ the Spirit's love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22—23).
>
> Second, we know the "gifts of the Spirit" are also "of the Spirit."
>
> Third, the worship that Jesus—our Example—demonstrated shows us how to worship "of the Spirit." For instance:

Luke 10:21 says: "At that time Jesus, ***full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said,*** "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth . . . ." Have you ever experienced a deep burst of joy erupt from your innermost being? That's worship "born of the Spirit."

Acts 10:38 says this about Christ: "how ***God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power,*** and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him." There are times when the Holy Spirit comes upon you in power, in joy, in peace to worship Jesus, and when this occurs, it is acceptable unto God.

God endowed the church with two divine and transcendent ways to worship him: One is with the Word of God (which I have discussed) and the other is by the Spirit of God. And this is why I've emphasized praying for the Spirit's presence and infilling in this Corporate Acclamation. If we attempt to worship without the Spirit, we will deprive ourselves of the one who enlivens our worship and empowers our worship. It's the only way we can properly live for God, serve God, and worship God.

(Transition) Let's now move to the next line, which says, "We reverence Christ as Sovereign and Savior of the world"

V. "We reverence Christ as Sovereign and Savior of the world."

This is another stanza that contains both doxology (praise) and orthodoxy (doctrine). And it's a sacred confession that the man Jesus Christ is also the divine Son of God—the Sovereign of all Creation. But it also testifies that Christ—the Sovereign of Creation—descended to Earth and surrendered his life on the Cross as Savior of the world.

When you think about it, this is the acclamation of Christmas. It exclaims that the babe in the manger is both Creator and Savior! And this is something that Christians should acknowledge throughout the year. Our God—the high and holy God of the Bible—is unlike any other so-called "god" that is worshiped. Jesus, the Sovereign of Creation, is also our blessed Savior!

(Transition) Now let's move to the sixth stanza of this creed, which states that Jesus is "Forever enthroned as the object of praise."

VI. "Forever enthroned as the object of praise."

Christian worship always places and keeps Jesus at the center. Always remember this when you are preparing for corporate worship. You are going to worship the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

(Testimony) I want to share something I wish I had known early in life. Whether it was by my parents or a Sunday school teacher, I wish I had known this, no later than age twelve: **That God has made Jesus Christ preeminent in all things! That Jesus is the central figure of all things!**

(Question) I have a question for you. What does it mean to you when the Bible says, **"Jesus Christ is preeminent in all things"?** Here is what it means:

> At the center of Heaven is Jesus.
>
> God has made Christ to be the center of our love and affections.
>
> Christ is made to be the center of the universe.
>
> He is the towering figure of human history.
>
> He is the centerpiece of microbiology and the galaxies.
>
> Jesus reigns over humans and angels.
>
> Christ is the centerpiece of yesterday, today, and forever.
>
> In all things, in every respect, for every occasion, Jesus Christ is the over-arching figure of the ages.

This is what I wish I could have grasped at the earliest age possible! That everything centers on Jesus—*everything!* I wish I had been taught that the preeminent figure of history, science, psychology, mathematics, literature, music, and everything is Jesus Christ!

Here is the passage of Scripture that establishes this so marvelously. It's in **Colossians 1:15—18,** where it says this:

> The Son [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (16) For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (17) He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
>
> And then Romans 11:36 summarizes it this way: "For from him and through him and for him are all things. **To him be the glory forever! Amen."**

Here again, you understand why this stanza in our Acclamation is important. I want worshipers from the earliest age possible to the eldest age possible to know that Jesus Christ is the preeminent figure of eternity past, present, and throughout eternity.

(Transition) And finally, notice that the closing line of this Acclamation states, "In Jesus' name. Amen."

VII. "In Jesus' name. Amen."

Praying "in Jesus name" is the only way to be certain that God hears and responds to our prayers. Jesus said in John 14:14, "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it."