

Acceptable Worship

by

Dr. Jack L. Arnold
Equipping Pastors International, Inc.



689 Kissimmee Place, Winter Springs, FL 32708 USA

*Phone: (407) 695-7372 * Fax: (407) 695-2487*

Email: DoctorJLA@aol.com

www.equippingpastors.com

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ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

Introduction

The most important activity any Christian does in this world is to worship the one, true and living Heavenly Father as He is revealed in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian God is the Christian's only object of worship

“Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises” (Psa. 47:6).

“Come let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song” (Psa. 95:1-2).

“Come let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker . . .” (Psa. 95:6).

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psa. 98:4).

“The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior” (Psa. 18:46)!

Worship is first an individual act. A Christian must know who God is and why He is to be worshipped before he or she can offer up acceptable individual worship. All defective worship is essentially a misunderstanding of the person of God and what He requires of His people to worship Him correctly.

“I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness and will sing praise to the name of the LORD Most High” (Psa. 7:17).

“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (Psa. 29:2).

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me” (Psa. 13:6).

The Christian must also be convinced that the one, true and living God has been revealed to us in inspired Scripture. He has told us in the Bible how He wants to be worshipped, and it is our responsibility to rightly understand the Bible as to how we are to worship God aright. Only the God of Scripture is the true God and worthy of our worship.

“I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise” (Psa. 18:3).

“To him belongs eternal praise” (Psa. 111:10).

The God of Scripture is the only one, true and living God. There is no other God, and He is to be exalted above all false gods.

“For you, O LORD, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods” (Psa. 96:9).

“I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; before the gods I will sing your praise” (Psa. 138:1).

Praise exalts the Lord God and it is pleasing to Him. He delights in the worship of His people.

“Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant” (Psa. 135:3).

“Praise the LORD. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him” (Psa. 147:1).

“Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him” (Psa. 33:1).

For individual worship to be effective, it must come from the inner man that wants to please God.

“I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High” (Psa. 9:1-2).

“My heart is steadfast, O God; I will sing and make music with my soul” (Psa. 108:1).

Individual worship is not something we do once a week at church but we do it all the time. A Christian is to have a lifestyle of worship and praise.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to god—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

“I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live” (Psa. 104:33).

“I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips” (Psa. 34:1).

“It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. . .” (Psa. 92:1-2).

“Let the name of the LORD be praised, both now and forevermore” (Psa. 113:2).

Worship is secondarily corporate. Once the Christian understands individual worship, then he must seek to grasp the meaning, motive and method for corporate worship. Collective

worship is unique. There is a presence and power of God in corporate worship that cannot be experienced in individual worship.

“Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together” (Psa. 34:3).

Author’s Comments

One of the major purposes for this study on worship is to determine what the Bible teaches about individual and corporate worship. It is the author’s desire to build a biblical theology of individual and corporate worship. The design of this material is to reach the average Christian and Christian lay-teacher with the basic Scriptures about worship. This work might be called a “Biblical Handbook on Worship.” The purpose of this book is not to present every aspect of worship from a scholastic view, but to state what the Bible teaches with mention of various views on key differences between Christians on the subject of worship. All will not agree with the author’s conclusions, but hopefully all will grapple with the Scripture on this vital subject of worship. Ultimately, the worship wars of the modern church will be solved as all come to the Bible, making it *the only rule of faith and practice* for individual and corporate worship. Hopefully, this book will bring *a spirit of love, tolerance and acceptance* between those who hold dearly to their particular traditional or contemporary or blended worship services, which they honestly believe is the right way to offer up acceptable worship to Almighty God.

This biblical theology may seem odd to some, inappropriate to others and irrelevant to many. The author clearly understands how people may react to making an attempt to reproduce New Testament worship. However, all Christians must take seriously the statement that *the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice*, even as it relates to individual and corporate worship. The heart desire of every Christian should be to make the *content, structure and style* of worship conform as nearly as possible to the biblical pattern.

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 1 God Seeks Worshipers John 4:19-24

Christians, who are spiritually mature in the 21st century, sense there is something missing in the evangelical church, especially in America. The trumpet gives an uncertain sound. Every conceivable explanation has been given to explain this missing link in Christendom. Some have suggested we need less tradition and more freedom of expression. Others have said we need more Bible teaching and less experience. Still others say we need less doctrine and more mystical experience in Christianity. May I humbly suggest that the missing link in modern day evangelicalism is Biblical worship, individually and collectively. Our evangelical churches may have sound preaching, good fellowship, sharp organization and myriad of activities, but they seem to have lost the ability to worship. The modern evangelical church is not cultivating the art of worship. A proper attitude of worship will give a balance between tradition and free forms of worship, and biblical knowledge and experience.

We must give deep thought and contemplation to the subject of worship, and if we have lost a spirit of worship, we must search for it until we find it. Why were we created? Did God create us to make a living, have a good time, and raise a family? Did He create us to be religious and go to church? Perhaps we think that God created us that we might serve Him. There is truth in this, for Christians do serve God and will serve Him through all eternity (Rev. 22:3). Service, however, is not the primary reason God created a human being. The first and basic reason God created a living soul was so that person could worship God. Service to God is always secondary to worship of the one, true and living God. The Presbyterians, who wrote the Westminster Shorter Catechism, were absolutely right when they said, *“Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”* **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God”(1 Cor. 10:31). “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Rom. 11:36).**

When most of us think of worship, we think of a Sunday morning worship service, but this is only a small part of worship. Worship is first and foremost individual and personal when a regenerated human spirit comes into contact with the living God as He is manifested in Christ Jesus, the Lord. Worship is knowing, loving, obeying and standing in awe of the sovereign, infinite, almighty God of the universe. Those who are personal worshippers of God will worship Him in all of life and gather together collectively to worship Him as an assembly of worshippers. Collective worship is important but it is only effective as each individual Christian has been worshipping God in his own daily experience.

GOD IS SEEKING WORSHIPERS - John 4:19-24

“‘Sir’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.’ Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers

will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:19-24).

The clearest revelation about the true meaning of worship in the Bible is given to us in John 4:19-24 where Christ encounters the Samaritan woman by the well. The subject of worship only comes up at the end of the conversation with this woman because the main topic of discussion was her desperate need of salvation. We are told that Christ **“had to pass through Samaria” (4:4)**. Why? There was a sinful woman who had five husbands and was presently living with a man who was not her husband (4:17) and she was to be saved. Christ went through Samaria because it was a definite part of His plan to save this woman who deserved nothing from God but damnation. This was a unique encounter because Samaritans and Jews hated one another. Christ, the master-evangelist, got to know this woman before He witnessed to her. He met her where she was in life and asked her to do him a favor; that is, to give Him a drink of water. Christ broke through all of her prejudices and sins in order to bring her to a saving relationship with Himself. He pointed her to Himself as the one who quenches a person’s spiritual thirst for reality by giving that person eternal life and the forgiveness of sins.

It is significant that this woman was a Samaritan, and her ancestry was part of the ten tribes of Israel who broke from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Only Judah and Benjamin remained true to the revelation of God given originally to the twelve tribes of Israel. The apostate ten tribes set up a rival religion in Samaria to the religion of the Jews in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own priesthood, sacrificial system and temple that set on Mt. Gerizim. The woman said that her fathers worshiped on Mt. Gerizim, and, as a typical Samaritan, she slammed Jerusalem as the only place of worship (4:20). She, as all Jews and Samaritans, put her emphasis upon a *place* of worship, for no Jew or Samaritan could think of worship apart from a temple. For them, God was primarily located in a place, a temple.

True worship in the Old Testament came from the heart but it was limited because it was centered on the physical aids to worship—a literal temple, physical animal sacrifices, and a physical priesthood. A Jew and a Samaritan always thought of worship primarily in terms of a place.

Christ immediately corrected her thinking and said, **“Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:20)**. Christ made it clear that since He had come, worship would take on a new dimension. All the Old Testament physical kinds of worship were but types or shadows of Christ. The Old Testament kind of worship would pass off the scene and something totally new, fresh and dynamic would replace this physical kind of worship. With the coming of Christ, the physical is replaced by the spiritual.

The Lord Jesus went on to tell this woman that the time is coming **“when true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:23)**. Real worship would not be going through outward forms, but will take on a new, dynamic, spiritual dimension that is inward. “Spirit and truth may mean: 1) Worship will be in freedom of the human spirit as it communes with the Father through Christ, and worship will also be bound up in truth; that is, the truth of God’s Holy Word and our response to it in truthfulness and honesty. Worship will spontaneously flow out from the inner recesses of a man’s spiritual being. This real form of worship frees a person from endless ritual and legalistic practices which kill the very spirit of

Christ. 2) The “spirit” may refer to the Holy Spirit in His Pentecostal power, and “truth” refers to the truth of the gospel, with emphasis on the death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ. This would make worship unique to the New Covenant age.

Then our Lord told the woman, **“For such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.”** The Heavenly Father is constantly seeking men and women who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. God wants Christians to shed the externals of physical worship and spiritually worship Him in spirit and in truth, which will result in, power and dynamic in the life.

Finally the Lord made a statement that staggers the human mind, **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).** In essence, Christ is saying that there is no real worship of God unless it is done in spirit and in truth. All of man’s externals and endless rituals are worthless if there is not worship in spirit and in truth. God is seeking these kinds of worshippers.

CREATED TO WORSHIP

God has a purpose behind every act He accomplishes. He never acts without intelligent design. God created man for a specific purpose. He originally created man that he might be a worshipper of the Most High God. God had no basic external or internal need for man’s worship and fellowship. God could have gone on for all eternity without man, for He is a self-sufficient God who does not need anything or anyone. Yet, God created man, so we conclude that God wants man to worship Him. Of all the created animals, only man has the capacity to worship the living God. While God does not need our worship, He wants it because we are His creatures and He is delighted when His creatures elevate, extol and exalt Him as the sovereign God.

Have you ever been to the place in your private devotional life in which you said, “I’m not getting a thing out of devotions. Why should I read my Bible and pray for I am not receiving a thing!” O, selfish man! Did it ever occur to you that God was enjoying your worship? That He delighted in your fellowship, and that you were pleasing God in these acts? You were created to worship God and God loves it when His people acknowledge their dependence on Him and give Him praise and adoration.

We are told that God in the original creation of Adam and Eve made man in His own image. **“And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen. 1:27).** This does not mean that God has a body like a human being, for the Bible tells us that God is spirit (John 4:23). It is not the material aspects of man but the immaterial aspects that are made in the image of God. God is a person and a person consists of will, mind and emotion, or as some say, volition, intellect and sensibility. God has a sovereign will, an infinite mind and a complete emotional make-up. When God created man, He created him also with will, mind and emotion. Why? So that man could rightly worship the one, true and living God. God gave man a mind so that he could know God. He gave him a will so he could obey God, and He gave man emotions so he could love God. Adam and Eve had a perfect worship of God. They were learning much about God and His purposes; they were obeying His commands and receiving great blessing, and they were loving God, entering into deep fellowship with Him.

Because God created within people the capacity for worship, all men worship. Every one, everywhere worships something. Worship is the fundamental drive of life. Atheists worship. Infidels worship. Skeptics worship. All people worship for worship is the basic difference between humans and animals. Animals do not worship. Why then do all people worship? God has set eternity in man's heart as the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us. **“He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from the beginning to end” (Eccl. 3:11).** This urge from God causes men everywhere to worship. Deep within all of us is the cry for God. If people are not worshipping the true God, they are worshipping a god of their own imagination. Their god may be a stick or a stone, or money, power, sex and fame, or man, nature or Satan. Man will find something to worship because worship is a universal phenomenon.

SIN DESTROYS WORSHIP

No one knows how long Adam and Eve experienced perfect worship, but God gave them a free will under the sovereignty of God. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat of the forbidden fruit. They rebelled against God's sovereign command and became sinners at enmity with God.

Adam and Eve's natures became corrupted by sin, so that their minds were alienated from God, their wills were in rebellion to God and their emotions were estranged from God. The image of God in them had become deeply marred by sin but not completely destroyed. Because of sin, our original parents could not know God with their minds, love God with their emotions or obey God with their wills. Their capacity to worship God aright was lost. Perfect worship was marred by sin.

According to the Bible, this sin nature has passed from Adam and Eve to every member of the human race. As sinners, we cannot worship God rightly or perfectly. Yet, we know that the image of God is still stamped upon every created human being. Every member of the human race has a corrupted image but not a destroyed image. Because of the sin nature, every person has a mind, a will and emotions, which operate but do so against the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture.

This explains how it is that there is a natural instinct in all men to worship something. Man is a worshipping creature that distinguishes him from all the other animals. He was originally created to worship the true God but because of sin he is not able to do so even though there is enough of the image of God remaining in him, which allows him to be aware of his need to worship. Some people worship sticks and stones; others worship birds and creeping things. Still others worship men. Some worship spirits and demons. Some of God's creatures have more light and they worship an imperfect concept of God such as the Muslims, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and the modernistic Christian liberals. All men worship something but no man can worship the one, true and living God apart from divine revelation and divine intervention on the part of God because man is basically sinful. No created human being is by nature an atheist. For a man to become an atheist, he must be educated into this belief, which is also a form of humanistic religion and worship. All men, by God's image on their souls, are worshippers but sin has invaded their existence so they cannot worship God as they ought.

SALVATION IN CHRIST ENABLES RIGHT WORSHIP GOD

God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this world for the purpose of forgiving sin and granting eternal life so that a person can come alive to God and worship God. When a person trusts Christ as personal Lord and Savior, God begins to restore the marred image of God in man because of sin through the renewing process of the Holy Spirit. In the born again believer, God begins to enlighten the mind so the person can know God. God progressively frees the will so it can obey God, and He releases the emotions of a Christian so he can love God more. The Christian, and only the Christian, can worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Holy Scriptures. God's purpose, then, for sending His Son to die for sinners was that He might restore to us the ability to worship. As Christians, we can worship God aright but we will never worship Him perfectly, for we are still in this sinful body that is being progressively delivered from sin.

A.W. Tozer in his booklet, *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*, said:

“Now, God Almighty sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world for a purpose, and what was the purpose? To hear the average evangelist nowadays you'd think God sent Christ that we might give up tobacco; that Christ came into the world that we might escape hell; that He sent His Son into the world that when at last we get old and tired we might have some place to go. Now all of these things are true. Jesus Christ does save us from bad habits and He does redeem us from hell and He does prepare us a place in heaven but that is not the ultimate purpose of redemption. The purpose of God in sending His Son to die and rise and live and be at the right hand of God the Father was that He might restore to us the missing jewel, the jewel of worship.”

Christians, God has saved you and is renewing your mind so you may know God. Are you using your mind to know more about God's person and works? Are you studying the Bible so you will interact with God's revelation about Himself? Are you grappling with doctrine so you can know God better and live a more consistent Christian life?

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).

You are not truly worshipping God unless you are using your mind for His glory.

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe” (Eph. 1:17-19).

John Stott in the book *Your Mind Matters* says,

“All Christian worship, public and private, should be an intelligent response to God's self-revelation in His words and works recorded in Scripture.”

Martin Luther, seeing the importance of the Bible to one's life, wrote:

“In truth you cannot read the Scripture too much;
And what you read, you cannot read too well.
And what you read well, you cannot too well understand;
And what you understand, you cannot too well teach;
And what you teach well, you cannot too well live.”

Christians, are you obeying God with your will? God is setting your will free that you may keep His commandments. You are not worshipping God unless you are desirous to keep God’s laws and precepts as they are revealed in Scripture. Obedience to God is basic if a Christian is to truly worship God.

“I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word. I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Psa. 119:101-104).

Christians, are you loving God with your emotions? God wants you to feel for Him as well as know and obey Him. **“Jesus replied, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’” (Matt. 22:37).** God is renewing your sinful emotions so you might feel and experience the one, true and living God.

Worship, then, is about knowing God in an intimate, personal and dynamic way, which involves the mind, the will and the emotions. Are you experiencing God? Do you really know Him? Is the motivation of your heart to obey and please God? God is seeking true worshippers and He is always pleased when He finds them. The true worshipper can and will say,

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (Psa. 42:1-2).

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 2 Obligated to Worship John 4:19-24

If we were to approach the average non-Christian man on the street and ask him, “Are you under obligation to worship God?” His answer would probably be, “I am under obligation to no one, not even God. Even if there is a God (and there may not be), I would feel no compulsion to fall before Him as the Sovereign God of the universe.” For the unsaved man, his god is a god of his imagination; a god carved of sticks or stones or conceived in his sin-darkened mind. His god is a god he can “wheel and deal” and one who would be as human or less human than a man. If, however, we were to approach the average professing Christian on the street and ask him about worship, he would reply, “I believe in God and His Son Jesus Christ. I believe in worship but I also believe I can worship my God however, whenever and wherever I desire. If I want to worship God I can; if I do not want to worship God I do not have to!” There also seems to be a humanistic air among many saved people who believe that the worship of God is optional. It is nice but not necessary. Worship to them is something done when they feel like it or are in the mood for it. The Bible tells us that worship is obligatory. God commands worship. God expects worship from all His creatures. Even the non-Christian is under obligation to worship God because he is a creature of God with God’s image stamped upon his soul. God requires worship of every person but all men do not give Him worship because they are sinners and in rebellion to God. They do not want to have the true God ruling their lives. They want to go their own independent ways, pleasing themselves rather than God. The Bible tells us that God has given every man some light about God, but whatever light he receives, he rejects because it means moral obligation to God and men love darkness rather than light.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom. 1:18-25).

Every fiber in the unsaved man’s body strains at the thought of worship of and servitude to the true God.

It is an obvious fact that God requires worship from Christians, His people on this earth. **“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care” (Psa. 95:6-**

7). Because of the new birth from the Father, the renewing by the Spirit and the continual work of Jesus Christ in a Christian, he can offer acceptable worship to God. As a Christian, do you know that you are worshipping God in the right way? Are you sure God is accepting your worship? We all must desire to be enlightened on this subject of worship so we can know that we are truly pleasing God and not ourselves or others in worship. We must ask ourselves why do I worship, who do I worship, when do I worship, where do I worship and how do I worship?

WHAT WORSHIP IS

In John 4, Jesus told this Samaritan woman who was morally lewd and sexually debauched that **“God is seeking worshipers”** and those who worship Him **“must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24)**. Men must (obligation) worship the Father. In His evangelization of this woman, Christ told her about worship and her moral obligation to God if she was to be saved and be a follower of Christ. Since Christ put so much emphasis upon worship, we should seek to define it and do it.

Webster’s Dictionary defines worship as “to adore or pay divine honors to a deity; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration; as to worship God.” A.W. Tozer in his small pamphlet, *“Worship, The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*, defines worship as “to feel in the heart and to express this feeling in some appropriate manner.” Tozer’s definition is biblically and theologically weak and leaves the door wide open to radical experiential Christianity. Al Martin in a series of messages on worship defines worship as “the honor, reverence and homage paid to superior beings, whether to a false god or the true God.”

While it is impossible to give a complete definition of worship, any definition at all must come out of the words used in the Bible for worship. In the Old Testament, the primary word for worship is *shahah*, which means “to prostrate oneself before another in order to do him honor and reverence,” (Exo. 4:31). In the Greek New Testament, five words are used to explain worship but only three have deep significance. *Proskuneo* means, “to kiss the hand, to bow down or to prostrate oneself.”

“The twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’”(Rev. 4:10-11).

Sebomai which means “to revere, stressing feeling of awe or devotion.”

“You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men’” (Matt. 15:7-9).

Latreuo, which means, “to render religious service and honor.”

“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh . . .” (Phil. 3:3).

From these Biblical words, we can readily see that worship involves both reverence and service.

In light of the Biblical meanings of the words translated worship in the Bible, a general definition of worship is:

“Worship is the activity of the new life in a born again believer in which he recognizes the fullness of the Godhead as manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture. He seeks according to biblical commands and principles, to render to the living God that glory, reverence and honor which is His due, which will result in spiritual service and activity on the part of the true believer.”

The implications of this definition are many. First, worship involves prostrating oneself before God as a humble sinner saved by grace. This prostration may be the bowing of his knees or head, or it may be a mental attitude where one bows his heart, mind and will to the living God. Second, God is the supreme Creator of all and He is to be treated with respect and dignity. God is not “the man upstairs” or “my big buddy in heaven.” He is not “buddy” but Sovereign. He is not just a friend but a King. He is not to be talked to flippantly but to be honored and respected. Third, in our pragmatically oriented evangelical world where work, witness and warfare are stressed, we need to understand that service alone is not worship. Service is part of worship but true service must always be preceded by true reverence of the Most High God. Fourth, worship is not only giving praises, adorations, thanks and exaltations to God, but is also offering oneself to God as an obedient servant. It is giving to God and not necessarily taking from God.

WHAT WORSHIP IS NOT

There are so many misconceptions about worship in the minds of unsaved and saved alike that it is proper at this point to lay the ax to what some people think is worship but is not true Biblical worship at all.

Nature Worship. Nature worship is based on the natural feelings of men. This type of worship comes from the unregenerate heart, which may or may not relate these natural feelings to God. Nature worship appeals to the senses of man; it is worship on a poetic and philosophical level. It comes as one looks at a beautiful sunset, or the moon flashing on the expanding ocean, or one’s soul is enraptured as he hears beautiful music or reads a moving poem. Many people get rapt feelings as they contemplate and meditate on a great masterpiece of art. Worship, however, is more than love, music and poetry. When one listens to Beethoven’s symphonies, he is not necessarily worshipping God. Quite often I hear people say, “I can worship God better in the woods than I can in church.” This is nature worship but not worship of the true and living God.

Cain Worship. Cain and Abel were sons of Adam and Eve. Undoubtedly Adam and Eve taught these boys the type of sacrifice and worship that was acceptable to God. They were instructed that God is only satisfied with blood sacrifices, “for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). Abel obeyed God and his parents teaching and brought an animal sacrifice, but Cain offered the Lord “the fruit of the ground.” What was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice? He and his brother both came to the same altar, both came to the living God, both came at the right time and both came to sacrifice. What was wrong with Cain’s sacrifice? He was religious and sincere and this was in his mind an act of worship.

What was wrong? He did not come God's way. Cain offered worship without blood atonement. God will not accept natural, humanistic, man-centered worship. Cain worship comes out of a sincere, unregenerate heart whereby a person thinks he can approach God any way he wants. Yet, there is only one way God will accept worship and that is through the shedding of blood. There is only one way of salvation and that is through the blood of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant, and this salvation is appropriated through faith in Christ.

All the people in the world who belong to other religions are not true worshippers of God no matter how sincere they might be because they are rejecting the atonement of Christ. Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Shintos or whatever are not worshipping the true God because they have rejected Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Samaritan Worship. Samaritan worship is heretical worship because a person mixes error with truth. Heresy is picking out of the Bible what you want to believe and rejecting or ignoring the rest. Heretical worship springs forth from an unbelieving heart. Samaritan worship can clearly be seen in the Samaritan woman who Christ spoke to when He stopped at the well for a drink of water. She worshipped her concept of God. She went to the temple on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria. She made animal sacrifices and approached God through the priesthood. The Samaritans had set up a rival religion to the true Jewish religion in Jerusalem. Samaritans were heretics. They had some truth but this truth was mixed with error. Therefore, Christ said to this woman, **“You Samaritans worship what you do not know” (John 4:22).** Their worship was close enough to the truth to look real but it was not grounded on the total revelation of the Old Testament, for the Samaritans only accepted the five books of Moses. There may be people who call themselves followers of Christ who are not worshippers of Christ. Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Scientists, Universal Church people, liberal Protestants and all other cultists and religious modernists are guilty of Samaritan worship. Their worship is heretical worship and God will not accept this kind of worship.

Pharisee Worship. Pharisee worship is to have the truth of God intellectually in the head but not to have a spiritual heart for God.

“So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, ‘Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?’ He replied, ‘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. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men” (Mark 7:5-8).

Pharisee worship is done to please men and not God. It is holding to the traditions of men but not really desiring to keep the commands of God as they are revealed in the Bible. People put on a phony religious show. They have worked up a good worship act, but they do not know God personally and their hearts do not beat to please God. Pharisee worship is hypocritical worship.

Both saved and unsaved can perform Pharisee worship. It is possible for a person to go to church, pray, be religious and go through the external motions of Christianity and still never be saved. This person is a mere professing Christian who needs to be born again. However, it is also possible for a true Christian to have carnal attitudes about the worship of

God and fall into the externals by trying to please men, by trying to uphold man-made traditions and by having a life spiritually dry and far from God. A Christian can have head facts without a love relationship with God. Beware of Pharisaical worship. It is external orthodoxy with no heart for God.

WHY WORSHIP IS IMPORTANT

There are some basic underlying principles of worship that must be understood if we are to plumb the depths of worship individually and collectively.

God has Commanded Worship of Himself. The Bible declares it is our solemn duty to worship God. He has commanded it. He requires it. In the Ten Commandments, God commands His people not to make any idol or likeness of God to worship, as do the non-believing nations. God states that worship belongs to Him alone. He is to be worshiped exclusively.

“You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exo. 20:5-6).

When Christ was tempted in the wilderness by Satan our Lord told Satan to worship God only. **“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matt. 4:10).** If God commanded Satan to worship Him, how much more are we, God’s children, to worship God? Worship is our duty. Worship is our solemn responsibility. Worship is our basic task to perform towards God. It is not optional. It is essential. Without a sense of our duty to worship God, we will never worship God right or acceptably. Worship of God does not depend on how we feel. If we went only by our feelings, we might never worship Yahweh aright. We Christians are morally bound to worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture.

God is Concerned as to How Men Worship Him. God is not indifferent to the way men approach Him and worship Him. He is vitally concerned that people worship Him in the right attitude and the right manner. God wants His people to worship Him for the heart.

“When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right” (Isa. 1:12-16)!

God is not impressed with externals. The Jews were meticulously going through their religious worship but God declared His disgust and hatred of external religion with no love, heart and devotion to God in it. In the midst of what appeared to be a thriving Israel politically, economically and religiously, God spoke to the Israelites through the prophet Amos and declared His disdain for their phony worship.

“I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps” (Amos 5:21-23).

God is only pleased with those who worship Him in purity and honesty from the deep recesses of the devoted heart.

“Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob” (Psa. 24:3-6).

God is not indifferent to how His people worship Him. He is turned off by externalism, hypocrisy and phoniness. For instance, in our public worship on Sunday morning, God is not one bit impressed with any human feelings we may have for being in church. To Him it is not a matter whether we get a good feeling, whether we see our friends, what type of clothes we are wearing, whether we shake the preacher’s hand or whatever. He is only pleased with our heart toward Him and whether we are in public worship to meet Him, and whether we have assembled to interact with our God. This is rendering acceptable public worship to God. The question is not whether we will be pleased or men will be pleased with us but will God be pleased with our worship.

God has Revealed to Us How to Worship. God has not only commanded us to worship Him but has left us divine revelation in the Bible as to how we should worship Him. Because we have the Bible, we can answer the question, “How can I show I am rendering acceptable worship?” For instance, in the Old Testament, we are specifically told we are to have no images or likeness of God as the heathen who materialize their gods.

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Exo. 20:4-4).

Therefore, to have any idols of God or likeness of God is idolatry, and we cannot worship God acceptably with these pagan practices even though we may rationalize our position by calling them aids to worship. God hates them! God has revealed to us in the Bible things that please Him. He does not give two hoots about what we *think* will please Him. He has told us what will please Him.

If we say, “I think God is pleased with my worship,” or “I feel God is pleased with my worship,” we are on very shaky ground. We cannot trust our minds or our feelings when it comes to the subject of acceptable worship because our minds have been darkened by sin, and even as redeemed men and women we need special revelation on how to worship God. All of our traditionalism that says, “I have been taught to worship this way by my church or parents; I have done it this way and will continue to do it, for I cannot change,” must be put under the scrutiny of the Word of God. All of our subjectivism which says, “Worship is what I feel and experience only” must be placed under the light of the Bible. All pragmatism that says,

“Worship is good as long as it moves a crowd or gets them to respond:” must be examined in light of the Scriptures. Traditionalism, subjectivism and pragmatism often make the Word of God void.

God has Declared that One of the Marks of True Conversion is True Worship. True worship is one of the direct fruits of the saving work of Christ. Born again Christians are those who are spiritually circumcised in heart by the saving work of Christ and the regenerating and renewing work of the Holy Spirit. They are the worshippers of the Triune God.

**“For it is we (Christians) who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh . . .”
(Phil. 3:3).**

It is an assumed fact that those who are circumcised in heart are true worshipers of God. Therefore, worship will flow to some degree from every genuine Christian. A Christian can worship God in a right manner but he can never worship Him perfectly in this life because sin is still in him. The Christian can learn the right way to worship, enter into deep understanding and experience of worship, but he can never perfectly worship until he gets to heaven. Yet, a true Christian will worship God, and will desire a deeper experience of the worship of the living God.

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 3 Worship of God John 4:19-24

How much do we know about worship? Are we offering acceptable worship to God? Worship should be the normal employment of all God's creatures. In Isaiah 6, the prophet was given a vision of the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, and angels were around this throne, saying, "**Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty, the whole earth is full of His glory.**" The angels were worshipping God because they were created to worship Him. In Revelation 4, the four living creatures did not cease, night nor day to say, "**Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is, and is to come.**" The twenty-four elders fell down before God's throne and worshipped Him by saying, "**You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.**" This worship came natural for these creatures because they were created to worship the living God.

Is worship of God our normal employment as a Christian? Does worship of God concern us and does our God occupy our mind? We know that the unsaved man does not want to worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture, but what about us who are God's children by grace through faith in Christ? Are we, Bible believing, evangelical Christians, truly worshipping God? The average evangelical in America is defective in his ability to worship the Most High God. Why? Evangelical Christians as a whole do not know who God is. An evangelical has an open Bible but he does not study it. Consequently, he has lost sight of the God of Scripture. The hidden person of the Trinity to most evangelicals is God, the Father. They do not worship aright because they are ignorant of God as He is revealed in Scripture.

Worship stands or falls with our concept of God. As evangelicals, we abhor the idea of an image of God carved from sticks, stones or metal. We would oppose pictures of God or any kind of idolatry as a violation of the Ten Commandments. Yet, it may be that we evangelicals may also be idolaters of sorts, but our idolatry is in the mind, for we conceive of a God in our imagination that really does not exist. Idolatry always begins in the mind before an external image is made of one's mental conception of God. There is only one, true and living God and that is the God of Scripture. To the degree evangelicals have a wrong concept of God, then our worship will be defective.

As Christians, we may be idolaters while sitting in church if we have a wrong concept of the God of Scripture. There can be no true and acceptable worship of God if our thoughts of God are not biblical.

The Samaritan woman to whom Christ had spoken concerning salvation was guilty of mental idolatry. She, as all Samaritans, had conceived in her mind a God who did not exist. The Samaritans had set up a rival religion in Samaria to the true Jewish religion in Jerusalem. The Samaritans had their own priesthood, sacrificial system and temple that set on Mount Gerizim. The Samaritans only accepted the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses, as inspired Scripture and rejected all the other Old Testament books. A Samaritan's concept of God was defective because it was not based on complete revelation. Christ, therefore, in the

evangelization of this woman, had to give her a true concept of God and He said, “God is spirit.” Or more literally, “The God is spirit.” **“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).** Before this woman could correctly worship God, Christ had to correct some of her defective thinking about God.

WORSHIP IS TO BE GIVEN TO THE GOD REVEALED IN SCRIPTURE

The first concept Christ had to correct in this woman’s thinking was concerning the person of God. He is “the God,” (Greek definite article) the only, true God as revealed in the whole Old Testament. She ignorantly worshipped because she did not have proper facts about God because she denied the revelation of the Bible about God. She worshiped a god of her imagination and her worship was not acceptable, no matter how sincere she was. She had to worship “the God” of the Old Testament if she was to be a true worshipper of God. Any other god except the God who is revealed in the Bible is a false god.

Who is the God of Scripture? What is He like? God is not like a man. No, He is infinitely more superior to the best of men. In fact, God can never be comprehended totally by any one. No creature on earth or in heaven will ever completely understand who God is because God is infinite and to Him there is no end.

We do know some things about God because they have been revealed to us in the Bible, but even this revelation baffles the human mind. We know that God is self-containing, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, sovereign, eternal, immutable, holy, wrath, love and just. God is all these attributes and more. Yet, we need to try to understand what God has revealed about Himself so we can worship Him for who He is.

God is All-Powerful. God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. God spoke and the world came into existence, and it is revealed to us **“in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1),** and He **“upholds all things by the word of His power” (Heb. 1:3).** God has infinite power to do as He pleases in this world.

God is All-Knowing. God knows everything and He has absolutely no need to learn for He knows all things in Himself. God never wonders about anything. He is never surprised or amazed and He never discovers anything, for He knows everything. God has “perfect knowledge.” **“Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge” (Job 37:16)?**

God is Holy. God is a pure being separate from the slightest taint of sin. He is absolute perfection and there is not one defect in His whole essence. God is faultless, spotless, impeccable and unblemished. God is the complete antithesis of sin, and His majestic holiness makes Him separate from all other creatures. Holiness speaks of God’s awful majesty and His hatred of sin. **“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders” (Exo. 15:11)?**

God is Sovereign. God is sovereign and He does as He pleases in heaven and earth.

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please’” (Isa. 46:9-10).

God is supreme. He rules over all. No man can tell God, “What are you doing?” Only a sovereign God is worthy of worship, for a god who is not sovereign is a weak god. In fact, he is not God at all. We worship a sovereign God and we must see Him as preeminent with the right to do all of His good pleasure.

“Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name” (1 Chron. 29:11-13).

God is Wrath. **“God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29).** God’s wrath is His hot anger against sin that flows out of His holy nature that hates sin. God’s wrath is greatly to be feared, for He must certainly judge all men for their sinfulness and rebellion to Him.

“The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The LORD takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger and great in power; the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished” (Nahum 1:2-3).

God is Love. God is love and He puts His love on whomever He pleases, and He pleases to put His love on all those who are true believers in Messiah, His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord. It is God’s saving love that makes a person a true believer and worshipper of God. **“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” (Jer. 31:3).**

It is an obvious fact that when there is ignorance of the one, true and living God there can be no true worship. The starting point to make true worshipers of the Most High God is to teach them knowledge of this God. We must know who God is before we can accurately worship Him. Until men think about God they cannot and will not worship Him right. It is also true that a deficient understanding of God will produce a defective worship of God. Rev. Al Martin says, “Where there is rejection of any revelation of God, worship is defective in proportion to that rejection.” In one sense there is no Christian who worships God perfectly because sin has an influence on the mind no matter how far a person has progressed in his understanding of God. God accepts even the imperfect worship of His children because He loves us, but He desires a progressive attitude of deeper worship of Himself. God has left us the revelation of Himself in the Bible, and He is progressively sanctifying us so that we might know more about Him and His works. God expects Christians to grow in their understanding, love, appreciation and respect of Him.

We Christians must accept the God of Scripture or we are guilty of mental idolatry and will be defective in our worship of the true God. For instance, any Christian who willfully rejects God’s sovereignty in salvation is guilty of making up a god in his mind that does not exist. If a Christian insists upon having a God of pure love only and rejects, ignores or explains away God’s absolute justice, holiness and sovereignty in the salvation of men, he is guilty of mental idolatry, preaching a defective gospel and offering deficient worship to the one, true and living God. The Bible declares that God chooses whom He pleases for salvation and He puts His wrath on whom He pleases.

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13).

“What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory . . .”(Rom. 9:22-23)?

You cry out, “That is not fair!” God’s answer to the question of unfairness is that He is God who rules and controls all and does what He pleases with His creatures.

“But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use” (Rom. 9:20-21)?

A Christian will always be defective in his worship of God if he denies God’s sovereignty in salvation, for anything less than a sovereign God is not worthy of a person’s worship.

As soon as a Christian learns that God rules and reigns, that Christian falls down on his face before God and says, “You chose me to salvation when I should have been damned forever. Because of your grace and love, O God, I have been brought into a saving relation with Christ. I have been bought with the price of Christ’s death. Do with me as you please. I am your servant.”

What happens when a person does not see clearly the holiness of God? It is obvious; he does not understand the seriousness of sin or the awfulness of God’s hatred of sin and His wrath that burns hot against all sin and sinners. When a man sees God as holy, he will understand the words given to Moses by God, **“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exo. 3:5).** Any denial, perversion or watering down of God’s holiness does not allow a person to give acceptable worship to God.

You say, “It is hard for me to understand the God of Scripture!” Good. That means you are beginning to grasp the grandeur of His person and the mystery of His greatness. We cannot and will not understand all about God. We cannot put God in a box or chart Him on a chalkboard. God has made a revelation of Himself in Scripture and we are to stand in awesome wonder and overpowering love as we contemplate the greatness of His person. He has unspeakable majesty and there will always be a mysterious aspect of God we will never understand because we are finite creatures and He is an infinite God. However, we must learn all we can about the God of the Bible even if we will never comprehend Him. There are aspects of God’s character that we will never figure out, but we can believe them and stand in total wonderment of His glorious person. This feeling of awe and astonishment can only come as we know more about God, and we can only know through the Scriptures. Al Martin says, “As knowledge of God increases, a person becomes more accurate in his worship and his worship becomes more acceptable to God.” We must be growing in admiration and appreciation of God so that our minds are captivated, charmed and entranced with His person.

A terrible thing has happened to us when we think we can totally explain, understand and rationalize God. If a person thinks he understands God, he has absolutely no grasp of the mystery and majesty of God, and he is guilty of mental idolatry because he puts God on a level with man. A.W. Tozer says,

“The evangelical rationalism which tries to explain everything takes the mystery out of life and the mystery out of worship, When you have taken the mystery out you have taken God out, for while we may be able to understand Him in some measure, we can never fully understand God. There must always be that awe upon our spirits that says, ‘Ah, Lord God, Thou knowest!’” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE PRODUCES WORSHIP

Knowing God is not just having intellectual understanding of facts. Knowing God is having spiritual understanding of God. Whenever a Christian gets a glimpse of God, it always has an effect on his life. A person who encounters God will have a changed life.

Job, who went through horrible sufferings, could not understand why, but in the midst of these sufferings he received a glimpse of God’s controlling providence. He said, **“I am unworthy” (Job 40:4)**. He saw God through spiritual eyes and then he saw himself as vile or insignificant. In another place, Job said, **“I despise myself” (Job 42:6)**, for spiritual knowledge of God always causes one to see his own sinfulness, inadequacies and shortcomings. **“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes”(Job. 42:5-6)**. When a person sees his own sinfulness, this causes him to cling to God and to worship Him with more fervency.

Daniel was given a vision of God. Perhaps this was a vision of the pre-incarnate Christ. **“I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude” (Dan. 10:5-6)**. When he saw God he declared, **“So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless” (Dan. 10:8)**. Daniel spiritually saw God’s almighty, omnipotent power and his own impotence as a man, and he was sapped of all his strength. When one sees God’s power, he sees how puny he is in himself and turns to God for power to live.

Isaiah entered into the divine presence and saw and heard the angels saying **“Holy, holy, holy”(Isa. 6:3)**. Isaiah received a glimpse of God’s holiness and cried out, **“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”** Isaiah saw his sin in the presence of God’s holiness. God gave him cleansing. Then God said, **“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us”(Isa. 6:8)?** Isaiah replied, **“Here am I. Send me!” (Isa. 6:8)**. A glimpse of God put the fear of God in Isaiah and he went out as an obedient prophet of the Most High God. True worship always results in true service.

The basic reason so called Christian men have lost the art of worship today is that they have lost a high and exalted concept of God. Their God is altogether too human. They have not seen Him as the almighty, holy God who rules and reigns over all. Tozer again says,

“The God of the modern evangelical rarely astonishes anybody. He manages to stay pretty much within the constitution. Never breaks over our bylaws. He’s a very well behaved God and very denominational and very much one of us, and we ask Him to help us when we’re in trouble and look to Him to watch over us when we’re asleep. The God of the modern evangelical isn’t a God I could have much respect for. But when the Holy Ghost shows us God as He is we admire Him to the point of wonder and delight.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

There are all kinds of results that come when one begins to get spiritual discernment on the person of God, but there are five very basic things that happen when we really begin to grasp the greatness of God.

We Learn about Our Sinfulness. Just as Job, Daniel and Isaiah saw their vileness when they saw God, so we too will see our sinfulness and abhor it. We will never prostrate ourselves or bow down before God, crying out for cleansing and power, until we see God through spiritual eyes.

We Learn to be Silent before God. In wonder of a sovereign God we learn to say, “**Be still and know that I am God**”(Psa. 46:10). We become awe-struck in His holy presence. While God longs to meet the needs of His people, true worshippers will revel in God’s person and love, praise and adore Him for being God. We will not always be asking Him for things but appreciating Him for who He is and what He has done for us. So often our worship of God in prayer is mainly, “Lord, give me this or that.” God is not just one who meets needs, but who is to be adored, exalted, extolled, praised and appreciated.

We Learn that God Controls Our Life. As we learn more about God’s sovereignty, we also come to learn that He is in control of our life. He loves us as Christians and has a wonderful plan for our life. We learn to depend more on our God by faith so we can have Him lead us and show us experientially His plan for us.

We Learn that God Answers Prayer. Since God is almighty and sovereign, then He has the power to answer prayer. He is not stymied by puny human wills or what seem to be impossible situations. God has the power to do anything and He brings about His plans and purposes through the prayers of His people. God teaches us that we have not because we ask not. Personal prayer and confidence in God are basic to our worship of God.

We Learn to Expect God to Work for Us. Knowing God not only involves resigning ourselves to God’s sovereign will, but also involves the excitement of anticipating the supernatural workings of God. We begin to look for the mysterious workings of God in our life. Part of our worship of God is expecting Him to work for us.

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 4 Worship of God as Spirit John 4:19-24

What we believe about God will affect how we worship God. Our worship of God will never rise above our concepts of God. If we are defective in our understanding of God, then we will also be deficient in our worship of God.

The word “God” is a term that people frequently use but seldom define; therefore, they have some vague, fuzzy or warped concept of God. Einstein thought of God as “a pure mathematical mind.” Tillich declared God to be “the ground of Being.” Others see God as a superhuman person or an impersonal force. Still others think of God as “a bully in the sky” or “a celestial policeman” or even worse “a sentimental grandfather sitting in the clouds, stroking his beard.”

A Christian must always take his definition of God from the inspired Bible, which is a revelation from God about God. Since God is, it is our duty to know all we can about Him. God’s existence and nature do not depend upon what men *think* about him, for He is all that He is no matter what men think. The only true God is the God of Scripture. Because God has revealed Himself to us in the Bible, we have no need or the option of conjuring up ideas and images of God by our own imagination.

The Samaritan woman at the well obviously had some very wrong concepts about God that made it impossible for her to render acceptable worship to God. In His evangelization of this woman, Christ sought to give her a right understanding of God that she might worship God correctly after she became a follower of Christ. This woman thought of worship in terms of a place. She localized God in her thinking to a temple whether it was on Mt. Gerizim in Samaria or on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. In her own mind, God was limited to a piece of geography and contained within a particular location. Therefore, Christ corrected her false thinking by pointing out that with His coming worship would not be connected with any physical temple anywhere but that worship would be “in spirit and in truth.”

“Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:20-21,23-24).

The revelation that Christ made to this woman concerning the person of God was that “God is Spirit.” She had to clearly understand that God is Spirit in order to break her false concepts of God. Literally this says, “The God is Spirit.” God is not a spirit as though He were one of many. God is in essence, substance and being Spirit. This woman’s acceptable worship of God was directly dependent upon her understanding of the spiritual nature of God.

The Greek text puts the word ‘Spirit’ first in the sentence in order to stress the Spirit aspect of God.

The revelation that God is Spirit is a truth that Presbyterians have taught their children so they could worship God correctly. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* says, “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”(Question and Answer 4)

GOD MUST NOT BE MATERIALIZED

In the words “God is Spirit” we understand that God can have no physical body or human parts. He is not of any corporeal substance; therefore, He has no physical limitations, as do humans. Since God is Spirit, He is never to be materialized, for the Second Commandment strictly forbids any physical representation of God. **“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them. . .” (Exo. 20:4-5).** Any man-made physical representation of God or mental materializing of God is a willful breaking of God’s command.

The Samaritan woman had associated God with the temple at Mt. Gerizim. She undoubtedly believed that when a person finds his deity, a temple should be erected to this deity whereby a person comes to worship, offer sacrifices and go through certain rituals to please this deity. Perhaps this woman associated God with a temple to such a degree that she could not separate the two in her thinking. She became guilty of materializing God in her mind so as to make Him like a human who must be in one place at one time. She was most certainly guilty of a form of idolatry.

It is perfectly natural for men to humanize and materialize their deities because they have no real understanding that God is Spirit. This is why God said to wicked Israel, **“To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?” (Isa. 40:18)** and **“You thought I was altogether like you” (Psa. 50:21).** God is never like a man in substance or essence, for He has no human body. Why? God is Spirit.

The epistles of the New Testament also confirm the fact that God is invisible, for a Spirit cannot be seen. It is said of Christ that **“He is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15)** and in a burst of praise it is said, **“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim. 1:17).** “Wait,” you say, “If God has no body, then why in the Bible are there references to God having ‘hands’ (Exo. 3:20), ‘arms’ (Exo. 6:6), ‘ears’ (Isa. 37:17) and ‘eyes’ (Psa. 34:15)?” These are figures of speech to be understood metaphorically. When we speak of the “hand of God” or the “nostrils of God” we are using anthropomorphisms. Anthropomorphisms are using human expressions to describe God though we know they are not literally true because we have the revelation that God is Spirit. (John 4:24).

GOD MUST NOT BE LOCALIZED

The Samaritan woman tried to localize God; that is, she thought of God as being contained in one place that was the temple. Christ revealed to this woman that God is Spirit so she would know that God is everywhere, not just in a particular location like a temple.

God is Spirit teaches the omnipresence of God; that is, God is everywhere present because only a being that is spirit can be everywhere at once. God is boundless and limitless. God is over all things, under all things and outside of all things. Only God can be ten billion places and more at once because He is Spirit. God is too vast, too immense to be contained in one place. God fills the heavens and the earth.

“Am I only a God nearby,’ declares the LORD, ‘and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth?’ declares the Lord” (Jer. 23:23-24).

God as Spirit is an immanent God. God’s presence and power pervade His entire creation. He does not stand apart from the world as a mere spectator of the things He has made. As Spirit, God is everywhere present in His creation. God is and God is both here and there. This is also true in relation to God’s creation of man. God is present near him, next to him, and this God sees man and knows him through and through. It is because God is Spirit that every man has existence, **“For in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).**

God is not so immanent, however, that He is indistinguishable from the universe. This would be Pantheism, which states that God is all and that all is God; that God is in everything. Hindus, who are Pantheists, are said to tap on trees and stones and whisper, “Are you there? Are you there?” to the god they hope might reside within. What we mean as Christians by immanence is that God as Spirit has universal presence. A.W. Tozer says,

“He (God) is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. The doctrine of the divine omnipresence decides this forever.”(*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

For Christians, the immanence of God is blessed truth, for we are always, immediately in His presence. God sees, He hears, He acts immediately everywhere in the universe. Christian’s cannot escape God’s Spirit.

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (Psa. 139:7-10).

Because we know God is Spirit, we can offer acceptable worship by being conscious of the presence of God. We can practice the presence of God who is already here. God’s presence with us never leaves and He is closer to us than our very thoughts. Only God can be with every Christian at once, comfort every Christian at once and answer every Christian’s prayer at once. Why? God is Spirit and an awareness of this fact should cause a deep sense of worship to come over us as God’s people.

GOD MUST NOT BE DEPERSONALIZED

Some scoffers have concluded that if God is Spirit He must be an impersonal God with no personality, for a spirit cannot be a person. God as the Eternal Spirit does have a personality. A person is a being to whom the pronouns “I,” “you” and “he” can be

meaningfully applied, and a person must have self-consciousness and self-determination. One of the names of God is “I AM.” This name was revealed to Moses when he was to go back and speak to the Children of Israel to lead them out of bondage in Egypt. Moses said to God that when he went to the people and the people wanted to know what was the name of the God who sent him. God said, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God is stating that He exists as a self-conscious, self-determining personal Spirit. God is a person with a sovereign will, a perfect mind and a complete emotional make-up. He is a person!

For the Samaritan woman at the well, she had no personal God. She had some very limited understanding of God but it was a God of her own imagination. Whatever concepts she had of God, whatever religious understanding she had, and whatever external worship she rendered to her concept of God, this God did not change her life. She was an immoral woman who had five husbands and was presently living with a man who was not her husband (John 4:17,18). Her concept of God was depersonalized so that it had absolutely no effect upon the way she lived. Worship to her was an external exercise that had absolutely no effect upon the way she conducted her daily life. She, in her mind, had localized God in one spot, the temple. She could do as she pleased as long as she was not where God was. Whenever men lose the concept that God is Spirit and everywhere present, they will go down hill into moral degeneration, for God will become depersonalized to the point where one thinks he can isolate himself from God.

God is a person that cannot be localized or confined. Because God is a person, He can be known in a personal way. God is a personal God with whom men can talk, whom they can trust, who enters into their experiences, who helps them in their difficulties and who fills their hearts with joy and gladness. This personal God, who is Spirit, has been revealed in Christ and we can know this God intimately. **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).** God has promised to all those who trust Christ, **“I will be their God, and they will be My people” (Jer. 31:33).** Those who know God as a personal Spirit know Him vitally and intimately and their God changes their lives and they worship Him from the heart.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The truth that God is Spirit has some very profound implications in the area of worship. Perhaps more confusion has come into worship because of a wrong understanding of the spirituality of God than for any other reason.

God Does Not Dwell in Buildings. God is not confined to special places or special structures. God obviously can be worshipped anywhere because He is everywhere. The Scriptures are clear that God does not dwell in man-made temples. **“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands” (Acts 17:24).** God is not so interested in where He is worshipped as much as how He is worshipped. Since the first advent of Christ, God is finished with temples and buildings as houses for God. God is not primarily interested in the structure of church buildings or even the beauty of them. These things may appeal to the aesthetic side of man but not to God. Even structures in the Old Testament did not house God completely. This is not to say that God does not love beauty. Both the tabernacle and temple were beautiful structures, but in the New Testament age the emphasis is not placed on buildings, but on Christians who are the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD” (Isa. 66:1).

Remember a church building is not a holy sanctuary. The holy sanctuary was in the tabernacle and the temple and these were types that pointed forward to Christ who would come as the Messiah. The tabernacle is destroyed; the temple is demolished. A church building is a building. The building is to be respected and may be quite beautiful, but there is nothing holy about it. God is concerned about who worships and how we worship and not so much where we worship. We can worship at home, in bed, in school, in the shower, on the job and even in church.

God is Primarily Worshipped by Faith. God is Spirit and He must be communicated with and worshipped by spiritual means. The God who is Spirit is known only by faith. We contact the true God in Christ by means of the Bible through faith. **“We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7).** This does not mean that God does not use the whole man (body, soul, heart, mind) to worship Him. God can use the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste) as physical means to move the emotions to worship Him spiritually. However, these five senses are to be used as the Bible itself prescribes. While there is no strict dichotomy between the spiritual and physical, the New Testament places the emphasis on the spiritual side of worship, not the physical.

Do not misunderstand. Emotions are not to be eliminated from worship. God does want us to feel, experience and enjoy Him. However, man’s emotions are moved because he first comes into contact with God who is Spirit through the spiritual means of faith. When Christians contact the God of Scripture through faith, then they get a proper, balanced Christian experience. The whole man (body, soul, heart and mind) will worship God (Matt. 22:37).

Emotions can fool us sometimes. We can be deceived into thinking we are worshipping God when we are not. Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics and some Protestants all have external forms of worship that appeal to the five senses, moving the emotions, but this is not necessarily worship unless it is done according to the rules and principles of the Bible. If the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Bible and faith cannot bring Christians true worshipful experiences, then surely no unbiblical liturgical ritual, excited feelings or pumped up emotions can do it. Acceptable worship must involve the whole man as the worshipper seeks to exalt the Triune God biblically.

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 5

Worship of God as Father

John 4:19-24

When a man says, “I am the father of my children” or a child says, “That’s my father,” what is meant by the term “father”? A father is a creator, author and head of a family. He is one who is respected, loved and feared by his children. A father also has the responsibility of loving, protecting, caring and providing for needs, guiding and disciplining his children.

One of the great revelations of the Bible concerning the person of God is that He is the Father. The Old Testament has only a few references to God as Father and they are always in relationship to Him as Father of the Jewish nation.

“Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your creator, who made you and formed you” (Deut. 32:6)?

“Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another” (Mal. 2:10).

As the Father of Israel, God’s special care for His people was seen in that He loved, pitied, rebuked and required obedience from them. It is in the New Testament that the fatherhood of God is brought into full revelation.

All through the New Testament we see honor, worship and prayer directed to God the Father. In John 4:19-24, Christ made a full revelation to the Samaritan woman showing that the primary object of worship was God the Father.

“Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers much worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21, 23-24).

This woman’s problem was that she did not have a personal God. She had some limited facts about God (most of them were perverted) but she did not know the one, true and living God. Her God was a distant God, a concept but not in any way personal. She had localized God to a temple but did not see God as Father and God as Spirit who is everywhere present. She really did not communicate with her God, and her false and perverted views of God did not change her life. The Samaritan woman did not understand that God was to be worshipped as the Father. He was to be loved, respected and feared as the one who protects, loves, guides and disciplines His children. She had to learn that God was a Father before she could really offer up acceptable worship to God.

FATHER OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

There are many behind the scene implications of the word “Father” in John 4. One of these is that Christ wanted the Samaritan woman to learn that God the Father is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a New Testament revelation and has great implications to our

acceptable worship. **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 13).** This verse clearly teaches that God the Father is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very special and unique sense. The relationship of the Father to Christ is Trinitarian in nature. If there is a father, there must be a son, and since there is God the Father, He must also have a Son, even Jesus Christ. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).** God the Father sustains a particular relationship to Jesus Christ that He does not sustain with any other creature or human being. This is why Christ in His teaching always made a distinction between “my Father” and “your Father.” God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ in the wonder and mystery of the Godhead. The Samaritan woman had to learn the doctrine of the Trinity if she was to offer up acceptable worship to God. She had to understand that the Father was to be approached through God the Son if she was to worshiped aright.

The Father and the Son are One. The Bible very clearly teaches that Christ and the Father are “one.” **“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).** The word “one” is neuter in the Greek and means “one in essence” or “one in substance.” The Father and the Son have the sameness in the essence of life. We know that Christ was claiming equality with God in John 10:30 because the Jews tried to stone Him for blasphemy. **“Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’” (John 10:31-32)?** When Christ called God His Father He was claiming a special oneness in relationship with the Father not true of any created human being, and the Jews clearly understood His claim. **“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God (John 5:18).** Christ did not become God, for He was always God in the Second Person of the Trinity. God the Son robed His divine personality with perfect humanity and became a man. However, Christ was always God before He became a man. In eternity past, He shared the Father’s glory. **“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:5).** Christ alone knows God the Father because He is God in the flesh.

“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:17).

The New Testament writers tell us that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New Testament. For instance, in Isaiah 40:3 we have a prophetic reference to John the Baptist’s ministry that prepared the way for Christ. Isaiah 40:3 says the message of John would be, **“A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.’”** The word for “LORD” in the Hebrew is Jehovah. In Matthew 3:3, Isaiah 40 is quoted and we see that John the Baptist’s message was, **“This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: A voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.’”** The Lord here refers to Christ. The Jehovah of the Old Testament is the Christ of the New Testament. Jesus Christ is God and this is clearly affirmed by the Apostle Paul. **“(Jesus Christ), who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness” (Phil. 2:6-7).**

Since Jesus Christ is God, then we see that He is an equal object of worship with the Father. **“When they saw him (Christ), they worshiped him” (Matt. 28:17).** He is an equal object of honor with the Father. **“That all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him” (John 5:23).** He is also an equal object of eternal life. **“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).** Only one who is God is to be worshipped, and Christ qualifies for our worship because He is God. Jesus said Himself that to see the attributes of the Father people were to look at Him.

“Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered, ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?’” (John 14:8-10).

The Bible teaches three persons in one Godhead; three personalities subsisting in one eternal Being. The Father is God; the Son is God, the Spirit is God, There are not three Gods, but three persons in the Godhead. This is a great mystery, and yet, without an understanding of the Trinity, no one can offer acceptable worship to the God of Scripture. Someone has said, “If you deny the Trinity, you lose your soul. If you try to figure out the Trinity, you lose your mind.”

The Father is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The writers of the New Testament recognized the unique relationship between the Father and the Son. **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:3).**

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Eph. 1:17).

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6).

They recognized that Jesus Christ was Emanuel (God with us) and that as the Son of God He sustained a unique relationship with the Father. The Apostles could not think of God except as the Father who was revealed in Christ and the Father of Christ. **“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son, will be with us in truth and love” (2 John 3).** Worship is acceptable only when given to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Worship is not acceptable when the object of that worship is not the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Both the Father and Christ are worthy of worship as persons in the Trinity.

Only Trinitarian worship is acceptable to God. Al Martin says, “A God who is devoid of the mysterious inter-Trinitarian relationships, a God who can be reduced to mathematical formulas, is an idol.” This means that every Jehovah’s Witness is an idolater because he refuses to worship a Trinitarian God, giving the Father and the Son the same honor.

“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him (John 5:22-23).

This also means that every Protestant liberal who bypasses Christ to get to the Father is guilty of false worship. The only true Jehovah is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Worship is to be Directed to the Father through the Son. Worship is primarily to be given to the Father through the Son by means of the Holy Spirit. While it is true at times that Christ is worshipped in the New Testament as God, the dominant motif is worship to the Father. Obviously Thomas said of Christ, **“My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)** and when John saw a vision of Christ on the island of Patmos, **“He fell at his feet as though dead”(Rev. 1:17).** It is not wrong to have as the direct object of worship the person of Christ, but the general mood and climate of the New Testament is worship to the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. **“For through him (Christ) we both have access to the Father by one Spirit”(Eph. 2:18).** Absolutely no one can go to the Father except through Christ. **“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).** When the Apostle Paul prayed, he prayed to the Father. **“For this reason I kneel before the Father, . . . (Eph. 3:14).** It is Jesus Christ who takes a person to God the Father. **“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God”(1 Pet. 3:18).** It is the purpose of Christ to bring us to the Father that we might offer up acceptable worship. **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,” . . . (1 Tim. 2:5).** A.W. Tozer says,

“Also I think we ought not to talk too much about Jesus just as Jesus. I think we ought to remember who He is. ‘He is thy Lord; and worship thou him.’ And though He comes down to the lowest point of our need and makes Himself accessible to us as tenderly as a mother to her child, still don’t forget that when John saw Him -- that John who had lain on His bosom -- when John saw Him he fell at His feet as dead.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*).

FATHER OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS IN CHRIST

Before Conversion to Christ. Before conversion to Christ each person as a man is related to Adam his human father and as a sinful man is sold out to his father the devil

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Unsaved men have the devil as their father. Before conversion, all men are lost, children of wrath and under the influence of the devil.

After Conversion to Christ. At the moment we received Jesus Christ, the Bible tells us we were adopted into God’s family and became children of God.

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of

sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal. 4:4-6).

Because of this new relationship, our first act of worship is that we cry out, “Abba, Father” which is a term of endearment and deep trust. A very loose translation might be, “Daddy, Daddy.” Before conversion, we may have, seen God as sovereign, wrathful and terrible, greatly fearing this God who is justice, righteousness, holiness and wrath. But Christ, took us to the Father who is love, so that now we sense His protection, care and concern for us as His children. The wrathful God as Father loves us. The sovereign God as Father communicates with us. The holy God as Father accepts us. We no longer fear God and His wrath but respect Him and only fear His discipline to us as His children. Because we know God as Father, we cry out, “Abba, Father.” Knowing God as Father through Christ gives us great assurance of our salvation.

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:15-16).

We have confidence to pray and we say, **“Our Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:9).** We enter into the joys of being saved. **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1)!** We experience the spiritual blessings of God. **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3).** We also experience the comforts of the Father in the midst of our trials of life.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

Our first act of worship as a Christian begins with the words, “Abba, Father” but this is just the beginning of our worship of the Father as He is manifested in the Son and revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We all must go deeper into our worship of God the Father. We must expand our horizons of worship. We must all seek to be full worshipers of God so as to give Him acceptable worship. Tozer again says,

“Well, it’s (worship) an attitude, a state of mind, a sustained act, subject to degrees of perfection and intensity. As soon as He sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts we say “Abba” and we’re worshipping. That’s one thing. But it’s quite another thing to be worshipers in the full New Testament sense of the word and up to our possibilities.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 6 Worship of God in Spirit John 4:19-24

“The minister tells me I should worship the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture, but honestly, I am as dry as a bone in my spiritual life. Intellectually I grasp what the preacher is saying but this deep sense of worship he talks about is not my own experience. What can I do to get a cool breeze from heaven so that a vital spiritual life can be restored to me?” Perhaps you have asked yourself these questions. If so, I would like to suggest to you that one of the keys to a vital spiritual life is to understand what it means to “worship in spirit.” This must be an important concept because Christ, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, stated twice that true worshipers must worship God “in spirit and in truth.”

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

The Samaritan woman had an outward form of worship but she had no personal relationship with God. The God she worshiped could not change her life because she had Him localized in a temple. Her God was a God of her imagination and she worshiped only when she was around or in the temple. She had no concept of a personal God who was always with her and who met her deepest spiritual needs. She was sincere in her religion but she was sincerely wrong. In her conversation with Christ, this woman referred to two different places of worship – Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” (John 4:19-21).

She always thought of worship in terms of a temple site. Christ’s point in this conversation was that worship would no longer be in terms of a place, a piece of geography or a temple, but it would be “in spirit and in truth.”

Mount Gerizim in Samaria and Mount Moriah in Jerusalem represent two kinds of worship both of which are not acceptable to God because neither one is “in spirit and truth.” Mount Gerizim worship represents a sincere worship on the human level but not at all based on the truth, for the Samaritans rejected all the Old Testament except the five books of Moses. They had “spirit” but not “truth.” The Samaritans had their own temple, priesthood and sacrificial system. When their temple was destroyed they carried on their worship for years. They were sincere, earnest and committed to their religion but their religion was not based on truth.

Mount Moriah worship, on the other hand, represents the possession of truth without sincerity. The Jews had the truth of the Old Testament and went through the external forms of

worship as God commanded them. They had the objective truth but lacked subjective experience and reality of the truth. They had “truth” but no “spirit.” They prayed, fasted, went to the temple, offered sacrifices, gave money and went through the external forms of religion, but Christ condemned them for their insincerity and hypocrisy. **“This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Matt. 15:8-9).** The Jews had head knowledge of truth but no heart for God.

In the words, “worship in spirit” Christ attempted to correct any false teaching that men can have truth without reality or head facts without heart response and offer up acceptable worship to God. Worship must be from the total man - mind, will and emotions. The words “in spirit” are given by Christ so that Christians will be on guard about falling into dead orthodoxy, where Christians have an open Bible or a doctrinal creed but are cold, lifeless and powerless in their lives. The words “in spirit” are given to warn Christians about the dangers of intellectualism, hypocrisy, formalism and ritual in worship. God wants His people to experience Him and to have warm, glowing hearts while being committed to the truth.

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

In the words “worship the Father in spirit,” Christ made it clear that since He has come in His first advent, worship will take on a new dimension. The Old Testament physical kind of worship will pass off the scene and something new, fresh and dynamic will replace this physical kind of worship. Worship in the Old Testament was centered on a physical temple, priesthood and animal sacrifices. These were types and shadows pointing forward to the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord who would come. Since Christ has come all the Old Testament types have been fulfilled in Christ and the Church. **“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves” (Heb. 10:1).** Old Covenant worship has been replaced by New Covenant worship, and New Covenant worship centers around Jesus Christ. At the heart of New Covenant worship is worship in “spirit and truth.”

Acceptable worship can only come as we rid ourselves of all worldly forms of worship and spiritually worship God “in spirit,” for the New Testament clearly states that all worship is to be done in a new spiritual dimension. The true church of Jesus Christ has its temple, its sacrifices, its priesthood and its worship, but these are found primarily in the spiritual realm not the physical.

The Individual Christian is Spiritually Circumcised. **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence” (Phil. 3:3).** Physical circumcision in the Old Testament was a sign that one belonged to the covenant. In the New Testament, every Christian has been spiritually circumcised and is part of the Covenant of Grace. Because of spiritual circumcision of the heart each Christian is a true worshipper of God.

The Individual Christian is a Spiritual Temple

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

God is not dwelling in buildings any longer. He, through the Holy Spirit, is indwelling every true believer in Jesus Christ, and the individual Christian has become the temple of God. God dwells in spiritual temples, His people, and as temples of God, Christians are to be holy sanctuaries unto the Lord God. How often people in ignorance will pray, “It is good to be gathered in the house of God on this Lord’s Day,” referring to the church building. Or they will talk about a church building as a “sanctuary” as if there was something holy and mystical about a building. God is not in brick and mortar and glass; He is in people who have received His Son, Jesus Christ. The physical temple is destroyed. God now dwells in spiritual temples and these spiritual temples are to be dedicated to God and used for His holy service.

One time a woman came out of the morning service all huffy and puffy and said to the preacher, “Did you see that young boy chewing gum in the sanctuary this morning?” The minister knew the boy was a believer and the preacher smiled and said, “Lady, I have news for you. The sanctuary was chewing the gum!”

The Individual Christian is a Spiritual Priest

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament has been done away with forever. Since Christ has come, every Christian is his own priest before God. He can represent himself before God in prayer and offer up his own spiritual sacrifices to the Father through his Great High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The great cry of Martin Luther in the Reformation was the universal priesthood of all believers. He opposed the Roman Catholic concept of a literal, physical priesthood on earth. Luther was right and we should still oppose this concept even today. God wants to set men free, not put them in bondage by placing them back under a system that God said has been done away with forever.

The Individual Christian Offers Spiritual Sacrifices.

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased” (Heb. 13:15-16).

As a self-sustaining believer-priest, each Christian is to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise, good works and finances. Real worship involves praise, performance and purse. Part of our worship is to praise God with thanksgiving for His person and His covenant of mercy towards us. Our worship involves good works towards our brothers in Christ and our unsaved neighbors.

A definite part of our worship to God is the liberal giving of our monies to the Lord’s work. When we do not give tithes and offerings, we are robbing God of proper worship that is rightfully His. **“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ ‘In tithes and offerings’” (Mal. 3:8).** No Christian is fully worshipping God until he is making these spiritual sacrifices to God.

The Individual Christian Offers Up Spiritual Worship.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom. 12:1).

The presentation of the life to God is an act of spiritual worship. Every Christian is to be a living sacrifice. In the KJV the presentation of the body as a “living sacrifice” is said to be the Christian’s “spiritual act of worship.” Do you want to worship God? Then present your life to Him. The highest form of worship is a life dedicated to God. Real worship is nothing less than an obedient life. Unless we are daily presenting our lives to God, we are not offering up acceptable worship. A life committed to God is a living, spiritual sacrifice. It is much more difficult to live for God than to die for Him. Martyrdom would be simple compared to living everyday for the one, true and living God as He is manifested in Christ and revealed in Scripture. We have not really worshipped until our bodies are presented to God.

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL POWER

The New Testament teaches that as spiritual temples the Holy Spirit permanently indwells the true believer in Jesus Christ. With the coming of Christ, there is a new manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. The very power of God resides within every believer. It is the Holy Spirit who energizes God’s people in the New Testament. **“For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit . . .” (Phil. 3:3).** Worship is to be offered to the Father, through the Son in the energizing power of the Holy Spirit.

When Christ said to the Samaritan woman that worship was to be “in spirit,” He undoubtedly had in mind man’s human spirit, but it is the Holy Spirit who energizes the human spirit, so this has caused some commentators to think Christ was indirectly speaking about the Holy Spirit and directly speaking about the human spirit. A.W. Tozer says,

“Only the Holy Spirit can enable a fallen man to worship God acceptably. The Church has been propagated by the Holy Spirit, so we can only worship in the Spirit, we can only pray in the Spirit, and we can only preach effectively in the Spirit, and what we do must be done by the power of the Spirit.” (*Worship: The Missing Jewel*)

The Holy Spirit becomes the power for the Christian to worship God when offering up his spiritual sacrifices of his person, praise, performance and purse. Christians are told specifically to pray in the Holy Spirit **“But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God’s love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life” (Jude 20-21).** Christians are exhorted to be filled or controlled by the Spirit. **“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18).** They are also commanded to live (walk) in the Spirit. **“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:16).** The whole purpose of the Holy Spirit’s work is to manifest Christ to the Christian, and Christ in turn takes the Christian to the Father. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify Christ.

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what

is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14).

Beware of any Christian or Christian organization that exalts the Holy Spirit above Christ. The Spirit’s task is to make Christ real to the Christian. If one is occupied with Christ, the Holy Spirit will energize him.

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to Christ can be compared to a spotlight on an actor when on stage. The purpose of the spotlight is to focus attention on the actor. Without the spotlight no one would see the actor. The Holy Spirit shines His light on the person of Christ so we can see Christ. The Holy Spirit’s work is to put Christ in the spotlight in the life of the believer.

Christians need the work of the Holy Spirit in order to worship acceptably and effectively. Without spiritual assistance from God we cannot worship God aright. If we feel our souls are dry as a parched desert, then let us fall on our faces before God and cry out for God to have His Holy Spirit revive us. We can say as the Psalmist, **“Revive us, and we will call on your name” (Psa. 80:18).**

WORSHIP IN A NEW SPIRITUAL ATTITUDE

When Christ told the Samaritan woman that worship was to be “in spirit,” He was most certainly talking about the fact that worship was to come from the heart of a person who had deep emotional feelings for his God. Worship was not to be in some geographical sphere but in the sphere of attitude of heart and mind.

It is the immaterial part of a Christian that worships God. God communes with Christians through the human spirit. **“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16).** A Christian serves God through a redeemed human spirit. **For God, whom I serve in my spirit . . . (Rom. 1:9 - NASB).** In worship, the worshipper is wholly engaged in the act of worship. The renewed mind is also involved in the act of worship.

“And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4:23-24 - NASB).

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2).

The heart is the seat of the emotions so we know the redeemed emotions of Christians seek God with the whole heart. **“I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonders” (Psa. 9:1).** **“I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands” (Psa. 119:10).** Acceptable worship demands a commitment of the whole immaterial man. **“Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name” (Psa. 103:1).** Worship involves deep contemplation of the person of God, meditation upon the works of God and appreciation of our approach to God, through Christ Jesus the Lord. God also wants the heart as well as the head. It is an insult to give God a divided and fragmented heart. Love for God is as important as knowledge of Him.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Worship Is Giving Not Getting. The basic purpose of worship is not that Christians should get a blessing in worship but whether God is pleased with the Christian's worship. Worship is the giving of the mind, the will, the emotions and the body to God. It is the giving of all that we are or have to the worship of the one, true and living God who is manifested in Christ and revealed in Holy Scripture. Beware of Christians who are "need centered" in their worship of God. If they stress what God can do for them more than what they can give God, they have a perverted form of worship. If a person says, "My needs were not met in worship," he may really be saying that he is putting nothing of himself into his worship of God. A Christian will not experience fullness in true worship until he consciously wills to give himself to the worship of God. Each Christian must ask himself the question, as did the psalmist, **"How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me" (Psa. 116:12)?** However worshippers who give themselves to God will receive spiritual blessings in return, and they should anticipate blessing. As they give themselves to God worship, they will receive blessings, but they must give of themselves whether they receive anything or not.

Worship Is by Faith. A God who is Spirit can only be communicated with by spiritual means. Spiritual worship is offered through faith in the living God as He is revealed in the Bible. Worship in spirit is something internal, not external. Any worship, which tries to reach God through emotions, feelings, and aesthetics alone is a false worship. God cannot be reached through beads, crosses, pictures, and buildings or trumped up emotional meetings. God can only be reached by faith as He is revealed in Holy Scriptures.

Worship Does Involve Emotions. God does want us to experience Him. He does want our emotions to be moved towards Him, but He wants the emotions to be moved by the truth of the Word of God. God wants us to weep and laugh and get excited and show seriousness of purpose in our worship of Him. God through the Word, as the Christian exercises vital faith, must move the emotions. If we are to properly worship God, we must use the means He has instructed us to use in the Bible.

Worship Is a Moment by Moment Attitude. Worship is not to be regulated to the hours of eleven and twelve on Sunday morning. Worship is a moment-by-moment experience. In fact, if we have not been worshipping during the week, we will get very little out of collective worship on Sunday. Worship is being occupied with God through Christ and presenting one's body (life) for the service God has prepared for us. We worship when we read the Bible, pray, witness, clean house, change diapers, play with the kids, make a business deal, type a letter, do well in school, do a good job at work or whatever as long as we do these things for the glory of God.

Worship can Only be Pleasing to God When it is Spiritual Worship. There are some external aspects of the Christian religion but God will never be pleased with mere physical aspects of worship. This is clearly taught through the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. The offering of sacrifices without a heart for God was repugnant to God.

"I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offering, I will have no regard for them.

Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps” (Amos 5:21-23).

What God always wants is an obedient heart from His people

“For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you” (Jer. 7:22-23).

God spoke to disobedient King Saul through Samuel. **“But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams’” (1 Sam. 15:22).** God desires all true believers to have a humble and contrite heart before they offer any external kind of worship.

“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Psa. 51:16-17).

Our bodies sitting in a church pew means nothing to God unless our hearts are there to worship Him. When we pray out loud, this is of no consequences to God unless our hearts beat for Him. Praying out loud may help us and certainly it helps others to enter into this prayer, but God is interested in our hearts more than our public prayers. God is not one bit impressed with our singing voices unless we sing out of pure love for Him. Songs create no sensation to God; they do to us but not to God. God is only interested in the heart that produces the song. All physical aspects of worship mean nothing to God and create no sensation to God except they are given by faith. When given by faith, they are well pleasing to Him.

ACCEPTABLE INDIVIDUAL WORSHIP

Lesson 7

Worship of God in Truth

John 4:19-24

“Doctrine, doctrine, doctrine, all I ever hear is doctrine! I just want to love God and serve Him. Learning wearies my flesh. Doctrine divides Christians and I want to love them. Why can’t I just love God without doctrine?” This is a very prevalent attitude among many so-called evangelical Christians today. Is this the right attitude? I think not, for it is impossible to worship God aright and serve Him correctly without a proper understanding of Christian doctrine. Acceptable worship is directly related to a proper understanding of the Word of God.

The neglect of the doctrines of the Bible was the very problem of the Samaritan woman. She as all Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses and rejected all the other Old Testament books. Her religion was based on insufficient revelation. While the Samaritans had a physical temple, an earthly priesthood and literal animal sacrifices based on partial revelation, their religion was not acceptable because it was not based on the full revelation of the Old Testament. They were also very sincere and zealous about their religion, but they were unable to render acceptable worship to God. Christ specifically told this woman that worship must be “in spirit and truth.”

“Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24).

What was her problem? She had “spirit” (zeal) without “truth.” She was deficient in her understanding of the God of Scripture; therefore, she could not worship God correctly. She needed to have a complete revelation of God, so she could worship in truth.

Christ taught the Samaritan woman what every Christian should know and understand explicitly; that is, Christianity is a revealed religion and rests on the unveiling of the hidden Creator Himself. **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6).** Christianity states dogmatically that the Triune God has made a revelation of Himself in a general way in creation and the human conscience and in a particular way in Christ and in the written Bible. Christianity is not a religion thought up by men. It is a revelation directly from God. Revelation is “a disclosure of what was previously unknown” or “the act of God by which He discloses Himself and truths concerning Himself to man, which truths could not be obtained by man in any other manner” or “the act of communicating divine knowledge by the Spirit to the mind.” Revelation deals with how God communicates divine truth, making a manifestation of Himself and His will to men. J.I. Packer, in the book *God Speaks To Man* says,

“Revelation is a divine activity: not, therefore, a human achievement. Revelation is not the same thing as discovery, or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself. In revelation,

God is the agent as well as the object. It is not just that men speak about God, or for God; God speaks for Himself, and talks to us in person. The New Testament message is that in Christ God has spoken a word for the world, a word to which all men in all ages are summoned to listen and to respond.”

TRUTH IN CHRIST

The whole of the Old Testament is a revelation from God, but the Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus Christ, God’s ultimate revelation. Christ constitutes the apex or the climax of all revelation, not chronologically but qualitatively. God has spoken to men in His Son, Jesus Christ. **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2).** When God revealed Himself in Christ, He could go no further. Christ was the ultimate end of all revelation. All that is written in the New Testament is simply explanatory of what God has done in revealing Himself in Christ.

Jesus Christ is God’s full and final revelation of truth. **“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).** All that the Old Testament contained in types and shadows are now reality and substance in Christ the Lord. The tabernacle, temple, priesthood, sacrificial system, incense, ornately dressed priests, and many other things were all types and shadows that pointed forward to the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ. They were mere reflections of the true substance and worked upon the human senses. Ultimate reality and spiritual truth has come in Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, all that Christ taught and did is truth. The reason Christ claimed to be the only way to the Father was because He was truth. **“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’” (John 14:6).**

Worship Must be Based on the New Covenant. In Christ, God has established the New Covenant forever and every Christian is a New Covenant believer. To return to any part of Old Testament (Old Covenant) worship is to dig up what God has buried and to exchange the light of the sun for a dimly lit candle.

God has made a final revelation in His Son, the mediator of the New Covenant, and to go back under Old Covenant worship when He has established the New Covenant is slapping God in the face. Old Testament physical worship is no longer acceptable to God, for He will only accept worship that is “in spirit and truth.” Any earthly physical priesthood that sees the minister as a priest, has an altar in the church sanctuary, and allows any ritual designed specifically to appeal to the five senses of man alone must never be allowed in New Covenant worship. God is speaking to us today in spiritual realities in Christ and not primarily in physical substances. Unfortunately there are today many so-called evangelicals who are living in the types and shadows rather than in the glorious reality of Jesus Christ. Their worship is not “in spirit and truth.”

Worship in the New Covenant is distinct from worship in the Old Covenant because it is based on the truth of the gospel, the full revelation of Christ’s person and work. The New Covenant emphasis is upon the truth of Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension and return.

Worship Must be Simple. Private and public worship must be kept simple so that the physical senses do not get in the way of true worship by faith. God has left us His Son Jesus

Christ and the Word and that is all we need in the New Covenant to worship effectively. Beware of any teaching that would put the Christian back under the Old Testament dispensation and forms of worship.

TRUTH IN THE BIBLE

The Bible is a Revelation. The Bible is also truth. Scriptures are a revelation given in propositional form; that is, real words are given by God to communicate to man. God has not only spoken in mighty acts of history such as the incarnation of Christ, His life, His death and His resurrection, but God has also spoken in verbal form through the Bible.

“We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:9-12).

The Bible becomes the final interpreter of the Christ event. The Bible as revelation is historical, objective, verbal and completed. The Bible is a written revelation from God and is, in an objective sense, the Word of God whether anyone believes it or not. It is impossible to know the Triune God apart from the Bible, for all we know about God is in the Bible.

The Bible is Inspired. The Bible makes its own claim to inspiration. **“All Scripture is God-breathed (inspired) and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).** This means that every word of Scripture is God-breathed; that is, the words are breathed out or spring out from God. It is the Scripture that is inspired. God inspired the finished product of each book when the authors of Scripture penned the books. We have, therefore, inspired Scripture and not inspired writers of Scripture.

Scriptures are not the product of God and man (man cooperates) or God in man (an inspired man) but God through man. The Bible also makes the claim that the Holy Spirit controlled the writers at the time of writing of the Bible.

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

When writing, the writers of Scripture were “carried along,” “borne along” or “moved” by the Holy Spirit so the exact words God wanted were written down. Remember, all the writers of Scripture had a sin nature and were capable of making an error, but God sovereignly and supernaturally controlled them so that they gave revelation in written form, which was inspired, authoritative, and without error. The Bible is the infallible Word. There are no infallible interpreters but there is the infallible Bible. One of the main reasons to accept the inspiration of Scripture is that Christ Himself believed the Bible to be inspired and inerrant.

“I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18)

“ . . . and the Scripture cannot be broken . . .” (John 10:35).

If the Son of God accepted the inspiration of Scripture, then why should any servant of His deny it?

Evangelicals today hold to the verbal-plenary inspiration of Scripture: that is, every word is inspired and the whole (full) Bible is inspired. A good definition of inspiration would be: *God so supernaturally directed the minds of the writers of Scripture that without waiving their intelligence, literary style or personal feelings, or any other human factor, His complete and coherent message to man was recorded with perfect accuracy, the very words of the original manuscripts bearing the authority of Divine authorship.*

The Bible is Truth. The Bible is itself absolute truth. **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).** Every word can be trusted, for it is the very Word of God.

“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

We can trust the Bible because it is truth. Are there not some that claim there are errors in the Bible? Yes, there are, but these are only claims but they have never been proven to be true. Any honest evangelical would admit the possibility of error in the transmission of the text, for we do not have the original manuscripts; however, through the science of lower textual criticism we can almost reproduce the original manuscript of the New Testament. It is more difficult to do this in the Old Testament, but discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls have merely shown how accurate our present copies of the Old Testament are. Honest evangelicals will admit in a very few cases there are some apparent contradictions in Scripture, but the problem is not with God’s inspired Word but with our limited knowledge. We are thousands of years removed from the time of the writing of the Bible. However, archeology is proving everyday the tremendous accuracy of the Old and New Testaments. What contradictions there seem to be are few; the textual problems are minor and there is no major doctrine of the Bible affected by any of the problems.

Paul Little, in his book *Know Why You Believe*, gives a solid answer to the evangelical’s problems with the Biblical text. He says,

“There are some other problems, which as yet do not yield a ready explanation. We must freely admit this, remembering that many times, in the past, problems resolved themselves when more data became available. The logical position, then, would seem to be that where there are areas of apparent conflict, we must hold the problem in abeyance, admitting our present inability to explain but awaiting the possibility of new data. The presence of problems does not prevent our accepting the Bible as the supernatural Word of God.”

J. C. Ryle gives an honest evaluation of an evangelical's position on inspiration. He says,

“Give me plenary, verbal inspiration with all its difficulties, rather than the doubt. I accept the difficulties, and humbly wait for their solution; but while I wait I am standing on a rock.” (Source unknown)

The Bible is a Book of Doctrine. The word “doctrine” simply means “teaching.” When we speak about doctrine we are speaking about the teaching contained in the Bible. There is the doctrine of Christ, of the Second Advent, of the Bible, of salvation, of Christian living, of witnessing, of praying and hundreds of other teachings in the Bible. An inspired Bible has been given so men might know the doctrine of Scripture. **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (1 Tim. 3:16).** Without doctrine, we cannot live the Christian life or worship God correctly. Doctrine is nothing but a revelation of God and how He wants His people to live. In the Book of Acts we find that doctrine was essential to corporate worship in the early church. **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (doctrine) and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42).** They continued in the Apostle’s doctrine and our task is to find out what the Apostle’s doctrine was from the written Word of God. Every truth we learn gives us more understanding of God and appreciation of His greatness. One of the marks of the last day before Christ’s second coming is that supposed Christian men will fall away from the true Faith and follow after the doctrines of demons. **“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).** We are warned that men will not want strong doctrinal teaching and will do everything to get teachers who will compromise and tell them what they want to hear.

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

Faithful ministers teach the “whole counsel of God” to their flocks without compromise, for they are teaching God’s inspired revelation. **“For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will (counsel) of God” (Acts 20:27).** One of the marks of a spiritual babe in Christ is that he does not want strong doctrine and deep truth. There is also the problem of spiritual pride, for a little knowledge puffs up. A person may want to be learning something new all the time, but not reveling in and obeying the truth he already knows. A person that says when hearing a message or reading his Bible, “I have heard that before. I know what this passage of Scripture says already. I have already memorized this verse,” has a very serious problem with spiritual pride and immaturity. As a Christian grows up spiritually, his learning of straight biblical and theological facts continues because Christianity is a dogmatic religion based on the Bible, but he never stops learning more about God and knowing God in his experience. We never stop growing in knowledge of God and fruitfulness to Him.

“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Col. 1:9-10).

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The Bible is a Revelation Not a Medical Book. The Bible is a revelation from God about God. It is not a book on psychology that helps us to deal with our daily problems only. God has made a revelation of Himself and every word and every concept and every doctrine is relevant to us because these truths tell us about God. It is our human responsibility to learn all we can about the written revelation so we can experientially know God. The whole counsel of the Bible is to be taught to men and then application is to be made to one's life. The Bible is not primarily a book written as a manual to handle problems, although it gives the spiritual basis for handling the problems of life. We do not go to the Bible to solve our problems, but we go to the Bible to know God who in turn meets our deepest needs as we commit to Him. The Bible approached purely as a manual for problems will never produce deep worshippers of Almighty God.

A Defective View of the Bible Produces a Defective Worship. Where the written Word of God is rejected, neglected or perverted, worship is rendered unacceptable in direct proportion to that rejection or neglect of the Word of God. Atheists, infidels and agnostics have no worship at all. Protestant liberals and cultists have a corrupted worship that is not acceptable to God. Even evangelical Christians are perverted in their worship to the extent that they are ignorant of the whole counsel of God. Evangelicals must accept the whole Bible without reservation so as to give God all the glory in worship.

The Bible is the Only Rule of Faith and Practice. Nothing must be introduced into our acts of worship in private or public for which there is no biblical warrant. Acts of private and public worship should be according to the Bible alone. This was a big issue in the Reformation between Luther and Zwingli. Luther believed whatever is not specifically forbidden in Scripture was all right to practice. Zwingli believed there should be nothing in worship except that which is specifically and clearly taught in the Bible. Luther's view permitted him to keep high liturgical worship in the Lutheran church. Zwingli had simplicity of architecture and forms of worship. In my opinion, Zwingli had a more Biblical concept of worship than Luther for he more clearly saw the Bible as a revelation, which spoke specifically on matters of faith and practice.

Is the Bible like a paper pope? Absolutely not! The Bible is inspired by God and popes are not biblical. The Bible is the only authority and not to hold this allows every man to do that that is right in his own eyes.

The Bible Alone is the Guide for Feelings. Feelings can always be deceptive. It is quite possible to have a religious experience without Jesus Christ. It is also possible to worship on a human level without truly worshipping God. It is possible for men to have some kind of experience of talking with or to God and still not worship biblically. For sure, God wants Christians to worship in spirit, but not at the expense of truth. He wants His people to experience Him but to do so through the Word of God. Subjective Christian experience is always to operate within the framework of objective biblical truth. It is through the biblical understanding of Scripture that one comes to really know God. If we need more faith, then we should read and memorize the Bible. **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the**

message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). The Bible is a living book and the more we read it, memorize it, and meditate upon it, the more we understand about God and His purposes.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Spurgeon said, “This Bible will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Bible.” It is always true that dusty Bibles mean dirty lives.

The Bible should be read as a love letter from God to us. Each paragraph, each line and each word tells us something of the God who loves us. The Bible takes us beyond the words to the person of God Himself. Just as we never tire of reading a love letter, we must never tire of reading God’s Word, for it is through the Bible that we learn of His love for us.

The Bible is Necessary for Worship. Without a right understanding of the Bible we cannot offer up acceptable worship to God. A person who continues in the Word is a true disciple of Christ. **“To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31).** Since worship comes from a total revelation of Scripture, it is absolutely essential that each Christian reads his Bible regularly and studies it consistently. In public worship, there must be a systematic reading and exposition of Scripture. The Bible must be read and re-read with a devotional emphasis whether learning a practical truth, grasping a deep theological concept or parsing a Greek verb. Before we read books about the Bible, we should be acquainted with the Bible. If we read books about the Bible, let us be sure we read good, solid Christian literature that will give us an appreciation for the Bible and the God who wrote it. Always check the books you read about the Bible with the Bible to be sure what an author is saying is biblical.

TRUTHFULNESS FROM THE CHRISTIAN

To worship God in truth may also refer to the fact that every Christian must be truthful before God, open and honest with his own life, as he reads the Word of God. If Christians are to understand the objective revelation of God’s written Word, they must subjectively yield themselves to the truth of God’s Word. The Bible is true whether men believe it or not, but it only becomes a living reality to those who accept what it says at face value and apply it to the life. We must believe what God says about His Son Jesus Christ and how He relates to our daily Christian lives. We must yield ourselves to what God says about us, and, as He shows us our sin, we must confess it and do what He commands us to do as Christians.

Every Christian must evaluate his life continually in light of the Word of God. He must allow the Word of God to convict him of sin and to produce a cleansing effect in him. **“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17).** The Bible is alive to the believer who is prepared and ready to accept it. It is not possible to give acceptable worship to God unless a person is living in the Biblical commands, promises, principles, concepts and precepts. A hunger for God’s written Word will produce growing, dynamic Christians. **“Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pet. 2:2-3).**

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 8

The Basis for Corporate Worship

How are Christians to worship God corporately or collectively? How is the gathered church to approach the Living God? What is the criterion for worship? Is it found in how one thinks or feels worship should transpire? Where does one go to find out how the one, true and living God desires to be corporately worshipped?

The Bible

The Bible is the only place we can go to find out how to worship God. The Scriptures are the one source that tell us why, when and how to worship as a body of believers. Evangelical Christians since the days of the Reformation have declared that *the Bible is the only rule of faith and practice*, and this surely includes the motivations and methods of corporate worship.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).

The inspired, infallible Word of God becomes the ultimate criterion to judge all of life, and this certainly includes the proper way to conduct corporate worship. Without the objective Bible, the church is cast on a sea of subjectivity so that in worship every person does that which is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6). God has given the church infallible revelation on how He is to be approached in collective worship, and the body of Christ needs no other man-made criterion to make worship effective.

The Regulative Principle

The basic question is not what men think about worship but what does God say? All corporate worship, as all of life, must be regulated and defined by the Scriptures.

For those who are Reformed in theology, the foundational principle for worship has been the Regulative Principle of Worship.

“The living God accepts our worship when we offer it in obedience to his revelation of worship’s true character. Worship ought not to be offered according to imagined fantasies and invented techniques, satanic suggestions, using visible representations of God or through any way not directed by the Scripture. (Westminster Confession of Faith: Contemporary Edition—21:1).

The intention of the Regulative Principle is good in that it seeks to limit worship to what the Bible teaches, allowing the Bible alone to set the standard for corporate worship. The motivation of this principle is to keep God’s people from going to extremes in worship, so as to offer up acceptable worship to the Triune God.

The problem with the Regulative Principle is that the Bible does not mention many things that we use in worship in the 21st century – pews, stain glass windows, crosses, certain

types of instruments, sound systems, hymnals, over-head projectors, calls to worship, benedictions, etc. What is not specifically mentioned in Scripture must be solved by theological deductions based on biblical texts and principles. Those who view the Regulative Principle this way appeal to the Westminster Confession of Faith,

The entire purpose of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, human salvation, faith and life style is expressly written in Scripture or *may be reasonably concluded through careful and logical deduction from Scripture.*
(Westminster Confession: Contemporary Edition—1-4)

Most Christians would agree that they should worship only in the way God commands. Anything less or more is a violation of the Second Commandment: **“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Exo. 20:4).**

Various Christian groups or denominations look at how the regulative principle is carried out in theory differently. Those who are of the Puritan-Reformed tradition would say only what is explicitly commanded in Scripture is acceptable in corporate worship. Stated negatively they would say anything that is forbidden in Scripture plus anything not explicitly commanded in Scripture should not be allowed in worship. The Lutheran and Anglican traditions would allow anything in public worship except that which is specifically forbidden. In these groups, much of the Roman Catholic tradition is retained. The tradition of General Evangelicals would state that anything that is appropriate and enhances the service is appropriate for corporate worship. This is a more pragmatic approach to worship. Perhaps the closest tradition to the regulative principle is found in the moderately Reformed group that states all that is forbidden in Scripture plus anything without implicit biblical warrant is not acceptable for public worship. Stated positively, the moderately Reformed believe that whatever has explicit or implicit Biblical support is appropriate for corporate worship. The moderately Reformed accept the premise that whatever is commanded or stated in principle in the Bible alone is acceptable in collective worship. Any thing else is not acceptable. This view says that the Bible alone (both Old and New Testaments) must be the only criterion for public worship.

The biggest issue is how the regulative principle is to be carried out practically. Theory is one thing and the practice of that theory is something else. All corporate worship is made up of content, structure and style. Content has to do with the truth of the gospel and the whole counsel of God. Content is non-negotiable because it is founded upon the inspired and infallible written Word. Structure has to do with the way the church orders its service. Obviously Christian churches do not structure their services alike. Robert Webber suggests that Christian worship is:

“Gathering (we joyfully enter into the presence of God), Word (proclamation in which we hear God speak), Eucharist (we respond with thanksgiving), and Dismissal (we are sent out to love and serve others” (Richard Kauffman, “Beyond the Battle for the Organ”).

Style has to do with the cultural context of worship. Style varies from country to country and culture to culture. Different churches have different styles – some are traditional and others are contemporary and some have blended worship. It is in the area of style that most of the

controversy over worship occurs. The issue is over form and function. Function has to do with things that never change – doctrine, fellowship, communion, prayer and worship.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

No church is a true church without these basic functions. Form is over how we do certain things in worship – take offerings, arrange chairs, types of music, ways of expressing worship, order of worship, use of instruments and choirs, overhead screens or hymn books, reciting of creeds or Scripture, etc. These will vary among Christians. Those who are more aesthetic in nature usually drift toward more formal kinds of worship. Those who are more emotive drift towards contemporary worship. Style of worship so often has to do with one’s personality; therefore, worship is a preference. It is related to what we like and what we do not like. Christians around the world worship God in different ways (form) but all are committed to the basic elements of worship, which never change (function).

God, The Object Of Worship

The basis for all corporate worship is the Bible, but the object of worship is the Trinitarian God and the purpose of worship is to glorify God.

“Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy” (Psa. 99:5).

The Bible is not God. The Bible leads us to God. We worship God, not the Bible.

Worship comes from the old English worth-ship, which means, “to ascribe worth to something or someone.” True worship is to attribute worth to a real Being, one who is truly there and who is truly worthy.

“The function of believers is to learn what God is like and acknowledge him – to ascribe worth to him, to reflect upon the value, beauty, and character of God. This is true worship” (Ray Stedman, “Why Worship?”).

Without God at the center of worship, there is no true worship.

“Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (Psa. 29:1-2).

“To ascribe” means “to give: or “to acknowledge.” True worship is giving to God not necessarily receiving from God. Worship is not determined by how much a person gets out of worship but how much he gives or puts into worship. The worshipper does get something from worship but only after he gives himself to God in worship.

We get to know the True God through nature. God reveals Himself in common grace through the world of nature. Behind this universe is the Great Designer and through the world the majesty of God is seen in the beauty of His world. In nature we get a sense of God's wisdom, majesty and power. This can cause the Christian to worship God and the unsaved man to stand in awe of Him.

We get to know God through the Scriptures. God has spoken in His Word through special revelation. The Bible reveals His character; it tells of His work both in creation and redemption, and unfolds the ultimate purposes of God – what He is doing in the universe and the world in which we live. We would know none of this without the Word of God. The Bible alone reveals to us who God is and how He is to be worshipped.

We also get to know God through worship both personal and corporate. When we take the facts of nature and the infallible revelation of Scripture and respond to them in faith, prayer and obedience, we truly worship God. Praising Him, ascribing worship to Him and praying to Him, do something to us internally. This is God's self-revelation to us through His Spirit to our human spirit. Through worship we get to know God personally and intimately. When we pray, our occupation is with our human needs and problems. When we praise, our occupation in our minds is on God's blessing – the things He has done to us and for us. Worship is our occupation with God Himself, with His greatness and majesty of His being. We do not worship the Bible. We worship the God of the Bible. The Bible is merely the vehicle or instrument that reveals to us the one and only True God.

“I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom” (Psa. 145:1-3).

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 9

Essentials and Patterns for Corporate Worship

Confusion often reigns in the minds of true, committed believers because they are not able to distinguish in their minds the difference between *function* and *form* in worship. Function relates to the content of worship that never changes. Form relates to how worship is done in any given culture or generation and is always subject to change. Function deals with the basics, the fundamentals of worship. There are some biblical criteria for corporate worship that can never change. Again, the regulative principle says that only the Bible should be used in forming one's view of corporate worship.

THE UNCHANGING FUNCTION OR CONTENT OF WORSHIP

The first question that must be asked is what does the Scripture command as to the very essentials of worship? What may not be commanded but seems to be laid down specifically by biblical principle? In other words, what are the things that must show up in corporate worship in order to be biblical?

Necessary Functions. There are five basic functions that are absolutely essential for effective corporate worship – teaching (doctrine), fellowship, the Lord's Table, prayer and praise.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

Teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Table, prayer and praise (worship) are fundamental and without them there is no corporate worship that is pleasing to God. What form these basic functions take in a worship service is a matter of culture, taste and preference.

These five fundamental points of worship do not have to occur in every gathering of Christians or in every worship service for Christians to offer acceptable worship to God. They do, however, have to be practiced by a local church generally to offer acceptable worship. Obviously, corporate worship can be offered to God at a prayer meeting with no teaching, or the Lord's Table does not have to be observed every Lord's Day. Yet, without these disciplines occurring generally in the local church, there can be no true worship of God.

Preaching/Teaching. Every worship service is to have the Word of God either preached (exhortation) or taught (content). The Apostle Paul declared preaching was *entrusted* to him by God. **“And at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior” (Titus 1:3).** This verse may lend weight to the primacy of preaching in a worship service.

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage”(2 Tim. 4:2).

“Until I come, devote yourself to . . . preaching and teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13).

“For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will (counsel) of God” (Acts 20:27).

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).

“Teach and preach these principles” (1 Tim. 6:2).

Preaching or teaching is to be from the Bible, and people are to know the truth because it is impossible to live by truth one does not know. It is to show how to apply truth to life by faith-obedience. It is to be from the whole counsel of God, declaring the whole will of God, for all truth is relevant for the Christian (Acts 20:27). It is to be honest with no compromise to soothe the whims and sinful patterns of people. All preaching and most teaching are to be under girded with exhortations to act, and people are to be warned of the consequences if they do not act on the truth. Preaching and teaching are to exalt God and not man. They are to center on Christ and His work not man and his work. They are to show how the Holy Spirit applies truth to the believer as he or she by faith responds to truth, and not how the believer’s pseudo faith manipulates God to meet human whims and desires.

Reading of the Scriptures. Scriptures are to be read from both the Old and the New Testaments so the saints can become familiar with the whole counsel of God.

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture. . .”(1 Tim. 4:13).

Public prayer. Public prayer, whether done by a pastor or by the congregation is the pattern for corporate worship.

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

Liturgy and Confessions. While this is not as nearly clear in the Bible, it seems to be something the early Christians practiced.

**“He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed in the world,
was taken up in glory.” (1 Tim. 3:16)**

“Here is a trustworthy saying:

**If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
If we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
If we are faithless,
he will remain faithful,
For he cannot disown himself.” (2 Tim. 2:11-12)**

As early as Acts 13, we see liturgical worship. The Book of Acts was written around 63 A.D., so liturgical worship in some form was possibly occurring around 50 A.D.

“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2-3).

In the Church of Antioch, the prophets and teachers were gathered. They were worshipping the Lord and fasting (Acts 13:2). In various translations of the Bible, this word “worshipping” is translated “ministering,” or “praying.” The Greek word for “worshipping” is *leitourgounton*, which comes from the word *liturgia*. “The word “liturgy” grows out of this use” (A.T. Robertson, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Acts, III, p 178). It becomes obvious that the word refers to some kind of liturgy, and was probably liturgy based on Old Testament Scripture and Christian oral tradition. While they were going through the liturgy in worship, the Holy Spirit spoke to the leaders so as to set apart Barnabas and Paul to be missionaries to the Gentiles (Acts 13:3). The Holy Spirit spoke to these leaders while doing liturgical worship.

Surely, liturgy has its place in worship. Often Christians rebel at dead liturgy because of the dead, cold, stilted churches they attended before conversion to Christ. Yet, it is not dead liturgy if based on the Word of God, but dead people trying to repeat the living Word without a changed heart. There is value for the individual Christian and the church corporately to have familiar liturgy and confessions. However, Acts 13 does not tell us what the liturgy actually was, but we can assume it was based on Scripture. Nor are we told that they did this liturgy every time they met. It appears this was by Divine design so that the early Christians and all Christians would not fall into rote repeating of liturgy with no mind of heart in it. Also, we need to remember that the early Christians had the Old Testament for their Bible and oral tradition about Christ and Christianity. Therefore, memorization and liturgy were given a high place in early church worship.

The Sacraments. The sacraments or ordinances of water baptism and the Lord’s Table are essential to corporate worship when they are practiced in the church.

Sharing and Exhortation. Not all Christians would agree that sharing and exhortation are necessary for Biblical corporate worship, but the Bible seems to connect exhortation with the public assembly of the local church.

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another. . .” (Heb. 10:24-25).

It was an Old Testament practice for the saints to praise their God among the people and in the great assembly of the saints.

“I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.”(Psa. 52:9).

“I proclaim righteousness in the great assembly; I do not seal my lips as you know, O LORD, I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation” (Psa. 40:9-10).

“I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise him” (Psa. 22:22-23).

Sharing may not fit into most Sunday morning worship services because of time and a tight order of worship. However, sharing could take place in the evening service or in small groups during the week.

Any person in the congregation should have the liberty to share without censure if there is the prompting of the Spirit to do so. Obviously every Christian won't share every week and some might share more than others but all should share at some time. However, no person should be made to feel awkward if he or she does not share. Some personalities are very private and it takes a long time to get up the nerve to share. Sharing should be something God is doing in one's life now not something that happened ten years ago. A person who is burdened with some problem should have the freedom to share without the fear of censure.

God has commanded Christians to gather together at least weekly to encourage one another. Yet, ironically the one hour or so a week Christians gather together as brothers and sisters, they are, in the modern church, prohibited from interaction during the worship service. This needs somehow to be corrected.

Singing. A very significant part of the Christian's praise to God is through his singing. Singing was definitely part of the worship in New Testament times.

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19).

This verse is in the context of the Ephesian local church so it can apply to singing in the worship service. Notice the things to be sung are psalms (Scripture with musical instruments), hymns (doctrinal songs based on sound theological concepts) and spiritual songs (probably a reference to “new songs,” mentioned frequently in the Psalms, being close to what we would call praise songs today).

The important thing to note is that they were singing to one another about God. A horizontal relationship with one another brought a vertical relationship corporately with God. This was a way of lifting their minds and emotions to the sovereign Christ.

Order. The New Testament corporate worship services had order. It was not a free spirited service without any control or continuity.

“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40).

PATTERNS FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Just as the New Testament writings were built upon the Old Testament writings, so New Testament public worship is built to a large extent on Old Testament worship patterns. There is some continuity between Israel’s worship and our worship as Christian. The church is spiritual Israel under the New Covenant. New Covenant worship by the church is different because it is spiritual worship and not related to the physical senses *per se*. However, there are many principles of Old Testament worship that carry over into church worship.

New and Old Testament Worship. First century Christian worship was born in the context of the Jewish temple and synagogue. For the first seven years of the Christian church, there were no Gentiles who were Christians. The early church had a Jewish culture, was made up of converted Jews and proselytes, and had only the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures. Yet, while Christianity had Jewish origins, from the very first, it had its distinctly Christian aspects. Many things were retained from Jewish worship, but the main emphasis and concern was for proper recognition of Jesus Christ as the God-Man, the Messiah, and a proper worship of Him. All aspects of Jewish worship that did not allow for the finished work of Christ, his resurrection, his ascension, and the exaltation of Him as the Messiah were eliminated. Jewish liturgy was purged of all elements of worship that did not give Christ His proper place, but much of the liturgy was retained, which shows us the early Christians were not opposed to liturgy as such.

New Testament Worship and the Synagogue. Early Jewish Christians did not pattern their local church worship after that of the temple but that of the synagogue because they saw all the facets of the temple as a type of Christ and the church. Elders ruled the synagogue and the form of worship was quite simple. Synagogue means “gathering” or “gathering place,” and while it was a place of prayer, it was primarily known as a place of instruction, where the Law was expounded to the people. There was a definite order of worship in the synagogue. First, there was the call to worship known as the *Shema*, which was a confession of the unity or oneness of God. This call to worship included three passages of Scripture – Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:31-47. Christians dropped the *Shema* because it did not give a proper place to Christ, but a call to worship was retained in Christian liturgy. Second, there were prayers called the *Shemoneh esreh* that was a cycle of eighteen prayers and the congregation ended each prayer with an “Amen”. Third, there was the reading of the Law and the Prophets and this was so designed that within three years the whole Old Testament was read. Fourth, there was the sermon that was usually given by the Rabbi, but anyone in the congregation might be asked by the Rabbi to preach or anyone might ask the Rabbi for the permission to preach. Interspersed in the order of worship was the chanting of hymns and the Psalms. Lastly, came the benediction pronounced by the Rabbi and the congregation responded by a hearty “Amen.” There was people participation in synagogue worship and yet the whole service was structured but very simple.

The early Christians patterned their worship after that of the synagogue. There was a call to worship, reading of Scripture, chanting of Psalms, common prayer, an exposition of the

Scripture (sermon) and a benediction. The Christians also attached the Lord’s Table to their worship in order to remember Christ. New Testament worship was not highly liturgical but very simple, centering on Christ and the written Word. Worship had to be simple and informal if it was done in homes. For 200 years Christians met in homes.

Place of Worship. In the very beginning of the Christian church, the early Christians continued to worship in the temple (Lk. 24:53; Acts 2:45). Obviously they had no hang ups about meeting in a building or even in a beautiful building such as the temple. The early Christians observed Jewish feasts and holy days as long as they did not conflict with the worship of Christ. Yet, all holy days and feasts and rituals that were inconsistent with their new life in Christ were emphatically denounced. Christians met in the temple and the synagogues until they were accused of being a Jewish cult and were forced out of the temple and synagogues into homes. Expulsion from Judaism was inevitable for the early Christians, but, in the sovereign plan of God, this was a leading out and liberation so Christians could worship God more gloriously and carry on the work of the ministry more effectively.

Form of Worship. In the New Testament, the church had no fixed form of worship. There was a liturgy but it was not rote repetition. There was an order of worship but it was more casual than what most evangelicals experience today. It was part of the Divine plan that no mention is made of a set order of worship in order that Christians might develop their own forms of worship within their own cultures. There is great freedom in the forms of worship in the New Testament and the general emphasis is upon simplicity. Form of worship differs from Christian to Christian, church to church, denomination to denomination and culture to culture.

Method of Worship. The Bible does not clearly state what went on in a New Testament worship service. We do have some hints, however. The early church practice was to say, “Amen,” in unison at the end of prayers (1 Cor. 14:16). This was obviously a carry-over from the synagogue worship. The early church also had much laity participation.

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (1 Cor. 14:26).

While the Corinthian Church was abusing the gifts of tongues and prophecy, this verse does give us a hint as to the form of worship for the Corinthian Church. We may argue as to whether this was normative for all the other New Testament churches such as Ephesus and Thessalonica, but it is reasonable to assume other churches had a similar form. Theologians may argue as to whether “revelation” and “a tongue” are active spiritual gifts in the church today and miss the point of this passage. The point to be made is that the Corinthian Church was a *participating* church. The people were deeply engaged in active, participatory worship. They were not spectators. It is true that in the Corinthian Church this form of worship got out of control and the Apostle Paul had to write First Corinthians 12-14 to correct these abuses. He did instruct them to bring order and dignity to their worship services, but he never said stop participating. The early church also had men (males) lift their hands when praying in the public assembly of the church (1 Tim. 2:8). Some have said they think the early Christians clapped their hands in joy out of appreciation for God (Psa. 47:1).

EXAMPLES OF PARTICIPATION FROM HISTORY

Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.). Martyr was a neo-Platonian philosopher who was led to Christ by an insignificant Christian old man while walking on the beach. Philosophy had left Justin empty and he turned to Christ and at once had a love for the Scriptures. Martyr did leave a description in his First Apology about early church worship.

“On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles (the gospels) or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying, Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given.”

Tertullian (160-225 A.D.). He was an immoral lawyer who came to Christ. He was a radical and for a time was involved in the Montanist cult but later came back into fellowship with the established, institutionalized church. He also gave us a hint about worship,

“In our Christian meetings we have plenty of songs, verses, sentences and proverbs. After hand-washing and bringing in the lights, each Christian is asked to stand forth and sing, as best he can, a hymn to God, either of his own composing or one from the Holy Scriptures.”

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 10 Effective Use of the Lord's Day

Sunday was the first day in the Roman calendar week. It is not Sunday that is important. It is the Lord's Day that is important to Christians, and it just so happens that the first day of the week in the Roman calendar was Sunday, and it was on this day that Christ rose from the dead. Sunday was a pagan day and it was dedicated to the worship of the sun. Christians apparently reinterpreted the heathen name "Sunday" as applying to the "the Son of Righteousness" or "Sonday," referring it to Christ's day. Early Christians in Rome adapted their Christianity to their culture.

The Biblical basis for a special day of worship is all through the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. It is the goal of this lesson to demonstrate that true believers have always had a special day of worship and it is right to do so.

SABBATH – A CREATION ORDINANCE (Genesis 2:2-3)

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

The Seventh Day. God rested from His creative activity on the seventh day. He did not rest from physical labor because He was tired, for deity cannot tire. This means God ceased from creation activity on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day (Saturday) and set it apart as a special day from the very beginning. While the word "Sabbath" is not in this verse, the principle of men ceasing physical labor one day a week can certainly be concluded from Genesis 2:1-3. It is part of God's moral law for one day in seven to be for rest from physical labor.

The Sabbath Until Moses. In the Bible, there are no direct references to the Sabbath observance from creation to Moses, and the first mention of the word "Sabbath" is in Exodus 16:23 which is in relation to the nation of Israel. However, from Romans 2:14-15, we can conclude the moral law existed before the Ten Commandments were ever written.

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (Rom. 2:14-15).

In ancient, secular Babylonian literature, we find traces of a week of seven to nine days, with the rest day or sabbath, which fell on the particular day. Perhaps this was an ordinance by these unsaved Gentiles who had perverted the true religion as given to Noah and his family. Whatever, the idea of rest is in the creation ordinance and some may have practiced rest before the Mosaic Law was enacted.

THE SABBATH AND ISRAEL

Israel Received the Sabbath as a Sign. The word “Sabbath” means “to cease” or “to stop” with special reference to physical labor. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week for the Jewish calendar and corresponds to our Saturday. The Sabbath as written law was officially instituted at Mount Sinai and was for the nation of Israel.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.’”(Exo. 31:12-17)

The Sabbath was in integral part of the Mosaic Law and it was the possession of that law which distinguished Israel from all the other people of this earth. The Sabbath was a sign, which identified Israel as God’s covenant nation.

Israel was Commanded to Keep the Sabbath Holy and to Cease from Labor.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exo. 20:8-11).

Israel was “to remember” the Sabbath and not forget it. They were to keep the Sabbath holy in that they were to separate this day unto the Lord God. Israel was to rest from all physical labor on the Sabbath, and it was apparently a day when public worship was carried out at the temple and later the synagogue. The ceasing from labor was based upon the creation ordinance of Genesis 2:1-3.

Israel Worshiped Their God on the Sabbath.

“There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD” (Lev. 23:3).

While Israel did go to the temple or the synagogue, the primary worship was at home with the family. The Sabbath was a day on which God expected families to enjoy a leisure time and to contemplate their relationship with God. The object of cessation from labor and coming together as families was to give man an opportunity to engage in such meaningful spiritual

exercises as would quicken the soul and strengthen the spiritual life. This is apparently what the Lord meant when He said the Sabbath was made for man.

“Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’” (Mk. 2:27).

Man was not made to be a slave to the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made to benefit man.

Israel was to be Blessed for Keeping the Sabbath.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight . . .” (Isa. 58:13-14).

The keeping of the Sabbath was to be a delight and honorable to the Lord, and for keeping the Sabbath God would bless individual Israelites and the nation as a whole. In Israel there was great blessings for those who kept the Sabbath and severe penalties for those who did not. There was even death for those who did not repent of their sin of breaking the Sabbath. Jews were allowed to do works of piety, necessity and mercy on the Sabbath. Piety had to do with work connected with worship in the sanctuary by the priests (Matt. 12:5). Necessity had to do with works necessary for existence beyond the regular law (Matt. 12:2-4). Mercy had to do with special acts of kindness (Matt. 12:3-4).

THE SABBATH AND CHRIST

Christ Kept the Sabbath. Jesus Christ was a Jew and lived and died under the Mosaic Law. Christ kept the Sabbath and all the rule of the Law perfectly to the letter. Jesus Christ was a Sabbath keeper. However, He had a right understanding of the Mosaic Law. By the time Christ came into the world, the Jews had hundreds of years of religious tradition behind them. Their legalistic traditions were man-made rules and not part of the Mosaic Law at all. There were at least five hundred of those legalistic traditions in relation to the Sabbath. For instance, the Old Testament says a Jew could not carry a heavy load on the Sabbath or take a trip. The Jewish legalist said if a person had too many nails in his shoe he was carrying an excessive load and was a Sabbath breaker.

Another example of the ridiculous rule was a person could only travel a certain distance in his own house on the Sabbath and even the number of steps a person could take were limited. The Lord Jesus opposed these traditions, which men added to the Law, but our Lord Himself kept the Sabbath. One of the frequent charges brought against the Lord Jesus by the Pharisees was that He was a Sabbath breaker. This charge was leveled against Him because He healed people on the Sabbath (act of mercy) and shucked corn on the Sabbath to feed His disciples (act of necessity).

Christ Fulfilled the Sabbath. Christ came not to abolish the Mosaic Law but to fulfill it.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same

will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-18).

He kept the Law perfectly and He fulfilled all the types and shadows of the ceremonial aspects of the Law. The moral law is embodied in the Ten Commandments and the moral law is binding in every age. This includes the command to keep the Sabbath holy. However, there were many ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath, which were types and shadows and were fulfilled in Christ’s death.

“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves”(Heb. 10:1).

The Jews in the Old Testament could not pick up sticks, light a fire, or recreate in any way on the Sabbath because these, being ceremonial, were designed to be a type or shadow of the completed work of Christ on the cross. It is assumed that Christ set aside the death penalty for Sabbath breaking based on the fact that in other instances, such as the woman of adultery in John 4, Christ did not recommend death for this woman’s sin. The Jew’s physical rest was completed in Christ’s spiritual rest. Christ in His death has fulfilled the type or shadow of the earthly Sabbath rest by bringing His people the spiritual rest of salvation.

“For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his” (Heb. 4:4, 9-10).

Christ is Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28 says, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” As Lord of the Sabbath, Christ could and did change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in the new age of the completed church. Christ did not change the fact of a Sabbath but He did change the day and the emphasis of the Sabbath. In His death and resurrection, Christ positionally changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, but it took the church time to make the complete transition from Judaism to full blown Christianity. We are told in Luke 22:20 that Christ established the New Covenant which obviously takes the place of the Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant).

“In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:20).

Now the civil, dietary and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law have been done away with for the believer under the New Covenant. However, the moral law as contained in the Ten Commandments still is binding on Christians. **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exo. 20:8).** However, the Ten Commandments must be filtered through the New Covenant for a new age. The fact of a Sabbath day is still blinding for Christians but this day has taken on New Covenant dimensions designed for a whole new age.

Christ Has a New Law. The New Covenant includes the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, which is a reflection of the moral law of God. However, the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law (Old Covenant) as a way of life but is under the New Covenant. Christians are now under the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses, and the Law of Christ is a higher and more liberating law.

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law” (I Cor. 9:20-21).

Christ’s Law Has a New Sabbath. All the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament except the command to keep the Sabbath. Dispensationalists assume this means there is no Sabbath for the church, but to do this one would have to say the Ten Commandments do not contain the essence of the moral law. This is contrary to the New Testament (Rom. 3:31; 7:12-13,16,22, 13-8-10).

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31).

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12).

“For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (Rom. 7:22).

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:8-10).

Those in the Reformed camp believe the absence of any mention of the Sabbath in the New Testament may imply a Sabbath was an assumed fact. It is best to say that Christians in the Gospel Age have a new Sabbath day with a new emphasis for a new age based on a new covenant. The Christian Sabbath is New Covenant controlled and not Old Covenant controlled. The Sabbath in the New Covenant is a special day; it is the first day of the week, the day Christ rose from the dead and it has a special thrust for this age. The principle of one day in seven for rest from physical labor is still binding on Christians today.

THE LORD’S DAY AND THE CHURCH

Sabbath in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Acts, we have no mention of Christians observing the Old Covenant Sabbath. We read of Paul and others who went into the synagogue on the Sabbath to preach the gospel to the Jews but they did not worship on that day. At the Jerusalem Council no mention is made that Gentiles had to keep the Old Covenant Sabbath as it was designed for the completed church to function in every nation of the world. It would have been impossible for Gentiles to observe the Sabbath, as did the Jews because religious political and civic activities were structured in Israel so the Jewish nation could keep the Old Covenant Sabbath. Gentile believers could not keep the Old Covenant Sabbath but they could keep the new Sabbath New Covenant style. The Book of Acts tells of Christians getting together on the Lord’s Day, the day Christ rose from the dead, the first day of the week.

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the

people . . .” (Acts 20:7).

Sabbath in the Epistles. In the Epistles, we are never told Christians met on the Old Covenant Sabbath (Saturday). We find Christians meeting on the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week.

“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatians churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

What we do find in the Epistles is the Apostle Paul exhorting Christians about getting all tied up in Jewish legalism when it comes to understanding the Sabbath. Christians according to Paul are not to get entangled in rituals, traditions and ceremonies of the Old Covenant, Jewish Sabbath worship.

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts”(Gal. 4:9-10).

Sabbath and the Lord’s Day. When we come to the New Testament, we find Christians worshiping on the first day of the week, Sunday according to our calendar. This is the day of worship for the Christian.

“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit . . .” (Rev. 1:10).

This was a significant day because Christ rose from the dead on that day (John 20:1). Christians, after the Day of Pentecost (which also fell on the first day of the week) that marked the beginning of the New Covenant church, met on Sunday rather than Saturday. The Lord’s Day is the New Covenant Sabbath. It is called the Lord’s Day marking a new age in the history of the church. The Lord’s Day has a new thrust, a new emphasis, and a new dimension. Christians are to remember the New Covenant Sabbath and keep it holy (separate) but now the thrust is different. We know that Jewish Christians at first continued to worship in the temple and went to the synagogue services on the Old Covenant Sabbath (Saturday), but at a very early date, the day of worship for Christians switched to Sunday from Saturday. This probably occurred when Christians were officially declared a Jewish cult and thrown out of the synagogues and the temple.

The early Jewish Christians at first observed the seventh day (Saturday) and the first day (Sunday), but the Gentile Christians kept only the Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath. The Jewish Christians, because of persecution and later the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., gave up any worship on the Old Covenant Sabbath. In the beginning this caused some trouble among Christians. Some wanted to observe the Old Covenant Sabbath and others the

Lord's Day, the New Covenant Sabbath, so Paul wrote to tell them of their Christian liberty in this area.

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:4-5).

Early church history indicates that there was no keeping of the Old Covenant Sabbath after 200 A.D.

“Those who walked in the ancient practices attain unto newness of hope no longer observing Sabbaths, but fashioning their lives after the Lord’s Day, on which our life also rose through Him, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher No longer keeping the Sabbath, but living according to the Lord’s Day, on which also our Light arose” (Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch – 110 A.D.)

“Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God having wrought a change in the darkness and matter made the world, and Jesus our Savior, on the same day, rose from the dead (Justin Martyr – 135 A.D.)

“The old Sabbath day has become nothing more than a working day (to Christians)” (Clement of Alexandria –194 A.D.).

Some have accused Christians of arbitrarily changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. They say this was done in the fourth century under Constantine when he made Christianity the religion of Rome. However, it must be noted that the Old Covenant Sabbath day has never been changed from Saturday to Sunday. Saturday is still Saturday. Actually a New Covenant Sabbath day has been substituted for the Old Covenant Sabbath day. It is not that the Sabbath day has changed (it is still Saturday) but the Christian has been changed because of his new position in Christ. The New Covenant Christian is operating under a new economy with a new Sabbath day for a new age. The day is called the Lord’s Day (Sunday).

THE LORD’S DAY AND OBLIGATION

Commanded. In the New Covenant, which includes the Ten Commandments (moral law), the Christian is commanded to keep the Christian Sabbath. The Christian is commanded to meet on the Lord’s Day for corporate worship with God’s people in the church.

“And let us consider how w may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Christians are also to cease from labor whenever possible (Exo. 20:8-11). The slaves in New Testament times had to work on the Lord’s Day and this is most likely the reason Gentile Christians met on Sunday nights.

When the Christian has performed his duty for public worship on the Lord's Day, then he is to rest. Whatever else rest may mean to some, it most certainly means we are to cease from the physical labors we do on the job the other five or six days. Once we have met our responsibility to worship, how we interpret rest is a matter of individual conscience.

Unregulated. Christians are commanded to worship and rest on the Lord's Day, but the Bible nowhere sets down any regulations regarding personal conduct on the Lord's Day. Christians should be very careful about setting up Sunday rules and regulations for fellow believers, telling them what they can do and cannot do on Sunday. After one has worshiped and is ceasing from labor, how one keeps the Lord's Day is strictly a matter between him and God. No other person has a right to impose rules and regulations upon him, or judge his godliness by the way he conducts himself on the Lord's Day. We must be so careful not to be Pharisees, forcing legalistic rules on Christians to somehow prove spirituality.

The Westminster Confession says, "The Christian Sabbath is to be kept separate and uniquely the Lord's. With a careful preparation of priorities, providing for our common affairs beforehand, a holy rest is observed all day from works, words and thoughts of employment and recreation" 21:8). The Westminster Fathers based their understanding on Isaiah 58:13-14.

"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if our call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob" (Isa. 58:13-14).

They stressed the words "from doing as you please on my holy day." It seems as though this was ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ to teach us about our spiritual rest in Christ. Many Reformers, including John Calvin, did not give a strict interpretation to "doing as you please." It is quite probable that the Westminster Fathers were victims of their culture and overstated the Sabbath question as to recreation on the Lord's Day.

It is very easy to be legalistic over what one can and cannot do on the Lord's Day. Ultimately it comes down to one's individual conscience, and we are not to judge another brother or sister no matter what our position may be.

APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS ON THE LORD'S DAY

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Rest. God wants us to take a break from our other six days of labor. We are to break the cycle of work. If we do business six days a week, we should not do it on the Lord's Day. If we are a student, we should try not to study on the Lord's Day. For health reasons, God wants us to break our routine. Christians may choose to take a nap on the Lord's Day, or take a hike, or go on a picnic with the family, spend time with family and friends, play a ball game or whatever if that is really rest.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Worship. Sunday is primarily a day given over to the corporate and private worship of Christ. After the Christian attends the services of the church, what he does the remainder of the day is between him and the Lord. However, the Christian must remember it is the Lord's Day. It belongs to Him.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Spiritual Activity. The Lord's Day may be used effectively to serve Jesus Christ by serving others in need – visiting the sick, relieving the poor, teaching the Bible, performing duties of piety, love and mercy.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day to Learn of Christ. We learn about Christ every day but the Lord's Day is a special day to learn God's Word and encounter Christ through corporate worship and the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day with the Family. The Old Covenant Sabbath was a day when the family worshiped together in the privacy of the home, so the Lord's Day should be a time when the family does things together in worship to God, service for Christ and general recreation together.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Joy. Because of the resurrection of Christ and the New Covenant, the emphasis upon the Lord's Day is one of joy. There are some Christians who see the Christian Sabbath through the Old Covenant rather than the New Covenant. The result is that Sunday becomes a spiritually somber, gloomy, solemn day where nothing can be done that smacks of joy or pleasure. Yet, the New Covenant Christian Sabbath is one of joy, delight and gladness because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The Lord's Day is literally a celebration so the Christian can shout, **“This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psa. 118:24).**

THE LORD'S DAY AND THE RIGHT DAY TO WORSHIP

Since the Bible teaches the Lord's Day is a special day of the week set aside to worship the living God, it becomes an issue as to whether it is Scriptural to have official public worship other days of the week. Many “seeker friendly” churches today are offering official corporate worship on Saturday and Monday nights. The Regulative Principle would not allow official worship on Monday. However, Saturday night worship may be allowable since the Old Testament Sabbath went from Friday at dark to Saturday at dark, although this might be stretching the point. Obviously if Christians are providentially hindered from worshipping on Sunday, then they should try to take their Sabbath some other day of the week to worship and rest. Ordinarily the day of official corporate worship for the church is the Lord's Day, and Christians should do everything possible to worship on Sunday.

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 11 Why Christians Go to Church

One of the great needs of the evangelical church is a return to New Covenant worship. In mainline Christianity, there is a desperate need for renewal in corporate worship. This does not, however, mean a return to the highly liturgical worship of the Roman Catholic Church. Many, especially young people, have turned away from the established Protestant church because they have failed to find meaningful worship of the living God. There is a need for revival of New Covenant worship, and revival always means “re-Bible,” for there can be no revival except there be obedience to Holy Scripture.

Those in the Reformed tradition need to take a fresh look at corporate worship. The Reformation was a return to the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and practice. The Reformers were radicals in their day and a big threat to the established Roman Catholic Church. They challenged the doctrines and practices of the established church and sought to reform it from within. In the area of corporate worship, the Reformers introduced such things as a laity participating in singing, laity offering up of prayers, laity hearing the preached Word, laity partaking of the sacraments, the use of instruments, etc. Revival came in doctrine and to some degree in worship. It was nothing for Reformed churches to gather in public worship for two or three hours. It was all new. It was a time of discovering the greatness of God, but it was not a complete reformation in actual practice. Doctrinally the Reformation made positive inroads, but in methodology and worship, there was much to be desired.

The true spirit of the Reformation was not one of static conformity but rather an openness to constant reformation based on the Bible. The Reformers, if they were here today, would tell us that the Reformed church should think of itself as *reformed and reforming*. They would tell us that Reformed Christians must still continue to examine the Scriptures and bring every area of worship into Biblical conformity. This would help the church produce corporate worship that is complete and yet open ended to meet the changing needs of any culture.

DEFINITION OF CORPORATE WORSHIP

Definitions are important if we are to know where we are going. Too much defining can bore us but a simple, plain definition can set the stage for all future learning about the corporate worship of the true God.

Corporate worship is the activity of a group or congregation of true believers in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in which they seek to render to the Triune God that adoration, praise, confession, intercession, thanksgiving and obedience to which He is entitled by virtue of the infinite glory of His person and His magnificent acts of redemption in Jesus Christ.

Worship, therefore, is an outward action that comes from joyful inward praise from the heart to the Redeemer who is present in the midst of His people. As the psalmist says, **“It is fitting (becoming) for the upright to praise him” (Psa. 33:1).**

Whatever corporate worship may be, it is to be entered into “in spirit and in truth.” According to Christ’s own words in John 4:23-24, He declared that worship in essence is not related to tabernacles, temples, mountains, places, buildings or whatever, but it is to always be “in spirit and in truth.” Worship is according to spirit; that is, our human spirit which is making contact with the living God through the Holy Spirit by faith. Worship is to be creative, alive and meaningful. It is possible to have an outward form of worship that is clearly orthodox (in truth) but is lifeless because there is no dependence upon the Holy Spirit to activate true worship in the human spirit by faith.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God Indwells the Church. In the Old Testament, worship primarily centered on the tabernacle and temple where the Shekinah glory dwelt. God’s presence was in a physical place. The tabernacle and temple were types or shadows of the true church where God would dwell in the midst of His people. God has chosen to manifest Himself in a special way in the New Testament. He dwells in the midst of His gathered people, the church.

God dwells in the universal church, a great and mighty spiritual temple: **“And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”(Eph. 2:22).** God dwells in each Christian who is an individual spiritual temple: **“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God” (1 Cor. 6:19)?** God also dwells in the local church which is a temple of God: **“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you” (1 Cor. 3:16)?** From these verses we may conclude that God dwells in the midst of Christians in a very special way when they are gathered together for group worship. In the New Testament, the holy place is not made of brick, mortar, boards, plaster and beams. The holy place is the church. God has committed Himself to and manifests Himself in His people, the spiritual temple, the church.

Christ’s Presence in the Church. Christ promises to be wherever Christians gather together.

“For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20).

The context of Matthew 18 is about the church and the exercising of discipline, but the principle remains that where two or three Christians are gathered Christ is in their midst in a special way. In New Testament worship, Christ promises to be in public worship in a unique way and to manifest Himself in a manner He will not do in private worship. Therefore, no Christian can be indifferent to the public worship of God. Since God has appointed worship to be in the midst of His people gathered, no Christian can shy away from public worship, for he or she will want to be where Christ is and where His people are.

An individual Christian can and must worship God in solitude, and he can have sweet fellowship with His God when alone. However, he can never know the full richness of worship unless he unites in common worship with other members of the body of Christ. In the New Testament, there is no emphasis upon numbers or the place of assembly or the order of worship or liturgy or official requirements for those who lead the worship. The one significant thing is *the mystical presence of Jesus Christ Himself*. Christ’s presence in corporate worship is a gift. Christ’s presence cannot be worked up by emotions or prevented

by any efforts of men. Christ's presence is not brought about when the pastor or worship leader invokes the presence of Christ. Nor is the presence of Christ dependent upon the faith of those who are gathered together. Christ has promised to be in the midst of His people and that is an absolute certainty. Therefore, the significance of group worship cannot be overlooked and any Christian. He who wishes to experience the richest blessings in worship must enter into a deliberate, self-identification with his fellow believers as they worship Almighty God together in the gathering of the church.

The Christian's Need for the Church. Even for the most casual reader of the Book of Acts and church history, it becomes obvious that Christians have always felt that the worship of God was the single most important aspect of life. They would do anything to assemble themselves together to worship their God, even suffering imprisonment and death to do so. This is true today in China, parts of Africa and some countries in Asia where Christians are taking great risks to gather together. Why? It is not for the experience of elaborate ritual or seeing beautiful architecture for they have none of these. Persecuted Christians will often meet on the Lord's Day for two or three hours at great risk to their personal safety. How sad that Christians in America often attend public worship infrequently and reluctantly and are upset if the service goes fifteen minutes past the stated closing hour. Obviously many so-called Christians do not believe Christ dwells in the midst of His gathered people in a special sense or they would not have indifferent attitudes about public worship.

WRONG REASONS FOR ATTENDING CHURCH

The right reasons for going to church have been pointed out, but there are many reasons people go to church, which are not the real, primary purpose.

Personal Benefit. Most people go to church because it makes them feel better. They derive personal benefit from this activity. It does something emotionally to them. While it is hard for them to articulate, it boils down to: "*It makes me feel good and I feel like a better person.*"

Socialization. Many people go to church to be with others, to meet people and to socialize with a group that they are racially and economically their equal. They like to be where other people are, where their friends are. Being with a familiar crowd doing spiritual things is reassuring.

Obligation. Others go to church because they feel they have to and if they don't God or parents will punish them. Many children, especially teenagers, go to church because their parents make them go. Rarely do children appreciate the fact that it is a parental responsibility to train their children to attend church.

Music. Others go to church because they enjoy the music and singing. They appreciate hearing people raise their voices in a harmonic expression of their faith. They like the words of the great hymns or enjoy the music of a good choir, orchestra or praise band. Music calms the spirit and drives out the cares of the world.

Preaching. Some people go to church because they like the preaching and/or the preacher. Then enjoy hearing a good message because it makes them think or lifts them above mundane things. They like the personality of the pastor because he resonates with their souls – his wit, his stories, his voice.

Solitude. Still others go to church to get away from the crowd, to experience peace and quiet. Church is a place where one can get away from noise, constant demands and unpleasant duties. As one person said, “Church is one place during the week where I can just relax.”

None of these reasons are really wrong, but they are not the real reason Christians gather. Christians gather on the Lord’s Day to honor and praise God. As the psalmist puts it, **“Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name” (Psa. 96:8)**. God is our Creator. He made us. He fashioned us. He sustains us. We live and breathe because of His creative power. He has redeemed us through Christ, given us eternal life and promised us a place in heaven. God alone is worthy of a person’s praise. There is special power when Christians gather to worship: **“Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together” (Psa. 34:3)**.

If the Trinitarian God is not the focus of a worship service, it quickly deteriorates into pure entertainment where people tap their feet to the music and like the snappy jokes of the pastor. It could also deteriorate into a boring ritual, the same thing every Sunday. Everything is predictable – when to rise, sit, kneel, bow heads and say certain words. Without God at the center of worship, it all becomes empty performance. Sometimes worship services are so man-centered, focusing on man’s needs, desires and feelings, it becomes only a “me,” “my,” and “mine” performance. Man-centered worship never satisfies the deepest longings of the heart.

Worship services ought to vary because the infinite, living God reflects many different moods. Most services should be a joyful celebration for all that we have received from the hand of a merciful and good God. Some services ought to be a solemn time of soul searching, a time to be broken before a sovereign, holy God. In these more solemn services, we worship the Lord in the beauty of His holiness. As the psalmist says, **“Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him” (Psa. 33:8)**. Some worship services should address the conscience so as to stir and excite the congregation to some particular action like world missions, saving babies from abortion, helping those in poverty, etc. Some services should be designed to bring comfort and reassurance to a congregation. If some event happens in the church like a sudden death or the threat of war, the congregation needs assuring comfort. When the gathered worshippers have had their faith shaken, they need the God of all comfort to calm their fears and rest in Him alone. The congregation needs to know whatever is happening it always brings glory to God, works for the good of God’s elect and is preparing this world for the second coming of Christ. One other variety in a worship service may feature a giving of honor to someone, the recognition of how God has used a man or woman as an instrument of grace. However, this kind of worship service must be done with great discernment so as not to glorify a man or a woman or a group above the Almighty God. Whatever the nature of the service due to the events a congregation is going through, it ought always to be centered on God.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Public Worship is a Time of Giving. Every Christian should come to the public worship service to give himself to God and to others and not so much to get something from God to meet his own needs. Corporate worship is a time each Christian should expect to meet God, and that God will speak to him so as to prepare him for more effective service. We will get out of a worship service what we put into it. Every Christian should have an excited

anticipation that God will speak to him through the corporate worship service of the church. Those who give of themselves in worship will experience edification and personal benefits. The order is God first and us second, and not us first and God second.

Public Worship Must be Prepared for During the Week. All corporate worship will be useless and futile if each individual Christian has not been preparing himself spiritually during the week. If believers are praying, reading the Bible and meditating on it all week long, then the Lord's Day worship will be the climatic event in the week.

Public Worship is a Celebration. Christians gather on the Lord's Day to worship the resurrected Christ who is in the midst of His people. Most worship should be a time of joy, excitement and dynamic. Public worship, while to be done decently and in order, is a celebration of God's people as praise, thanksgiving and adoration are given to God.

The most common description for worship in the Old Testament was the word celebration. Israel celebrated the Passover, Feast of Tabernacles, at festivals and dedications events such as the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem.

“At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem . . .” (Neh. 12:27-28).

Individuals also celebrated. King David and Israel celebrated exuberantly around the ark where Jehovah-God dwelt.

“David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets” (1 Chron. 13:8).

Public Worship is Not to be Stereotyped. To worship in the true spirit of the Bible and the Reformation is not to be bound in static conformity but rather openness to constant reformation. Corporate worship involves revitalizing older, traditional forms and opening up to fresh approaches to worship. The church needs rejuvenation of the old and discovery of the new. Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.

“There may be too much religious fervor and excitement in some religious gatherings but surely not in many, and most churches need to pray earnestly for a new moving and inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order that the hearts of the worshipers may know something of the passion, the triumphant hope, which was the common experience of the early Church . . . (Charles Erdman, *First Corinthians*).

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 12

Singing and Musical Instruments in Corporate Worship

What are the unchangeable marks of acceptable corporate worship by a local church? According to Acts 2:42-47, the marks are: (1) the Apostles' teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) the Lord's Table; (4) prayer. However there is a fifth mark of the local church that is offering up acceptable corporate worship—it is the mark of praise.

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

The New Testament church was a praising church. Praise was an essential part of worship for the early Christians.

SINGING

Praise would certainly include singing. The Lord Jesus closed the first Lord's Supper with a hymn (Matt. 26:30). Paul and Silas were singing while in jail at Philippi (Acts 16:25). As a body of believers, Christians are exhorted to sing (Col. 3:16). Singing was a necessary part of New Testament worship. Corporate worship would be defunct without music, especially singing, for music is the natural response of a redeemed heart filled up with Christ. One of the first impulses of the soul that has been born from above is to burst into a song of praise. The redeemed soul breaks out in melodies almost divine. Sometimes this praise is singing within one's own soul or it gushes out with exuberant joy.

Often people who dislike Christian hymns before conversion spend hundreds of hours singing after conversion. Why? God has put a new song in their hearts. They have been set free from the bondage of sin.

The redeemed have something to sing about. The world wails, the heathen howl, the sinner sighs, but the saved sing to their God. Christianity is a singing religion. Pagan religions have their chants and dirges, but Christianity alone of all the world's religions, philosophies and ethical systems has come down through the ages singing like a nightingale. Why? Christianity is all about a soul set free in liberty from the shackles of sin and the terrors of hell, and once the grace of God grips the soul, the Christian wants to shout and sing for joy.

Christians are to praise their God with song.

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.” (Psa. 95:1-2).

“Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints” (Psa. 149:1).

We are to come before God's presence with singing. Singing is not only nice but is

necessary. Singing is also an enjoyable experience. **“It is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, O Most High”(Psa. 92:1).**

Many of God’s people are so busy complaining and griping and carping that they have no time to praise God. The world is asking, “Where is your God?” The unsaved world will never be attracted to the true God until they see and hear Christians giving praise to their God by song. Music is a very moving force and its power is beyond the comprehension of most people. The power of music can be seen in the comments of the enemies of Martin Luther. They said, “Luther’s songs are damning more souls than his messages. The people are singing themselves into Lutheranism.”

Christians have been created to make music. God the Creator sings. **“The Lord will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17).** The angels sing. **“While the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy”(Job 38:7).** Even the mountains sing. **“Shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice, O earth; burst into song, O mountains” (Isa. 49:13)!** God has given us the ability to sing so that we might praise Him. Music, therefore, is part and parcel of our individual and corporate worship of God. Singing should include the congregation, choirs, duets, solos and trios, etc.

WHAT DO WE SING?

The New Testament clearly teaches that Christians are to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”(Col. 3:16).

Old line confessional Presbyterians who advocate exclusive Psalm-singing, think that psalms and hymns and spiritual songs refer to singing the Psalms only with different melodies and tempos. However, the majority of modern Bible scholars see these as different types of songs. A Psalm refers to a sacred song sung with poetic utterances set to melodic line from the Psalms accompanied by instruments. A hymn is a song of praise directed to the Trinitarian God with strong theological content. A spiritual song is a song that has spiritual character and arises out of the human spirit of worship. This would include praise songs, folk spirituals, gospel songs and folk rock. Spiritual songs are lighter in theological content, are often repetitive and spring out of a heart that wants to express emotion to God.

Singing in the church may be traditional, contemporary or a blended worship. There is a definite place for creativity in singing for we are told to sing a *new song* in worship. **“Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints” (Psa. 149:1).** However, discernment should be used in determining when and where certain types of music are used. It may not be wise to sing folk rock in a formal, traditional service, or Handel’s Messiah at a Christian rock concert.

All kinds of music and song can be honoring to God. There is no such thing as Christian tempo, rhythm, harmony, melody or volume that is sacred and all others are secular. All music technique comes from God. All rhythm, for instance, comes from the Almighty, not from the devil, although abuse of rhythm can be used by the devil for his own evil ends. Music itself is neither good nor evil, but it is how it is used and why it is used that makes it

evil. The ultimate distinguishing factor that makes songs Christian or secular are the lyrics, not the tempo or the rhythm. Words alone convey whether a song is sacred or secular. If so-called Christian music feeds one's lust or causes one to get up and dance wildly in a sensual manner, then it does not honor God.

Music is a force in every society. It may ennoble or it may degenerate. Music is like so many things—it can be a virtue or a vice. There is a time and place for all kinds of music in the Christian sphere as long as the words are Christian and based on Scripture or biblical principles.

Music is so much a matter of one's personal preference. So often Christians think and feel that the music that honors God is the music they like themselves. Most Christians approve music they are accustomed to hearing. Likes and dislikes in music are very subjective. Most Christians listen to music, appreciate art or poetry and absorb spiritual truths only according to their own comfortable traditions or experiences. A Christian song in Japanese may sound weird to American ears but it is sweet music to the Japanese. Loud, pulsating drum beats to accompany singing in a worship service in the villages of Uganda may seem repulsive to a cultured French Christian, but it is the heart of worship for the Ugandans.

Some Christians love country western gospel and this same music is repugnant to other Christians who are committed to classical music in worship. It is all a matter of our likes and tastes. Music is a matter of preference and this affects how and where we like to worship. Christians need to pray, asking God to give them love and tolerance of other Christians and their styles of music in worship. God in His marvelous grace has provided different churches with different worship forms. Each Christian can choose and pick what style of worship he prefers in the worship service of a church, where he feels more comfortable, but no Christian has any biblical grounds to mock Christians who do not accept their worship styles. There are no right or wrong worship styles as long as they are grounded on Scripture and fall within the limits biblical principles.

It is by Divine design that the Bible makes no mention of rhythm, tempo, volume or melody. The Bible is a *trans-cultural book* and must apply in every country and culture. By holding to any one style of music as truly Christian, the Bible then could not go across cultures and be effective. Christian music, therefore, must be allowed to develop within various cultures.

WHY DO WE SING?

To Praise God. The first reason to sing (or make any kind of music) is to praise Almighty God. The reason we sing is to please God because He is listening to our voices and He knows the attitudes of our hearts. We sing to extol God's person.

“Sing to the Lord, you saints of his; praise his holy name” (Psa. 30:4).

We exalt the person of Jesus Christ as did the twenty-four elders.

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’” (Rev. 5:9).

We sing out to God also for what He has done for us.

“I will sing of the Lord’s great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations” (Psa. 89:1).

“I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise” (Psa. 101:1).

Our God has saved us. Our God has redeemed us out of the slave market of sin. Our God has set our course towards heaven. Why do we sing? We sing to worship God who intently listens to what we have to offer Him in praise.

If we say our singing has become dull, dry and mechanical, it has only done so because we have stopped thinking about what God gets out of our singing and have thought only of what we get out of it. Our singing has become need-centered rather than God-centered. If this is the case, we have a deep spiritual problem.

To Communicate Truth. Music is a marvelous way to communicate truth to the Christian. This is why all the Psalms were put to music because music is a powerful means to help God’s people remember God’s Word. Often spiritual truth will be retained when sung when it is forgotten when preached. Putting the Bible to music helps it to stick in the mind. Music is a means God uses to communicate with the soul of a believer. Music, coupled with a biblical message, can make a great impact upon a Christian so as to lift thoughts to God in help and hope for time and eternity.

To Unite the Body of Christ. Music, especially congregational singing, has a unique way of helping Christians understand they are one in Christ. Singing unifies a group around their God. Singing causes believers to pull together and gives them a little taste of what heaven will be like. As the poet said, “If singing His praises on earth is so sweet, what will it be when around Him we meet?”

To Rally the Saints. God often uses music to stir the emotions of Christians to action. Many a saint has gained the confidence to witness, or face a crisis, or confront a brother about sin, by being moved by God through singing or hearing a rousing Christian song.

After the surrender of General Robert E. Lee to General Grant at Appomattax at the end of the Civil War, a group of Confederate Army officers were listening to some Union officers sing their battle songs and patriotic marching choruses. The singing was applauded with great enthusiasm by the Southerners. When the music ended, one of the Confederate officers said in a voice shaking with emotion, “Gentlemen, if we would have had your Yankee songs, we’d have licked you out of your boots.” (Source Unknown)

To Soothe the Soul. God uses sacred music, especially music with a strong message, to comfort and soothe the restless spirit and the troubled heart. The psalmist says songs about God relax the Christian at night when fears and worries seem to be the strongest.

“By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life”(Psa. 42:8).

“I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired” (Psa. 77:6).

Music can help us gain inward peace of soul. When facing trials, pain and discouragement, the singing of songs can calm one’s heart and bring about a changed attitude. Music can set the mood to help a Christian set his affections on things above and not on earthly cares. Singing can most certainly give the Christian a sense of God’s presence when things seem very dark. A recommended exercise for a Christian is to get out a hymnbook and all by himself sing to his God. Or he should listen to recordings and sing along with the praise music. This is a tremendous way to draw close to God and soothe one’s anxious cares.

Music can set the mood and soothe one’s emotions so as to make him receptive to receive the preached or taught Word of God. God often uses music to still or change one’s emotions so as to open him up to the truths of Scripture.

To Lift One’s Countenance. Music can be used by God to bring a person out of despondency to joy, lifting the countenance to God and before men. King David said, **“You have turned my wailing into dancing” (Psa. 30:11).** Singing Christians should be able to cope with problems a little better than non-singing Christians because God has given singing as an emotional release. Music should reflect the radiant joy of a soul set free in Christ. One of the obvious evidences of a person filled with the Spirit is that he desires to sing.

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord . . .” (Eph. 5:18-19 NASB).

To Influence the Unsaved for Christ. Music can be an effective tool in evangelism. When the unsaved see Christians singing about Christ, this causes them to sit up and take notice.

“He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord” (Psa. 40:3).

Music may be used as a means to soften the sinner’s heart to the preached Word. Many a heart tightly closed to the evangelistic message has been made pliable by the singing of a significant song.

A danger to watch for is when music is used only as a pragmatic tool in reaching the lost. The attitude often is, “If it works, it must be good,” or “If it brings people to Christ, it must be right.” It is wrong to use music to excessively play on people’s emotions so that they irrationally make some kind of decision for Christ without a proper understanding of the gospel. It is not wrong, however, to use music to get sinners to think about God so as to make them more receptive to receiving the gospel when it is intelligently preached. Music is an evangelistic gimmick when the preacher says, “John, I want you to play this song at the invitation because it will bring souls down the aisle.” When Christian music of any kind is used for behavior control or crowd manipulation, it is wrongly used and may become a tool of Satan rather than God.

To Calm Demonic Activity. God used the music and songs of David to ward off and

calm the demonic spirits of King Saul.

“Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him” (1 Sam. 16:23).

Satan hates all kinds of Christian music that is Scriptural and glorifies God. Demons flee when Christians praise God through singing. Martin Luther, who clearly understood spiritual warfare, said,

“We know that music is hateful and intolerable to devils. I really believe, nor am I ashamed to assert, that next to theology there is no art equal to music, for it is the only one, except theology, which can give a quiet and happy mind, a manifest proof that the devil, the author of racking care and perturbation, flees from the sound of music as he does from the exhortation of religion.” (Source unknown)

HOW SHOULD WE SING?

With Feeling. God has created man as an emotional creature. Man’s personality is made up of mind, will and emotion. God wants His people to experience Him and one specific way to experience God is through music, especially singing. The Bible teaches the Christian is to sing in the Spirit.

“So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind” (1 Cor. 14:15).

Singing is worship and it must come from the heart. If we take emotions out of worship, then we are not worshipping God with the whole man. In fact, our worship is lopsided. Singing allows the Christian to get involved with his God. In congregational singing, the Christian should really put himself into it. In fact, the person who is worshipping God should be somewhat exhausted after singing a hymn. Someone has said, “A song that can really be heard on the outside must first be felt on the inside.” When singing is dry and mechanical, there is a spiritual problem; we are not feeling our singing with our emotions. Montovani’s father told him, “Put feeling into your music, my boy. Music without feeling is little more than noise.”

With Gusto. All singing should be done with exuberance and excitement for it is done first to worship God and secondly to experience God.

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Psa. 98:4).

“Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation”(Psa. 95:1).

“David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets” (1 Chron. 13:8)

In all Christian music, we should exude enthusiasm and purpose. If we are not excited

over what we are singing or playing, we should examine ourselves and find out what is keeping this enthusiasm from us. Ira D. Sanky said,

“I would not try to say what is the best singing for every church. That would vary. Good, earnest, warm singing, I regard as a necessity in every church.”

With Skill. Every person should sing to the best of his or ability. God has not given all His saints great musical skills but every saint can sing and should sing to the maximum of his or her musical skills. For those who have been given a special talent in the area of singing, they should develop this skill and sing with a choir, small group or solo. All music done in the public worship should be done with skill and good taste.

“Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy” (Psa. 33:2-3).

Nothing can kill the spirit of worship like poor singing and unskilled musicians. Every worship service should begin with a hymn or spiritual song that everyone knows.

With Understanding. Music must spring out of our understanding and obedience to the Word of God. Christian music must be based on the Scripture or on Scriptural principles and concepts, or it is not Christian music. Singing is also one way Christians can teach and exhort one another to a deeper walk with Christ.

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”(Col. 3:16).

INSTRUMENTS

In the New Testament, there is no mention of any use of musical instruments in worship. This does not mean they were not used in New Testament worship. However, the Old Testament is filled with worship accompanied by instruments.

“Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power, praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord”(Psa. 150:1-6).

Any and every kind of instrument can be used in the worship of God. God’s people should praise their God with all the familiar instruments in their particular culture. Instruments are not good or evil but it is how they are used that makes them sacred or secular instruments. The two instruments that seem to be the most offensive to some Christians are the guitar and drums. These instruments are not specifically mentioned in relation to worship in the Bible. However, the Bible does mention the harp and the lyre, which are stringed instruments.

“I will sing a new song to you, O God; on the ten-stringed lyre I will make music to you” (Psa. 144:9).

The guitar is also a stringed instrument. If some Christians keep the guitar out of worship, will they also keep the piano out, which is a stringed instrument? The drum is a percussion instrument and so are cymbals, and the Psalms speak of loud clashing cymbals. Drums can be extremely effective in the worship of the living God. In some African cultures, only drums are used to accompany singing. Beauty is in the ears of the listener. Musicians using instruments and voices were part of the processional into the temple sanctuary.

“Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines. Praise God in the great congregation; praise the Lord in the assembly of Israel” (Psa. 68:24-26).

Surely these verses give warrant for church orchestras and praise bands to accompany worship.

Does not the use of instruments in worship also give warrant for the use of taped background music? We use sound systems to help in worship so why not taped music? Taped music by skilled musicians honors God more than no instrumentation or instruments that are played poorly. Whether instruments or taped music, those doing the performing are doing it for God alone and it springs from the love of God in the heart.

“As they make music they will sing, ‘All my fountains are in you’”(Psa. 87:7).

THE DANGERS IN MUSIC

There are some obvious pitfalls to sacred music, and if these are not prayed over and controlled, they can be used as a tool of the devil.

Pampers the Flesh. Music can become performance oriented. Those who perform Christian music as artists can have an added problem with the ego or flesh. Wanting to show off or liking the accolades of the crowd is not just true of musicians, however. It could be true of preachers as well because the sin nature loves the praise of men. Egotistical musicians can kill the spirit of worship.

It is normal to perform best before a large crowd rather than a small crowd, but it is not right to have this attitude if one is singing for God. Singing should always depend upon our desire to exalt the Lord and never the size of the crowd. When musicians get a swelled head, they have forgotten that their talent is from God, and just as surely as God gave them that talent, He can take it away.

Musicians as a whole can be very touchy people. By personality trait, they are melancholic, giving them sensitivity that makes them good artists. But it also makes them hard to get along with at times. Charles Spurgeon, a wise preacher, knew that the choir was often the war department of the church. In one of his sermons he said, “When Satan was kicked out of heaven he fell into the choir loft.”

Plays Down the Word. Many times a music program in a local church replaces or rivals the preached Word. All music, while necessary, must be subordinated to the expounded

Bible. It is easier to feel with emotions than to think with the mind, and that is why music often crowds out the preaching of the Scripture. Every local church must have a strong pulpit and all music must complement the preached Word.

Places Verbal Witnessing Secondary. It is very easy for a Christian to get so involved in the music program of the church that he forgets about his responsibility to be a verbal witness for Christ. Singing in a choir or playing in a praise band is not the same as giving a public witness for Christ. Music of any kind must never become a substitute for personal evangelism.

Puts Melodies Above Theology. One of the real dangers of Christian music is that songs with catchy melodies will be written and sung but the theology may be weak or in error. Many musicians do not care about theology and that is a tragedy in itself, but it is also disobedience to God's Word. We need theologians who are concerned with music and musicians who are concerned with theology.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Music is a very subjective in nature. Music in worship is a matter of preference. Therefore, Christians need to become tolerant of one another's musical tastes. Traditional or contemporary worship is neither right nor wrong. It is a matter of one's likes and dislikes. There needs to be a spirit of Christian liberty in the whole area of Christian music.

Christian music spans 2000 years of church history, so we should attempt to perform music that covers the full spectrum of history, not just a few segments of it, like the 16th and 17th centuries. The local church should strive for variety in music and not become bound by any period of history.

Christians are obligated to teach their children the great hymns of the church as well as teach them to sing new contemporary songs that also honor Christ. When Christians love the old and discover the new, then they are truly *reformed* and *reforming*.

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 13

Choirs, Dancing and Drama in Corporate Worship

Choirs, dancing and drama are not mentioned in the New Testament. The question is whether these fit the Regulative Principle that worship of the living God is to be done by what the Scriptures alone command or allow. If the New Testament does not mention a practice or form of worship but the Old Testament does, then it is acceptable for corporate worship. If neither the Old nor the New Testaments mention a worship practice, then that practice should not be allowed in corporate worship.

CHOIRS

Choirs are not mentioned in the New Testament but were clearly used in the worship of God in the temple and at others events in the Old Testament. Choirs were part of the Levitical worship and this was their primary purpose.

“At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were brought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres” (Neh. 12:17).

Choirs were made up of skilled musicians (2 Chron. 34:12; Psa. 33:3). The temple choir could exceed 200 participants (Ezra 2:65; Neh. 7:67). The choirs included men and women (1 Chron. 13:25). Singing went on while the whole assembly was worshipping.

“The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed” (2 Chron. 29:28).

The choir was part of the procession into the sanctuary.

“Your procession has come into view, O God, the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary. In front are the singers, after them the musicians; with them are the maidens playing tambourines” (Psa. 68:24-26).

Sometimes singers went out in front of the army of Israel to meet the enemy.

“After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: ‘Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever’” (2 Chron. 20:21).

The choirs had skilled leaders and directors who were appointed to their positions.

“Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skilled at it”(1 Chron. 15:22).

“For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the

singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God”(Neh. 12:46).

“These are the men David put in charge of the music in the house of the LORD after the ark came to rest there”(1 Chron. 6:31).

Singers were paid for their services in the temple.

“ . . . and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests” (Neh. 13:5).

“So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers” (Neh. 12:47).

These verses give strong evidence that it is Biblical to hire professional Christian musicians, paying choir, orchestra and band members. This would insure that musicians would play skillfully.

The use of choirs and musical instruments in worship has much to do with invoking the presence of the Lord.

“The priests then withdrew from the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had consecrated themselves, regardless of their divisions. All the Levites who were musicians – Asaph, Heman, Jeduthum and their sons and relatives – stood on the east side of the altar, dressed in fine linen and playing cymbals, harps and lyres. They were accompanied by 120 priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raised their voices in praise to the LORD and sang: ‘He is good; his love endures forever.’

Then the temple of the LORD was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the temple of God” (2 Chron. 5:11-14).

In New Testament corporate worship, God does not come down to His people in a cloud (Shekinah glory). He comes into their presence in a powerful spiritual sense and the people stand in awe of Him.

DANCE

There is much controversy among Christians as to whether dance should be allowed in corporate worship of the church. Dance is not found in the New Testament but it is spoken of in many places in the Old Testament.

“Let them praise his name with dancing, and make music to him with tambourine and harp” (Psa. 149:3).

“Praise him with tambourine and dancing” (Psa. 150:4).

Dancing most certainly fits the Regulative Principle. The real question then becomes what kind of dance is appropriate for worship?

Dance took many forms in the Old Testament. Miriam, Aaron's sister, was so excited about God's deliverance from Egypt and the destruction of Pharaoh and his army that she led a group of women in dancing to the music of tambourines (Exo. 15:20). The Israelites danced when they observed victory. **"The Israelites sang and danced when David had more victories than Saul: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his tens of thousands'" (1 Sam. 21:11).** David danced in celebration before the ark: **"David wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets"(2 Sam. 6:14-15).** David was so excited that he stripped to his underwear and danced excitedly and enthusiastically before the Lord. He was so full of joy he leaped and shouted (1 Chron. 15:29). This was undoubtedly a very free-spirited dance because it offended his wife Michal (2 Sam. 6:16)

Another incident of possible dancing is at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem. On top of the wall half of the great choir went in one direction and the other half in the other direction (Neh. 12:31,38).

When God restores Israel it says, **"I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up our tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful" (Jer. 31:4).**

These dances mentioned could be free-spirited or choreographed. From the above verses we can draw some basic conclusions: 1) dance was an accepted part of Israel's corporate worship; 2) Israel regarded dance as a natural and valid expression of gratitude to God and a festive way to celebrate a joyful event; 3) men danced with men or women with women or they danced alone. No religious dancing had anything to do with touching the opposite sex.

Dance can be evil as well as good. When Israel fell into unbelief, they made a golden calf and worshiped it, singing and dancing in a lewd way (Exo. 32:18-19). This negative incident compared with other positive incidents in the Bible indicates that dancing can either be an appropriate exuberant response to God's grace, or it can be an occasion for degenerate revelry. It all depends on the motivation of the heart.

The purpose of dance is to worship and honor God with the body (1 Cor. 6:19-20). By bodily movement, the worshiper communicates his or her emotions to God. Dance can be a very powerful form of worship if done correctly. Liturgical dance with proper choreography can truly honor God. Free style dance in corporate worship can be effective if it does not get out of control. Emotions are very powerful whether used by God or by Satan. The Bible says there is a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:4). There is also a time to dance in a worship service and a time not to dance. If liturgical dance is used, it should be done skillfully.

There are dangers to using dance in a corporate worship service. These dangers are: (1) when dance calls attention to itself and not to the message; (2) when dance is done sensually either in movements or dress; (3) when the dance does not fit the theme of the worship service; (4) when dance becomes entertainment rather than ministry; (5) when dance

is not artistically pleasing; (6) when dance is so abstract that its meaning is not understandable; or (7) when dance is performed poorly.

Dance is a worship form whereby Christians can express worship to God through bodily movement. Most Christians do not dance in the Spirit because they are embarrassed or are afraid of the abuses that come from dance. Certainly no one has to dance in worship if he or she does not want to use this form of worship. There is Christian liberty in forms of worship. However, dancing should not be rejected because it makes us feel uncomfortable. All change is uncomfortable. We may never do religious dance ourselves but we must not reject or despise those who do unless they are somehow abusing dance. We are commanded by God to correct all abuses of doctrine or practice according to the Word of God.

DRAMA

Drama is a difficult issue to deal with as it relates to corporate worship. Drama is not mentioned as a worship form in the Old or New Testaments. If drama is to be used in corporate worship, then an exception must be made to the regulative principle of worship.

Those that believe drama is a legitimate form of worship use the following arguments: 1) Drama is all through the Bible—Israel crossing the Red Sea or the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies once a year, etc.; 2) A drama that enhances the pastor's sermon is not entertainment, but just another sermon illustration acted out; 3) A preacher is using dramatic illustrations and movements all the time, so we can transfer that into acting, 4) Drama is presenting the redemptive acts of God in word and motion.

Those that reject drama as a legitimate worship form do so for the following reasons: 1) Drama is not mentioned as a worship form in the Old or New Testaments; 2) Real drama is one person acting out the part of another character (role playing), and this could be superficial or deceptive, both of which the Bible rejects; 3) Events in the Old Testament like the Red Sea or the Holy of Holies are dramatic events, but they are not drama (one person acting out the part of another), and 4) Drama, while an art form, lends itself readily to entertainment, and entertainment should be avoided when possible in the corporate worship of the church.

There is no clear evidence that drama should be used in a corporate worship service. However, it is a wonderful art form that can be used in Christian meetings other than corporate worship. Drama is neither good nor bad. It is Christian in so much as it gives a Christian message. Christian thespians should be encouraged to use the natural ability of drama to teach the gospel or some Christian truth. Yet, for some reason, God did not put drama as one of the forms to be used in corporate worship.

For those that want to honor the Regulative Principle, drama should not be used in the official worship service of the church. For those that feel drama can be used in the worship service, they should be committed to excellence, make sure there is a strong Christian message and that the message illustrates the sermon, and every effort should be made to avoid entertainment and the stroking of human egos.

While the evidence seems to favor not using drama in the worship service of the church, it is not worth splitting the church over the issue or dividing with other Christians. It becomes a matter of Christian liberty or conscience. God has provided all kinds of churches for His people to attend with various forms of worship.

TECHNOLOGY

If it is questionable that drama should be part of worship, then what about modern technology—overhead slides, video presentations, sound bites and movie clips?

God has allowed the modern world to have many technological tools to enhance learning. How can these technologies be used by the church in corporate worship to help Christians learn more about God and to love Him more with the emotions?

How does the use of technology differ from drama, for neither one is mentioned in the Old or New Testaments? There may be a difference between drama and the use of multi-media, namely sound bites and movie clips. Drama is real, live actors playing another role, which may or may not be controlled. Sound bites and movie clips show real actors, but the situation can always be controlled. Live drama would lend itself more to entertainment and the stroking of human egos than would multi-media presentations.

There is a difference between aids to worship and forms of worship, although sometimes these two concepts could overlap. The use of multi-media can be a powerful aid to worship, especially in cultures where the common man is more of a visual learner because of TV. and cinema than an auditory learner.

Modern technology is already utilized to some degree by most churches—sound systems, amplification of instruments, special devices for the hearing impaired, special lighting, etc. The issue seems to be over sound bites and movie clips, which are closely related to drama. While the Bible does not speak of multi-media (technologies beyond human comprehension in Biblical times), the Bible also does not mention hymnbooks, amplification systems, lighting, heating, air conditioning or padded pews (or pews at all). All of these modern technologies and comforts are used today to enhance worship.

The issue with multi-media is whether it enhances or distracts from worship. If overhead projection is used for reading Bible verses, historic creeds, song lyrics or giving the pastor's sermon outline and enhances worship, then it can be used in corporate worship. If sound bites and movie clips help people remember a Scriptural truth, gets their attention, makes some poignant spiritual point, effectively illustrates the sermon, then it is helpful rather than harmful. However, if sound bites and movie clips distract from worship by drawing attention to the media techniques, or is done because it is "cool," or is pure entertainment, then it should not be used.

If any type of multi-media is used in worship, then it must be done well or not at all. Nothing is more distracting and frustrating than technology that is used poorly in worship.

Whatever sound bites or movie clips that might be used should be consistent with the moral law of God. No explicit sex or cursing should be shown to make a moral point. Mental images during worship should be on the living God, and nothing should cause immoral thoughts to enter the mind. One needs to exercise common sense when using multi-media forms. Just as it would be unwise for a pastor during his sermon to describe some vivid sex scene or use curse words, it would be distasteful to do the same with any multi-media presentation.

Lastly, we live in a world of high tech, and God wants His church to redeem culture for God's glory. The church needs to redeem the multi-media world for Christ, and to do it for God's glory. The 16th century Reformers were on the cutting edge of the church in their time. They used the printing press for God's glory. They printed Bibles, books and pamphlets and changed the world forever through the printed word. They introduced preaching/teaching from the pulpit, the priesthood of the believer, musical instruments in worship, hymn singing by the laity, etc. They were the progressives in the 16th and 17th centuries. They used modern technology and were not afraid of change, as long as no Biblical truth was compromised and jeopardized. They were reformed and reforming, as we in the 21st century should be as well.

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 14 Demonstrative Forms of Worship

When we say, “The Bible is our *only* rule or standard for faith and practice” we better make sure what we are saying or we might find ourselves thinking about or actually doing things we never ever conceived of doing in corporate worship.

The Bible is our authority for all practices, and the Bible sets forth worship practices some might consider out of the norm or down right weird. Yet, we must ask ourselves, “What does the Bible itself allow in the way of worship forms?” “What does the Bible permit whether we think these are out of the norm or not?”

All of us are victims of our upbringing, prejudices and culture. We like things because we are used to them and are comfortable doing them. We may never ask ourselves honestly, “What does the Bible teach about forms of worship and what am I doing or not doing to conform to biblical standards in worship?”

We are going to focus our attention on biblical forms of corporate worship. These are forms so we are not commanded to do these nor are we obligated in any way to do them in order to worship God. However, these are biblical forms and God placed them in the Scriptures for a purpose. It should be the desire of the Christian to preserve these biblical traditions and conform to them whenever possible.

“So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings (traditions) we passed on to you, whether by word or by letter” (2 Thess. 2:15).

Our goal should always be to reform the church so as to conform to biblical standards because as Reformed people we should always be reforming in our practices and actions.

It would be impossible to reproduce the New Testament church completely because we are not in the first century, being separated by two thousand years and are in a different culture. However, there are biblical forms which supersede time and culture, and we need to reproduce as nearly as possible the New Testament model of corporate worship.

Worship is designed to move the emotions towards God. Cerebral worship alone leaves one flat because the soul needs to release emotions towards the living Christ. We were designed by God not only to know God and obey God but also to love God with all our heart. These demonstrative forms (expressive forms) are ways to release emotion towards our God in appreciation for His matchless love and His glorious grace. We are not speaking about *emotionalism*, where emotions are unbridled, drawing attention to self and causing great confusion in the church. We are speaking about love towards God, releasing the emotions to praise, adore and exalt the living God as He is manifested in Christ Jesus.

POSTURES OF WORSHIP

Prayer in corporate worship is a function that must never change. Positions in prayer are forms and can change and do change from congregation to congregation.

Standing. **“And she said to him, ‘As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord’” (I Sam. 1:26).** In both the Old and New Testaments, there is the form of standing to pray. **“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full” (Matt. 6:5).** Our Lord prayed while standing with His eyes open and looking into heaven. **“Then Jesus looked up and said, ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me’” (John 11:41).** The New Testament church took many of its forms of worship from the Jewish synagogue. In the synagogue, the men would stand facing towards Jerusalem and pray with hands lifted up. **“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (I Tim. 2:8).**

Kneeling.

“Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (Psa. 95:36). **“When he (Paul) had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed” (Acts 20:36).** **“For this reason I kneel before the Father . . .” (Eph. 3:14).**

Kneeling With Hands Towards Heaven.

“When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had been kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven” (1 Kgs. 8:54).

Face Between the Knees.

“. . . but Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees” (1 Kgs. 18:42).

Bowed Head and Beating the Chest.

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner’” (Luke 18:13).

The only position of prayer not mentioned in the Bible is sitting down with every head bowed and every eye closed. The closing of the eyes in prayer appears to be a western culture form that is not wrong but it is not biblical either.

Kneeling is a position of humility and should be practiced by the church corporately. It may not be done all at once or at the ringing of a bell, but it should be done to express submission and dependence on God, and it should be done spontaneously whenever possible.

LIFTING OF HANDS

Lifting of Hands in Prayer. Prayer with hands lifted by men (males) was a common form of worship. **“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Tim. 2:8).**

Lifting of Hands in Praise. **“I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands” (Psa. 63:4). “Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD” (Psa. 134:2).**

STANDING FOR THE READING OF GOD’S WORD

“So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon...And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform...Ezra opened the book...and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Neh. 8:2-6).

With the wall completed, the Israelites assembled to worship God primarily through the taught Word of God. Notice men and women and children were there—all who could understand. Apparently, those who could not understand were not there. There was some kind of child-care going on somewhere.

As Ezra opened the Book of the Law, reading behind some kind of a pulpit, the people stood up to listen. They lifted up their hands in worship and said loudly at times, “Amen! Amen!” Then overcome with the awesome God of the universe, they bowed down with their faces to the ground (a prone position) and worshiped Jehovah-God.

“Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, ‘Amen! Amen!’ Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground”(Neh. 8:6).

This position of flat on the floor face down may seem a little too expressive for most Christians but it is Biblical. If God the Holy Spirit mightily moved on a congregation in corporate worship some undoubtedly would find themselves prone before a holy God.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS DURING AND AFTER THE SERMON

It appears that there were questions and answers during and after the sermon in early church worship.

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on speaking (*dialogue*) until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked (*dialogue*) on and on. When he was sound to sleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead” (Acts 20:7-9).

We can assume this was a worship service. It occurred on Sunday, the Lord's Day. They broke bread, which is a reference to the Lord's Table. Paul spoke to them so we assume this was some form of preaching. We know that Paul must have preached five or six hours because Christian gatherings in the first century began right after dark. Surely this was not one man preaching for six hours. The key is found in the words "spoke" and "talked." In both cases (verses 7 and 9) the Greek word is *dialogos* from which we get the English word dialogue. There was interaction with the congregation. There must have been questions and answers and some inter-active argumentation. This was two-way communication during the sermon.

We know the early local church was patterned after the Jewish synagogue. Part of the Jewish worship service was a sermon or discourse that could be brought by the elders or by any man in the synagogue who felt he had a message from God for the people. During the sermon people could ask questions and even challenge the speaker if appropriate. It was a dialogue.

CLAPPING HANDS

"Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy" (Psa. 47:1).

The evidence for hand clapping is not as strong as other forms of worship but there is some evidence.

"You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12).

"Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Psa. 98:8-9).

Scripture allows the clapping of hands while singing a song, and it is most certainly a Jewish practice. Clapping after someone has performed a Christian song should not be to praise the performer but a spontaneous praise-clap to God for the things He taught us through the song or the hearing of a testimony. The clap is to God and not for man

DANCING

"Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp" (Psa. 149:3).

"Praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute" (Psa. 150:4).

People in the Old Testament danced. The dances were probably religious dances designed to bring glory to God. **"Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing" (Exo. 15:20).** Most likely men danced with men and women with women or they danced alone.

Dance is a worship form that must be kept from being sensuous but can express glory to God. The Bible makes no direct reference to dancing in the Spirit, but sometimes Christians have been so excited about Christ that they have danced for the pure glory of God.

Morton Smith, the first Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the PCA and presently Dean of Faculty at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, gives his reason for not including dance in corporate worship. He says,

“Thus, as we look to the Bible for what is warranted in Christian worship, we look primarily to the New Testament, not the Old. It is for this reason that such things as dance, which is mentioned in the Old but not the New should not be included in Christian worship” (*Presbyterian Journal*).

Dr. Smith needs to be reminded that the same context of Psalm 150, which mentions dancing also speaks of the use of trumpets, harps, lyres, tambourines, stringed instruments and cymbals. Are these also not acceptable for New Testament worship for they are not mentioned in the New Testament? Would he be opposed to the use of a piano that is also a stringed instrument in worship?

SHOUTING

“With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: ‘He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.’ And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away” (Ezra 3:11-13)

Sometimes the Christian is so overtaken by his joy in Christ he just has to shout for the glory of God. Shouting can be abused and may be disturbing but there is a place for it in corporate worship if done decently and in order.

HOLY KISS

“Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss” (1 Thess. 5:26).

“Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings” (Rom. 16:16).

The holy kiss was a Christian greeting of love and affection. Although we have no historical evidence from the Bible or extra-biblical material as to how the holy kiss was practiced, we may assume that men kissed men and women kissed women on the cheek. In countries today where the holy kiss is practiced, no one of the opposite sex is kissed. Apparently, this is to avoid any appearance of evil.

Most Christians in our American culture have dropped the holy kiss, which is a form of worship. It is sad when we eliminate biblical traditions although, thankfully, it is still practiced by many European, African and Asian Christians.

AMEN

“Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the ‘Amen’ at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying” (1 Cor. 14:16-17)?

The saying of “Amen” in unison at the end of a prayer was obviously a carry-over from the synagogue worship. This tradition became so strong among the New Testament churches that the synagogue abandoned the use of the “Amen” so as not to be identified with Christians. Saint Jerome, in the fourth century, said that in his day the “Amen” sounded like a clap of thunder at the end of the prayer.

FOOT WASHING

“If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet for I give you an example that you also should do as I did to you” (John 13:14-15).

Foot washing is not a sacrament. The only two sacraments (ordinances) of the church are the Lord’s Table and water baptism. The church is not bound by Scripture to do foot washing, but the Lord Jesus set forth this act as an example of humility. Foot washing is a valid form of worship for the church.

PRAYER FOR PHYSICAL HEALING

“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous

If we never ask, we will never get healing from God.

“You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2).

Why don’t we practice these demonstrative forms more often? We are self-conscious and embarrassed about what others might think of us. We don’t want to be radicals or thought of as weird. While no one has to avail themselves of these expressive forms to be spiritual, they are the biblical means God has set forth for us to release our emotions to God. We are not just machines; we have emotions that want to tell God in words and actions that we love Him dearly. Demonstrative worship does allow us to get out of our protective shell and worship God with more enthusiasm. Demonstrative worship is not designed to make us feel better but to release our emotions to God which may or may not make us feel better. In fact, we may end up weeping with conviction or shouting for joy. Whichever, God is pleased when our love for Him is spoken and demonstrated, being done for God and not for man.

No one can force another person to use these demonstrative forms of worship. It is an individual matter. If you would like to use some or all of them, you may want to first practice individually alone and then with a small group. Perhaps as time passes you will feel comfortable using these in corporate worship.

Whatever forms you choose to use, do them for the glorification of God and not to draw attention to yourself. Only God ultimately knows the motivation of the heart.

Because these are forms of worship, they do not have to be used at all in corporate worship today in the 21st church although God put them in the Scripture for a definite reason. Furthermore, a church might sanction all these forms but they do not all have to be used in the morning worship service. Some may be used in a more informal evening or mid-week service. Others may be used only at special worship services.

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 15 A Communing Body

Why do Christians put such an emphasis upon the Lord's Table? Why is eating a little piece of bread and drinking wine (in many cases grape juice) so important to Christians? Why do most Christians observe this Table with solemnity and reverence? Why can't Christians agree on the true meaning of the Lord's Table? What is all the fuss about?

The Lord's Table is important for all Christians but all Christians do not view the Lord's Table the same way. However, some Christians make too big a deal out of the Lord's Table and others don't see it as enough of a big deal. The only way Christians will ever get together on the essence of the Lord's Table is for all Christians to submit themselves to the Bible as their only authority and be willing to deal honestly with their prejudices and traditions. Coming over our backgrounds, prejudices and hang ups in spiritual matters is tough, and nowhere is this more evident than when partaking of the Lord's Table.

The Lord Jesus left us with only two physical things by which to worship Him—bread and wine. All physical buildings (tabernacles and temples) are gone. There are to be no icons, statues, stained glass windows, fancy architecture or anything else physical or material as necessary aids to worship God, who is a Spirit. Buildings are not wrong but they are not to be used as necessary aids to worship. But Christ did leave us the bread and the wine, so this act of worship must be important in God's mind and should be important to every true Christian.

THE LORD'S TABLE SHADOWED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Passover (Exo. 12:2-14). The Passover was a significant event for the children of Israel. In order for Israel to be physically delivered from bondage in Egypt, every father was commanded to make a sacrifice and put the blood on the door of every Jewish home. When the death angel came to take the first born of every family, the Jews would be protected by the blood and would pass out of Egypt to move towards the Promised Land. The Jews that night observed a special Passover supper, and the Jews have been observing this supper for thousands of years. The Passover is a big deal for the Jews and it is directly related to the Old, Mosaic Covenant.

Passover Lamb—Jesus. **“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed”**(1 Cor. 5:7). Christ is said to be the ultimate Passover lamb that was sacrificed by God for the sins of all that would ever believe on Christ as Savior and Lord. The Passover foreshadowed the final redemption provided by Jesus Christ, the Messiah. There is a direct link between Jesus Christ and the Passover. He is the fulfillment of the Passover in His death that delivers men out of spiritual bondage to sin.

THE LORD'S TABLE ESTABLISHED BY CHRIST

“They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.’ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:13-20).

The Passover Supper. Jesus established the Lord’s Table while He and his disciples were partaking of the Passover Supper. The Jews had a set ritual they went through at the Passover Supper. They sang hymns, quoted Old Testament Scripture and heartily entered into fellowship. During the supper, there were times of seriousness and times of joyfulness. In the ritual, there was even time for dialogue. Somewhere at two different points of the ritual, Jesus introduced the bread and the wine.

Jesus made it very clear He would not partake of the bread and the wine again with His disciples “until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” and “until the kingdom of God comes.” This is an obvious reference to the second coming of Christ.

The bread represented (symbolic of) the actual body of Christ that was given for God’s people as a sacrifice for sin. By the words, “This is my body” our Lord did not mean it was His actual body because if that were so then there were two bodies of Christ present - His actual body and the body He was holding in His hand. This is speaking symbolically. Furthermore, in the same context, Jesus said, “This cup is the New Covenant in by blood.” Obviously neither the cup nor the wine was the actual New Covenant but they were symbolic of or representative of the New Covenant.

Placing into Effect the New Covenant. The cup (wine) represented or was symbolic of the New Covenant that was well known by the Jews.

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (Jer. 31:31-33).

This New Covenant for Israel would be made when Messiah would come. Imagine what these words meant to these twelve Jewish men. Messiah had come! Israel has the New Covenant established! Israel’s future is secured! What the disciples did not comprehend is that the Church, the spiritual Israel of God, would partake of the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant until the blood of the New Covenant would be applied to Israel as a nation at or around the second coming of Christ.

THE LORD’S TABLE AND THE CHURCH

Prime Mention **“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer”(Acts 2:42).** The first mention of the Lord’s Table being observed by the church is in Acts 2:42. They **“devoted themselves to the breaking of bread.”** The term “breaking of bread” is often used in the New Testament and refers to the Lord’s Table. The early church always observed the Lord’s Table with a supper. This supper was called the *Agape* (love feast). This was a supper with lots of food and drink for all, probably provided by the people. The actual partaking of the Lord’s Table was done during the Agape Feast and called the Eucharist. Historians are not clear on the procedure for the Eucharist during the supper. It probably varied from church to church or region to region. The important thing to note is the Lord’s Table was taken during a supper called the Agape Feast. There were obviously times of joy, seriousness and inter-active fellowship.

Christians soon corrupted the Agape Feast because men are sinful. One of the problems was that people were not waiting for all to arrive before eating, and others were drinking too much wine and getting drunk (1 Cor. 11-17, 20-22). This custom brought much debauchery and soon passed out of existence. It is very sad that the church dropped the tradition because the Lord’s Table was taken in an atmosphere of joy, excitement, fellowship and seriousness.

Proper Observance.

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup on the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:23-32).

Those who partake of the bread and wine “in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.” In context, partaking in an unworthy manner was being selfish by not waiting for all to eat and getting drunk (1 Cor. 11:17-22). However, “unworthy manner” can be applied to any known sin of which we may be guilty. When we do acts of sin, we sin against the body and blood of Christ that speaks of His death. Christ died to deliver us from sin and when we do acts of sin we are saying the death of Christ is not sufficient to deliver us from sin.

We are told that a Christian “ought to examine” himself before he partakes of the Lord’s Table. He is not examining himself to see if he is in essence worthy to partake, for no

one is worthy in that sense. He is to examine to see if there by any known acts of sin that have not been confessed. We all have sin but this is speaking of known acts of sin.

When the Christian fails to confess his known acts of sin, he is eating and drinking judgment on himself. The judgment in context is not the judgment of hell, for no Christian ever has to fear hell because Christ died for every sin that would put a Christian in hell. This is referring to the judgment of discipline from the Lord. All Christians need to fear the disciplinary hand of God. The Lord brings loving discipline on His children because He desires that they should be holy and experience practical righteousness in their lives.

When a Christian fails to confess known acts of sin before partaking of the Lord's Table, he opens himself up to possible physical weakness, sickness and even death. It says, "That is why many among you are weak, sick and a number of you have fallen asleep" (physical death). It is a very serious matter to partake of the Lord's Table with known, unconfessed sins. How much weakness, sickness and death in a congregation might be due to partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner? None of us will ever know until we get to glory.

The Christian is to judge himself in that he examines his life for any known sin and deals with it by confession and showing a desire to turn from it, for it says, "But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment." By confession, a Christian may avoid the discipline of God on his life.

When the Lord is judging a Christian, he is being disciplined in a loving way so that he will not be condemned with the world. The world is condemned because it has no Savior and Lord. The Lord disciplines the Christian so he will not be like the world and be different from it.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST

Most Christians would not disagree too much over what has been said up to this point about the Lord's Table. However, Christians have deep disagreements over to what extent Jesus Christ is present in the elements or at all.

“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”(1 Cor. 10:16).

Roman Catholics (transubstantiation). The bread and the wine that retain their outward appearance actually become the body and blood of Christ through a miracle. For a Roman Catholic, the Lord's Table is a big event because without it, he loses his salvation. There are many mystical and even magical aspects of communion for a Roman Catholic.

Lutherans (consubstantiation). Martin Luther, who was never able to make a clean break from his Roman Catholic background, believed no miracle took place but it was just as though it did. Therefore, Christ's body and blood are physically present in, under and around the bread and the wine. While modern day Lutherans may not hold the exact position of Luther on the Lord's Table, there are still many mystical aspects in the Table for the Lutherans.

Baptists (memorial). This view was set forth in the Reformation by Zwingli. The bread and the wine are merely symbols or memorials of Christ's death for the Christian. There is absolutely no mystical aspect to the Lord's Table for a Baptist or any person or group holding to the Zwinglian view.

Presbyterians (spiritual presence). John Calvin who taught that Christ is really present at the Lord's Table set forth this view. The bread and the wine are symbols but the presence of Christ is spiritual not physical. A Presbyterian or anyone in the Reformed tradition holds that Christ is mystically present at the Table, not in the bread and wine but in a spiritual sense.

The real issue is how one interprets 1 Corinthians 10:16: **“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation (fellowship, communion) in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”** Obviously, Christians somehow participate in the body and blood of Christ when partaking of the bread and wine. This is participation, a communion, and a fellowship by faith. This is certainly more than a mere memorial and less than transubstantiation and consubstantiation. There seems to be a real presence of Christ in a spiritual sense but that presence is related to the Christian's faith. Calvin's view seems to be the closest to Scripture but he probably needed to stress the believer's faith more.

What is the point? Christ is spiritually present at the Table and more real to the believer's faith when partaking of the Lord's Table than at any other time because it is during this time that by faith the Christian is eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ in a spiritual sense.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his bloods, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him’” (John 6:53-56).

THE LORD'S TABLE AND THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST

When Jesus established the Lord's Table, He made it clear He would not participate in the Table again with His people **“until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:17)**. This is an obvious reference to the Second Advent.

The Apostle Paul taught that Christians are to partake of the Lord's Table as a witness of Christ's death until He comes again: **“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26)**.

THE LORD'S TABLE AND CHILDREN

Most Reformed people and evangelicals believe that children are not allowed to take the Lord's Table until they can make a credible profession of faith in Christ before the elders of the church and understand the spiritual meaning of the Table. There are Roman Catholics, Lutherans and some Reformed people who believe in paedocommunion (children

participating in communion as infants because of the covenant). The basic issue is over 1 Corinthians 11:28,31 that indicates a person must be able “to examine himself” and “judge himself” before partaking of the Table.

Children of Christian parents (covenant children) should be allowed to partake of the Table when they make a credible profession of faith in Christ and are assumed to be true believers in the covenant. If the child desires to partake, the parents should question the child as to his/her faith in Christ. The parents of the child should make an initial decision as to when the child is ready to partake. When parents sense their child is a believer and understands the spiritual realities of the Lord’s Table, then the child should give testimony before the elders of the church. The elders will make the final decision as to whether the child can partake of the Table.

Parents who allow children to partake ought to remember to partake in an unworthy manner brings discipline for the child as well as an adult. Furthermore, if a child is allowed to partake but later shows no evidence of salvation, parents, who observe the child all day every day, should alert the Elders, and the Elders should re-examine the child. If necessary, the Elders should remove the privilege of the Table from the child.

THE LORD’S TABLE AND THE FREQUENCY OF PARTAKING

The Bible does not say specifically how often the Lord’s Table should be observed. It says, “Do this, whenever you drink it” (1 Cor. 11:25). At first the early church observed the Table every day (Acts 2:46) and later as the church grew, it was observed every week (Acts 20:7). However, there is no command to observe the Lord’s Table weekly, although that seemed to be the form the early church used. The Word and the sacrament of the Lord’s Table seemed to be the center of New Testament corporate worship.

THE LORD’S TABLE AND PROPER ADMINISTRATORS

The Bible does not say anything about who can and cannot administer the Lord’s Table. Most ecclesiastical traditions insist that an ordained minister administer the Table to protect it from abuse and becoming a common meal. We do know the Table was observed in small groups (Acts 2:46) and in large groups (1 Cor. 11).

THE LORD’S TABLE AND RIGHT ATTITUDES

Prepare for the Lord’s Table. Whenever you know you are to partake of the Lord’s Table, take time to pray, confess your sins, and right your life before God so that you may partake in a worthy manner.

Exercise Faith. You must believe Christ will meet you in a very special way while partaking of the Lord’s Table. You must trust Christ to make His mystical, spiritual presence felt in your life.

Fear God. You must have a high concept of God’s holiness and hatred of sin and understand that He desires for you to walk a holy life. God will discipline all that partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. It is better for the rebellious Christian to abstain from the Lord’s Table rather than to partake in an unworthy manner and receive God’s discipline.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Observing of the Lord's Table does not always have to be done in a solemn and somber way. The Passover and the Agape Feast were both suppers where there was joy and laughter. Yet, the Table is always to be taken with respect for the sovereign Christ.

Satan hates for Christians to partake of the Lord's Table because Christ is spiritually present and is very real to the believer's faith. Therefore, there is much spiritual warfare going on around the Table. This is why sometimes when partaking of the Table terrible, horrible, filthy thoughts may flash through the mind. There may be other kinds of distracting thoughts. Satan and his demons do not want Christians to participate in the body and blood of Christ by faith.

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 16 A Learning and Listening Body

Every church is a learning and listening body. Learning and listening are definitely part of a worship service. At least 30 minutes of every service is given over to preaching. Yet preaching is not effective unless the person in the pew has some listening skills to comprehend what the preacher is saying.

LEARNING

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

This passage was written to Timothy who was the pastor-teacher or teaching-elder at the Church of Ephesus. The Bible does teach there are some men who are specifically called by God to be ministers of the gospel and for this call there is to be remuneration so a man can give himself to the truth without worldly concerns. The teaching-elder’s task is primarily to study the Word of God, pray and preach the Word of God. **“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching” (1 Tim. 4:13).** He is not primarily an administrator or an evangelist or a counselor but a declarer of God’s Word, the Bible. The ministries of administration, visitation, Christian education, evangelism, care for the sick and widows and so forth are to be done by the people. The one ministry the average Christian cannot do as well as can a trained pastor is teach and preach the Word of God. The church through its history has gotten into much trouble because of an untrained clergy. This, of course, does not mean that a pastor is never to do administration, evangelism or Christian education. He does do these things but it is not his primary task. Also part of being a pastor is that he visits and shepherds his flock.

Timothy struggled with fear of men as a pastor and had a tendency to compromise the gospel in the face of persecution. At times, it appeared he was ashamed of the true gospel. **“So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:8).**

According to 2 Timothy 4:1-4, the Word of God must be the core and very heart of any churches’ ministry. Any other way of thinking replaces the voice of God with the wisdom of men. Philosophy, politics, humor, psychology, homespun advice and human opinion can never accomplish what the Word of God does. These things can be interesting, informative, entertaining and sometimes helpful, but they are not spiritually transforming. Only the Word of God driven home to the heart by the Holy Spirit and applied by the Christian transforms a life.

Whoever Ministers Ultimately Gives an Account to God (4:1). **“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge.”** The Apostle Paul clearly understood that Timothy and all ministers of the gospel do not ultimately answer to man but to God for what they preach. Ministers need to concern themselves about what God thinks of their ministries not what people think.

What Ministers are to Do - Preach the Bible (4:2a). **“Preach the Word.”** This is a command and preaching the Word must be the central point of every true ministry. The preacher’s task is to declare the Bible in Christ’s authority and the Spirit’s power.

Timothy was to preach the Word in its whole counsel. **“For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will (counsel) of God” (Acts 20:27).** The Bible alone is inspired and it alone coupled with the Holy Spirit’s work can change lives. **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16).** Ministers are to study the Bible and handle it accurately. **“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).** The minister must guard the Word, study the Word and proclaim the Word, whether men want to hear it or not. Moral lectures and motivational pep talks are no substitute for God’s Word.

How Ministers are to Preach - Consistently with authority (2b). **“Be prepared in season and out of season, correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction.”** The minister is to preach the Word regardless of the climate of opinion around him. He is to be faithful to preach the Word even when such preaching is not popular or tolerated. Let’s face it. Right now in Christian circles the preaching of the Word (the whole counsel) is out of season. Today exposition of the Bible and theology are seen as old fashioned and irrelevant. The cry today is for “need-centered” preaching, which demands that the Bible be preached topically rather than expositionally.

What is needed today is not less preachers preaching expositionally but more preachers doing it uncompromisingly and with passion, as when Jeremiah said the Word of God was a fire in his bones. Only the Bible will set people free.

Martin Lloyd Jones, the late famous British preacher who preached expositionally at the Westminster Chapel in London said this, “In many ways it is the departure of the Church from preaching that is responsible in a large measure for the state of modern society. The Church, having abandoned her real task, has left humanity more or less to its own devices” (*Preaching and Preachers*).

The Bible proclaimed faithfully will many times be an offense to the unsaved man and a drag to carnal minded Christians. The preaching of Christ will be offensive to unspiritual people. **“But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24).** It is pure folly to ignore, water down or compromise the gospel to please the base appetites of carnal men. Those who proclaim the Bible faithfully will suffer for Christ and with Christ and will never be a friend of the unsaved world.

Preachers are told specifically to **correct, rebuke** and **encourage**. A biblical preaching ministry must have a balance between the positive and negative. Man's deepest needs are spiritual - he needs to confess sin and overcome guilt. So any preaching that fails to confront and correct through the Word of God does not meet people's real needs but is only making the situation worse by pandering the ego-centricity of the flesh.

To negatively correct and positively encourage is to be done with great patience. It takes time for people to face their sins and repent of them. The way to get them to come to grips with their sin is to instruct them carefully, not giving them superficial pop-psychology answers that make them feel good for the moment but have no lasting, life-changing power.

Why Ministers are to Preach - There will be rebellion to truth (4:3-4). **“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”**

The “men” in this context were the people to whom Timothy preached - Christian men and woman. Surely it would include the unsaved but the direct reference is to the saved. They will not put up with sound doctrine. This is exactly what many Christian leaders are telling us today - people don't want to have truth. They want to be entertained and feel good about themselves. People want a watered down theology that pampers their own fleshy desires allowing them to have heaven without a changed life. The Apostle Paul, however, never even hints that preachers should soften the message so that people will be comfortable with it. In fact, he says just the opposite. Preachers are to preach the whole counsel of God and let the chips fall where they will.

Christians will gather around them preachers who will tell them what they want to hear. They tickle their ears and feed their lusts. They will flock to preachers who make them feel good about themselves, and they will avoid preachers who tell them the truth about themselves from the Word of God.

These Christians will turn their ears away from the truth of God's Word, which makes demands on the life to conform to Christ and the teaching of Scripture. When they turn from the truth, they become victims of deception. They make up myths about God, Christ and the Bible. They leave out of the Bible what it clearly teaches and they read into the Bible what they want it to say. When Christians leave the authority of God's Word, they turn to human wisdom, being left to their own ideas, devices and whims. Saved or unsaved, who do not have the Bible as their absolute authority for life, are cast on a sea of subjectivity and become the pawns of Satan. They reject the Bible and men who preach it with authority because it does not tickle their ears but burns them with the truth.

It is very important to understand the spirit of the age, especially in America. Absolutes and truth are no longer considered valuable. What is important is how man feels, not what is truth. This relativistic spirit has invaded the church so that today Christians want to feel good. They want their ears tickled and reject all confrontational preaching. They don't want to be confronted but want to be entertained. They want preaching that produces pleasant sensations. They just want to feel good even at the expense of ignoring or denying the inspired and authoritative Word of God.

“There have always been those in the pulpit who gathered crowds because they are gifted orators, interesting storytellers, entertaining speakers, dynamic personalities, shrewd crowd-manipulators, rousing speech-makers, popular politicians, or erudite scholars. Such preaching may be popular, but it is not necessarily powerful. No one can preach with supernatural power who does not preach the Word. And no faithful preacher will water down or neglect the whole counsel of God. Proclaiming the Word - all of it - is the pastor’s calling” (John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel*).

God has one answer and only one answer to a relativistic society and an evangelical church that has sold out to “touchy-feely” preaching. Preach the Word! Preach the whole counsel of God! Preach doctrinally! Preach theologically! Preach expositionally! Preach patiently! Preach uncompromisingly! Preach lovingly!

LISTENING

Often when Christ taught a parable, He would end it with the words, “**Let him who has ears to hear, hear**” (Matt. 13:4)! What our Lord was saying is it is important how we listen to the Word of God when it is taught. Obviously if we don’t hear properly, we cannot apply properly. What the preacher says and what the people hear is often not the same thing, and what the people hear and apply is not the same. There is usually a tremendous gap between what the preacher says and what the people actually hear and a wider gap between what they hear and apply. Therefore, it is imperative that Christians know how to listen to a sermon.

Think of the thousands of sermons you have heard. You can probably remember very few, and compared with how many sermons you have heard, how has your life been changed? Is it the preacher’s fault or your fault that your life has not been changed?

How Not To Listen To A Sermon. There are certain attitudes we must avoid if we are going to learn to be good listeners. These attitudes are:

“I have heard this before; I already know this truth.”

“I dare you, preacher, teach me something new.”

“I don’t like the way the preacher is dressed.”

“His tonal inflection is irritating to me.”

“He uses notes. He wanders on the stage too much.”

“If I was preaching this sermon, I would do it this way.”

“Will this sermon ever end? I need to get out of church early so I can get to the cafeteria line.”

“This sermon doesn’t meet my needs nor does it make me feel good so it can’t be of God.”

“This sermon does not apply to me but I’m sure it applies to Joe Smith.”

“I wonder if the preacher applies this stuff to himself.”

Before the Sermon (Preparation). Read every day from the book of the Bible the preacher is expounding. Just keep reading the book over and over whether you understand everything or not. You may want to read two or three translations. Be sure and pray that the Holy Spirit will give you understanding and a desire to apply truth. Pray daily for the pastor that he will communicate the truth accurately and clearly.

On Saturday night or Sunday morning, read the passage the preacher will be expounding on that Sunday. If you read 15 to 20 verses ahead of the last message, you will usually have the right text for the sermon.

Go to bed at a decent hour on Saturday night so the mind will be alert for the taught Word.

When you come into the auditorium, read the outline in the bulletin and look up any verses. Start then thinking about questions you might have and write them down.

Pray and ask God to give you understanding of the passage and how it applies to your life. Your goal is not to be a hearer only but a doer of God’s Word. **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves” (James 1:22).**

Pray for the pastor that he will make the message clear, interesting, challenging and applicable.

During the Sermon (Listening). You must believe that God is going to speak to you through the preached Word; therefore, there must be an attitude of anticipation.

Take notes during the sermon so that you can remember what was said the day after the sermon. Jot down illustrations – a few words so you can remember the gist of what was said.

Jot down applications. Have your Bible open and circle key verses or draw lines between connections in thought.

When your mind begins to wander (as it will), bring it back into focus on the sermon. Mentally confess evil thoughts that may flash through your mind while listening to a sermon. Demons do not want you to understand or apply the sermon.

Jot down any questions that the sermon may have caused to arise in your mind.

After the Sermon (Applying). When you are home around the Sunday dinner table, instead of having roast preacher for lunch, take a few minutes to discuss with the family what was said in the sermon. Use your notes taken during the sermon. Ask how this truth can be applied to life. It is best if the father, who is the spiritual priest in a covenant family, leads this discussion.

If there are questions left unanswered, call the pastor or an elder for clarification. Nothing is more important than understanding spiritual truth.

Put the outline and your notes in your Bible and look at them at least once during the week.

Be a good hearer and student and check what your pastor says in the sermon with what the Bible teaches. Pastors may not give all the truth or the right emphasis. It is possible he even taught error and the only way to find out is to check it with the objective truth of the infallible Bible.

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11).

HEEDING THE WARNINGS IN SCRIPTURE ABOUT LISTENING

Mix the Truth with Faith. **“For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did, but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (Heb. 4:2).** If the Word preached is not combined or mixed with faith by the hearer, the preached Word is of no value to the individual. The preacher cannot believe for the hearer. The hearer must believe for himself or herself before a sovereign God. Preachers can challenge and motivate, but they cannot believe for the hearer. Faith never happens unless it is somehow connected with truth as it is found in the Word of God.

Don't Harden the Heart to Truth. **“So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest’” (Heb. 3:7-11).** When the truth was preached to Israel in the wilderness, they spurned it because they hardened their hearts. When Christians refuse to believe and obey, they harden their hearts to the truth and are in line for God's loving discipline.

Be Doer's of the Truth. **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).** Those who hear the Word of God and earnestly and honestly apply it will receive blessing from God. If you want God's blessing, then obey the truth that you hear and know.

Don't Neglect The Truth. **“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (Heb. 2:1).** When we neglect the truth we hear, refusing to apply it, then we will drift from the truth. We will either get preachers to tell us what we want to hear or we will throw over the faith altogether.

When the Lord Jesus gave the story of the “Wise and Foolish Builders,” he said,

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock,” and “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand” (Matt. 7:24, 26).

From this teaching we see again it is not hearing a message that is important or even feeling good or convicted by a message that counts, but whether we hear, believe and practice what we have heard.

The preacher can tell the listener the truth. He can challenge and motivate the listener to apply truth, but the preacher cannot apply truth for the listener. Do you want to be a wise man or woman? The way to do it is to hear Christ’s words and practice them by faith. **“Let him who has ears to hear, hear” (Matt. 13:4).**

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 17 A Relational Body

Are you dry spiritually? Do you feel you are like a machine going through the motions of Christianity with little or no reality? Are you at a point in your experience where you are deeply struggling with the real meaning of Christianity? This is not an abnormal experience for many Christians that sit under a teaching ministry. Sometimes you may feel you cannot sit under another biblical sermon and get one more doctrinal teaching in your already crowded mind. Perhaps you sense your Christianity has become heady and complicated. If this is your condition, you are experiencing something that in the end will make you a stronger Christian. You are experiencing the rough road of changing your Christianity from an emotional level to a biblical level. You are going through spiritual withdrawal whereby you are beginning to use your mind to develop a total world-life viewpoint from Scripture. This is a painful experience but it is absolutely essential if you are going to become a mature Christian who is able to teach, exhort and lead other Christians.

The early Christians continued in the Apostle's doctrine and so must we today. However, doctrine is not all there is to biblical corporate worship. The Bible makes it clear that the early Christians also **“devoted themselves to fellowship” (Acts 2:42)**. These early Christians experienced a dynamic and power from group worship that changed their lives individually and made the unsaved world sit up and take notice. The pagan world of the first century could easily shrug off the preaching of the gospel as foolishness, but they found it difficult to explain the Christian practice of fellowship. The pagans would say, “Behold, how these Christians love one another!” The non-Christian world of that day had to admit that Christians were sharing a common life even though they did not believe in Christ themselves.

A life devoted to fellowship will balance the absolute necessity of learning the Apostle's doctrine. Sharing a common life in Christ among the brethren will move the doctrine from the head to the heart. It seems as though this New Testament fellowship is critically lacking in most of our institutional churches today. The larger a church grows, the more it faces a “fellowship crisis,” and to fill the fellowship vacuum a church resorts to keeping people happy by Christian entertainment. That is, people come to church to be entertained by the choir, the preacher and the programs. The institutional church is highly organized at a time when the people in the church are hungering for reality, caring less about organization and more about community. There is a need today in the church for winsome intimacy among the people where masks are dropped, honesty prevails and there is a sense of communication and community beyond the human. There is a desperate need in the church for the awareness of supernatural fellowship in the person of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

“Our churches are filled with people who outwardly look contented and at peace but inwardly are crying out for someone to love them . . . Just as they are confused, frustrated, often frightened, guilty, and often unable to communicate even within their own families. But the other people in the church look so happy and contented that one seldom has the courage to admit his own deep needs before such a self-sufficient group as the average church meeting appears to be” (Keith Miller, *A Taste of New Wine*).

What is missing in our evangelical churches today is the warm fellowship of Christians with Christians, which the Bible calls *koinonia*, “fellowship.” This *koinonia* or “fellowship” is basic to our corporate worship and it is a vital part of true Christianity. In fact, a local church has not offered up acceptable worship to God until the members of that local body know each other closely and intimately enough to have real Christian fellowship with one another. Christian fellowship has too often been equated with potluck suppers, baby showers, Sunday school class socials and church picnics. Conversation at Christian events is mostly about jobs, families, sports, weather, hobbies, romance and mutual acquaintances, but there is very little spontaneous talk about our common faith in Christ and its implications for our lives. It seems as though it is with great difficulty that Christians bare the condition of any of their inmost problems. In fact, it is not only difficult to share agonies, frustrations and failures of one’s life, but also the triumphs and victories lest one be thought too super-pious.

Some may cry out, “Any church when it gets too large cannot have real fellowship around Christ!” I disagree, for the church at Jerusalem had three thousand people respond to Christ in one day and several days later five thousand and they were able to have a spirit of oneness around Christ in spite of the massive numbers of people. If the early Christians could experience genuine fellowship in their church in Jerusalem when it was large, then Christians today can also experience genuine fellowship in large churches. However, we must do it the same way the early church did it or we will fail in all of our efforts. No local church can be a healthy church without fellowship. A local church without genuine fellowship will never be an effective witness to the world.

PROPER MEANING OF FELLOWSHIP

Meaning

The basic idea in fellowship is “to share” and from its derivatives we find that it means “communion, fellowship, association, relationship, participation, sociable, partnership and companionship.” Fellowship is a word that denotes personal relationships and communications between people.

Fellowship must be done with other Christians. It is group worship whereby we serve God by serving others. Sociologists speak of two kinds of groups: integrated and non-integrated. The non-integrated group does not meet regularly to communicate with one another about their common interest. A non-integrated group would be like a crowd at a sporting event. An integrated group on the other hand has sustained interaction regarding some common interest through which the members mutually adjust their behavior. A body of believers in Christ should be a very integrated group centering all their lives on Christ and His commands for them in Scripture. However, many churches are really non-integrated groups, not because they do not meet regularly but because they fail to talk about their common interest, Christ, when they are together. Real fellowship demands interaction with the lives and heartbeat of other Christians, and without this interaction a Christian is offering up defective worship to God.

Usage

A Common Salvation. The Bible tells us that all Christians are sovereignly called into fellowship with Christ. **“God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1 Cor. 1:9).** All Christians have a common salvation.

“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3).

All Christians have a common faith. **“To Titus my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4).** Christians, therefore, have a fellowship in the gospel, which the world knows nothing about. **“Because of your partnership (fellowship) in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil. 1:5).** The universal church consists of the called out ones who have all things spiritually in common. The strongest ties in the world are spiritual ties among truly saved people. All Christians have a common salvation in Christ. We are God’s children and numbered among the elect of God. Our fellowship is in Christ, our Lord. Our fellowship is not primarily in premillennialism, Calvinism, pre or post tribulationalism, charismatic gifts, independency or denominationalism. It is important to have doctrinal convictions on these things but they can often build spiritual pride and appeal to the flesh. Our fellowship must always be around the real and living person of Jesus Christ.

A Common Fellowship. Christians have a common fellowship that is produced by the Holy Spirit.

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” (Phil. 2:1-2).

Fellowship with the Spirit results in fellowship in the Spirit among true believers. The Holy Spirit can only give true Christian fellowship, as men are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to produce it. Christian fellowship is supernatural and cannot be reproduced in the unsaved world. Christian fellowship is not social fellowship such as friendly fraternizing. Superficial sociality is no more supernatural than the weekly Kiwanis or Rotary Club meetings. Most churches do not understand, expect or seek after real Christian fellowship. Sociality has become a cheap substitute for genuine Christian fellowship. Real fellowship does not depend upon pastors, buildings or programs that may only appeal to human pride but on Christ who is the focal point and purpose of all fellowship.

A Common Practice. The outward manifestation of inward common fellowship is common practice, so that the early Christians had fellowship through spiritual sharing. **“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship” (Acts 2:42).** They shared their money. **“All believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 2:44-45).** When they realized their common spiritual ties, the early church became united in effort, purpose, desires, goals and giving.

Christianity in the Book of Acts was not a religion but a life, a real, vital, personal life centered in Jesus Christ. The life of Christ flowing through Christians to other Christians met man’s deepest needs. The early church was a personal church. They knew their brothers and sisters. They knew their hurts and needs. They ministered to one another spiritually and

physically. In the early church, it was impossible to hide in the pew and to slip out unnoticed. They confronted one another eyeball to eyeball. Christians were noticed, reached out to and loved, and they were not just numbers in a local church. These early Christians were not just 11:00 to 12:00 o'clock Christians but they knew and loved their brothers and sisters in Christ. It was a life lived as Christ poured out His life through Christians to love others. In short, the early Christians had a "caring fellowship" and so should we today. Anything less than caring fellowship is cheating ourselves and others of real fellowship with one another and ultimately of the true fellowship of God.

"In the first century Church, unbelievers became believers at gatherings of the believers (1 Cor. 14:24-25), but that does not seem to be the purpose that brought them together. In Acts 2:42-47, the Lord added new converts to the church daily, but the reason for gathering together was so that those who were already believers could be taught by the apostles, enjoy spiritual fellowship with one another, remember the Lord's death and its benefits by sharing communion, and praying together.

As they did this, they began to love each other and to care for each other. They became personal enough with each other to notice their brothers and sisters in need. So they started - spontaneously - sharing everything together.

And when the doors opened, and they poured into the streets and market places and neighborhoods, the believers were so excited about the way they were loved, the life they had to share with the world, and about what God was doing for them, in them, among them and through them, that the people they talked to spontaneously, wanted to get in on the happening." (Robert C. Girard, *Brethren, Hang Loose*)

PATTERN OF FELLOWSHIP

The New Testament is quite clear as to the pattern fellowship should take among Christians. While it would be impossible to set up a total New Testament church in the twenty-first century, it is possible to implement the basic principles of New Testament fellowship. These things must be done if we are to offer up acceptable corporate worship to God.

Christians are to Share Truth with One Another.

"What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church." (1 Cor. 14:26).

In the early church, the people shared truth with one another in the worship service. The people were actively participating in the worship services as the Holy Spirit was directing them. There must be a time when believers can share truth with one another. They were not passively being entertained but actively participating in worship.

Christians are to Bear One Another's Burdens.

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).

Christian people have problems and they must be free to share these problems with other Christians. There must be honesty and openness with one another and awareness that burdens and problems are not abnormal or unspiritual for Christians. The masks must come off and the facades penetrated if reality is to be realized. Christians are to have a loving, non-judgmental spirit when others share their problems. People need help, not constant criticism. A person who shares a problem with another Christian must never feel as though he or she will be rejected.

To bear one another's burdens certainly means we are to pray for each other but it also means that we must be willing to spend time with these people so we can thoroughly understand their problems and seek to help them to find Biblical solutions. Yet, how can Christians bear one another's burdens if they do not know other Christians or if they do not know what their burdens are?

Christians Are to Exhort One Another.

“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” (Heb. 3:13).

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25).

Exhortation must certainly include encouragement as well as admonition. Each Christian must learn to speak the truth in love. If we really love another Christian, we will tell him the truth, for the Bible says, **“Wounds from a friend can be trusted” (Prov. 27:6)**

“We all tend to shy away from an unpleasant confrontation. If someone has an unpleasant or irritating habit or manner we are willing enough to talk about it to others, but seldom say anything to the person directly. If we do, it is usually only when we have been angered or irritated to the point of sharp and caustic protest. Our reason for silence is most often that ‘we don’t wish to hurt him.’ That, of course, is self-deception. It is ourselves that we don’t wish to hurt by having to tell someone a painful truth. In actual fact we do the other person incalculable harm by our unloving silence, for we condemn him or her to go on offending others and suffering rejection without realizing what it is that is creating the problem. No one loves him enough to take him aside and lovingly and understandingly point out the offending practice” (Ray Stedman, *Body Life*).

Christians are to Confess Their Faults to One Another.

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other” (James 5:16).

This confession in context is probably about a brother who had fallen into sin and as a result was experiencing sickness because of divine discipline (James 5:13-15). Confession may be made to the elders only, but it may go beyond the elders to all Christians in order that effective prayer may be offered up by all. Confession means admitting weaknesses and acknowledging failures in Christian living. This is so difficult to do because we all have pride and do not want to tarnish our images before others. It is contrary to our sin natures to give an

honest evaluation of ourselves. There are certain intimate and scandalous matters that should never be voiced in an open meeting. Some types of sharing should be done privately between Christians who are trustworthy and have mature insights. However, every Christian should have two or three Christians to whom he or she may pour out the heart.

Christians are to Care for One Another.

“No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds” (1 Tim. 5:9-10).

Christians are to care for the sick, the aged, and the widows when there is a need in the local church. There must be concern for one another, so much so that when there are needs they shall be met, even by sharing of money if the situation warrants it.

Christians are to Pray for One Another.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.” (Eph. 6:18-19).

We must pray for one another. However, to pray intelligently, we must know one another and this type of close relationship can only be brought about by genuine fellowship.

Christians are to Instruct One Another.

“Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled” (Titus 2:2-6).

Older men are to teach younger men about godliness and holy living. Older women are to instruct young women on how to be affectionate wives toward their husbands, loving towards their children and good homemakers. There must be a mutual love and respect between young and old in the local church.

PRACTICE OF FELLOWSHIP

It is one thing to know what the Bible teaches about fellowship, but is quite another thing to implement it in a practical way in the local church. However, it can be done, and every local church must seek after this kind of fellowship until it finds it.

Commitment of Heart. The primary reason that fellowship does not exist for an individual Christian or in a local body of believers is that one’s heart is not right. Christians

have a spiritual problem whereby they are so occupied with their own lives that they have no heart for Christ. A person must want to worship God correctly by being obedient to the principle of fellowship. God wants every Christian to be people-centered. Men are not mere animals of chance or machines to be manipulated, but they are persons, creations of God and are to be loved and respected. Dr. Francis Schaeffer says man's problem is that of his selfish desire for personal peace and affluence. By personal peace, he means that men want peace at any price. They do not want to get involved. They want to be left alone to do their own things. This attitude is so clearly seen in so-called Christians who come to church every Sunday morning and leave, being totally uninvolved in the real life of the church. At the basis of all personal peace is pride that wants to serve self rather than God and others. Then there is affluence, which is modern man's preoccupation with materialism. The lust for things and pleasure keeps men from giving of themselves to God. The craving for things kills the spirit of Christ.

Commitment of Time. If genuine fellowship is to happen, then each individual Christian must set time aside in his busy schedule to get to know and love other Christians in the local church and outside the church. We must discipline our time and set priorities so that fellowship is high on the list. A commitment of three or four hours a week to be with other Christians to interact in Biblical fellowship would revolutionize one's life.

Commitment of Life. Real fellowship comes as a Christian decides to give of his life to God and to others. His emphasis is not upon getting his needs met as much as on making sure he is meeting other people's needs. Real fellowship is the giving of self to others and this is very much a part of true Christian worship.

Commitment to Change. If personal renewal is to take place, then each individual must be willing to change as he is directed by God. We must be ready to forsake traditions, cultural hang-ups, stereotyped thinking, fear of people, fear of rejection and open up our lives to God and others. Change is very difficult for we all like to be comfortable, but no Christian is an island and no Christian can be a spiritual loner. We must all be intimately tied up spiritually with our brethren in Christ and this requires change of attitude and action.

If local church renewal is to take place, then a local church must be willing to forsake traditional thinking and establish new structures with the local body to allow fellowship to flourish. According to the Book of Acts, the early Christians met in the temple and also met in individual homes. **“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46).** They had large group worship in the temple and small group worship in homes. Situations must be set up today whereby believers are encouraged to meet in smaller groups, where communication is encouraged, where there is an informal atmosphere which allows for the freedom of the Spirit and where there is interaction about Christ. There is a place for the large group to meet on Sunday, primarily for instruction and group worship, and there is also a place to meet in smaller groups of no more than twelve people during the week. A biblical local church should include many smaller groups within a large group. It is interesting to note that whenever spiritual awakenings have occurred in the history of the church, they have always been accompanied by a revival of small, cell group fellowship.

The Holy Spirit must be seen elsewhere than in the pages of that “old, old story” in Acts. In genuine renewal, the Holy Spirit is real. He really speaks. He really leads. He really works. He really convicts. He really baptizes. He really indwells. He really equips us for

ministry to the body of Christ. He really fills. He really empowers. He really comforts. He really disciplines. He really communicates Jesus Christ to us, and through us, to others. He really illuminates the Word. He really glorifies Christ in us. He really produces the fruit of Christ's life through us. He really moves in us so we can count on the Living Christ.

The key to renewal is whatever releases the activity of the Holy Spirit among us!

“If structures hinder Him—change the structures.

If attitudes hinder Him—change the attitudes (confessing the sin involved).

If procedures, programs, patterns, forms, approaches, methods, facilities, plans, goals, or ideals hinder Him—let them be changed

Let the irreplaceable activity of the Spirit be released.” (Robert C. Girard, *Brethren, Hang Loose*).

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 18 A Praying Body

Have you ever asked yourself as a Christian, “Why does God seem so far away? Why am I so dry in my life? Why aren’t I experiencing the supernatural workings of God?” If you have asked yourself these questions, you are probably a very normal Christian. All true Christians hunger for spiritual reality and for the mystical workings of God in their lives. All Christians experience spiritual valleys, mountain tops and plateaus. Perhaps the hardest place to live the Christian life is when we are on a spiritual plateau in which nothing significant seems to be happening in our lives. When we are on a spiritual plateau, the one thing we need the most is a consistent prayer life and yet this is the last thing we want to do.

Consistent, dynamic prayer was the mark of the first century church, for we read **“they devoted themselves to prayer” (Acts 2:42)**. Individual and group prayer was a way of life for the early Christians. They devoted themselves to an understanding and propagation of the Apostle’s doctrine; they were deeply involved in rich and open fellowship around Christ and the Lord’s Table, but the power behind the dynamic of the first century church was that they were a praying people. They devoted themselves to prayer. Their Christianity was not only a learning process but it was a life lived in dependence on God through prayer.

Prayer was essential for the first century church and it is no less essential for us today. Yet, most Christians, if they were honest, would confess that they are dissatisfied with their prayer life. They would feel it was inadequate and infrequent. However, prayer is an absolute necessity for our personal lives and church life, and without it, we have dead orthodoxy without power. A prayer less Christian or a prayer less local church is not offering up acceptable worship to God.

PRAYING CHURCHES

The Book of Acts records for us that the early church was a praying church. There are over thirty mentions of prayer in the Book of Acts alone. They had a world-life viewpoint in which God was sovereign over all. They were deeply committed to the supernatural workings of an omnipotent God. They understood it was God who had to remove all roadblocks, difficulties and stubborn human wills and they petitioned their God to do the humanly impossible.

Prayer for Church Actions. The appointing of elders for the local churches was bathed in prayer. **“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23)**. Deacons, who were chosen to do the physical tasks of the ministry, were prayed over before hands were laid on them for this sacred office. **“They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6)**. The work of the deacons freed up the Apostles so they could give themselves to prayer and the Word. **“We will turn the responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4)**. The result of effective prayer and shrewd organization was a great evangelization of the lost. **“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in**

Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith”(Acts 6:7).

Prayer for Missions.

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:1-3).

While the leaders in the church at Antioch were fasting and praying, God mystically led them to a unanimous decision that Barnabas and Paul were to be sent out as missionaries from that local church. They “fasted and prayed” and sent them on their way. A praying church will be a missionary church for those who are praying are in tune with God’s will which is to save a multitude of people which no man can number.

Prayer for the Brethren. (Acts 12:12-17). The Apostle Peter was cast into prison. Obviously Peter had a need and the whole church prayed for this need. **“So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (Acts 12:5).** God marvelously and supernaturally answered the prayers of these committed Christians, but they too were only human. God released Peter. He showed up at the place of the prayer meeting and the Christians could not believe that God had done a supernatural act.

“When she recognized Peter’s voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, ‘Peter is at the door!’ ‘You’re out of you mind,’ they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, ‘It must be his angel””(Acts 12:14,15).

God answers prayer and we must not question how but we must believe. We have not because we ask not and only our unbelief keeps God from doing mighty things for us.

Prayer for Strength to Witness.

“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31).

Peter and John were called before the Sanhedrin because of their strong witness for Christ and were told to stop telling people about Christ. They were warned and released. Peter and John shared this with their brethren who immediately took the whole matter to God in prayer. (Acts 4:31). It was during this season of prayer that God mightily filled these Christians with the Holy Spirit and they were able to speak the Word of God with boldness.

In the Book of Acts, there are no prayers for the lost but all the prayers are for the Christians that they might be bold to speak the gospel. God will supernaturally move upon men providing they hear the gospel. Therefore, Christians must have special grace to speak boldly for Christ.

The dynamic of the early church was that they were a praying church. They expected to see the mysterious workings of God in their midst as they prayed. They prayed and kept on praying because they remembered the words of Christ, **“They should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1)**. Christians pray once or twice and, if they get no immediate answer, they go back to the human schemes and fleshly methods to get things done, which always result in chaos.

PRAYING FOR CHRISTIANS IN THE BATTLE

Invisible Powers.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:10-12).

Every Christian is in a spiritual battle. The Christian is told to put on the full armor of God in order that he might stand against the schemes of the devil. The Christian’s real battle takes place in the unseen world, in the invisible world. The spiritual world is more real than the physical world, and, furthermore, the spiritual world will be in existence when the physical world as we know it shall be destroyed. Right now the forces of God and the forces of Satan are in an invisible war and this war centers around human history and Christians in particular. Satan is the god of this world and is taking who ever he can into the way of evil. Yet, God has His invisible kingdom as well. Christians, who know God, are persuaded that the things happening to this world are the direct result of something happening in the realm of invisibility. They know that the way to change the visible world is to start with the invisible world. Our prayers to the invisible God play a direct and essential part in bringing God’s invisible power to bear on visible life. Our human prayers are somehow linked up with the working of God in this life. Our prayers do not change God’s plan but our prayers are part of God’s plan to bring about His ends. Prayer is God’s means to bring about His own sovereign plan. Prayer is essential. Without prayer, God does not often work, with it, He certainly does. Prayer brings the invisible powers of God into our personal experience and we begin to experience the mystical workings of God.

Invincible Prayer.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints” (Eph. 5:18).

After having put on the Christian armor of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God, the Christian is to surround himself with prayer. Prayer releases God’s power in our lives so as to give us the dynamic to make truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the Word practical. Christians are to pray “always” and “on all occasions.” It is to be a constant exercise. They are to persevere in prayer not only for themselves but also for other Christians who are in the spiritual battle.

As we learn to pray, we will discover that exciting and otherwise unexpected things are constantly happening. We will experience the quiet but mighty power of God at work. As

we learn to pray, we will find at our disposal a tremendous weapon, a mighty power to influence our lives and the lives of others. Every Christian must put on the armor of God for himself, but every Christian can pray for other Christians. We can call in spiritual reinforcements when we find our brothers and sisters engaged in a greater struggle than they can handle at the moment. By prayer for our brethren, we can see the mysterious workings of God come into their lives, releasing the invisible power in a visible way.

Imperative Need.

“Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should” (Eph. 6:19-20).

Even the Apostle Paul sensed his great need for prayer. He needed boldness to speak the gospel to others. The devil tries to get Christians to shut down their witness by terrifying them with fear or causing them to rationalize their responsibility to reach the whole world for Christ. Vicious Satanic opposition comes when Christians become active witnesses and telling others about Christ. We must understand the schemes of the devil. The devil whispers to us, “We must not offend anyone or we will drive them away! Let the preacher do the witnessing because we pay him to do it! I just don’t have enough knowledge yet to be a good witness. If we get the unsaved active in church, then they will automatically come to know the Lord. I’m a silent witness but I do give money to missions! I don’t want people to think I am a fanatic. Leave people alone for they are free moral agents and have the right to believe whatever they want.” These and hundreds of others are the schemes of the devil to get Christians to hold back in their witness for Christ. The only way to push back the Satanic opposition is constant, dynamic prayer for one another that we may speak the gospel boldly. It is our task to speak the gospel; it is God’s task to save souls!

PRAYING TO MEET OUR OWN NEEDS

A person may have numerous needs and no two people may have the same needs but all Christians have needs and we are to pray for these needs. Most of our confusion about needs can be placed under one specific category and that is in the area of worry. Worry is probably the biggest problem among Christians today. Worry is one of the major reasons Christians are stumbling blocks to non-Christians, for we preach our beliefs in God and live like atheists in practical matters.

Command Not to Worry. **“Do not be anxious about anything”(Phil. 4:6a).** Literally this means, “Stop worrying about anything.” This does not mean that we are not to have proper interest and concern about the circumstances of life. There is no reference here to mental indifference and stoicism. We Christians are not to be anxious, fretful or worried. We are commanded by God not to worry and to worry is sin. Yet worry so often characterizes the Christian’s life. Someone has said, “I am so loaded up with worries that if anything happened to me this week it would be two weeks before I could get around to worrying about it.” Or as the poet put it so well:

“I’ve joined the new ‘Don’t Worry’ Club
And now I hold my breath
I’m so scared I’m going to worry

That I'm worried half to death."

What is Worry? Worry is undue concern resulting in extreme anxiety in which a person is more occupied with the circumstances than with the God who controls circumstances. The first cure for worry is to cast one's burdens on the Lord, or more literally to roll the burden on the Lord, for He really does care about every Christian. **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).**

Why Do We Worry? We are concerned about our immediate circumstances - food, clothes, housing, jobs, money, financial security, social acceptance or whatever. God promises to meet every need we have if we will seek His kingdom. **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33).** Worry ultimately comes from fear and the only thing that can dispel fear is facts or truth. Fear and worry are overcome as we face the reality of life in light of the unchanging promises of God in Scripture.

What is Behind Worry? The ultimate cause of all worry is failure to believe God and to trust His promises explicitly. When we worry, we are saying that God is a liar; that His promises are not true. God says He rewards them who diligently seek Him. **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6).**

Cure for Worry. **"But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Phil. 4:6).** The cure for worry is believing-prayer. The only way to whip worry is not by suppression of feelings but expression to God. We must take everything to God. God is interested in the little things as well as the big things. Nothing is too big that God cannot handle and too small that He is not concerned. The God who made the vast universe also made the tiny atom and He has perfect control over both. God is infinitely involved in the minutest details of life. Therefore, pray about everything. Talk it all out with your God. Believing-prayer waits expectantly for the mysterious workings of God in every circumstance of life.

Counterpart to Worry. **"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard our hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).** When we offer up believing-prayer, God gives us mental stability and a peace that no one can really explain. In our helter-skelter society, nothing makes a bigger impact upon non-Christians than to see Christians who can handle pressure without being anxious, fretful, weary or disturbed. It almost seems impossible to do. Yet, it is possible for those who offer up believing-prayer.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Prayer is Talking to God. Prayer is not superstition; it is not a psychological religious experience of talking to oneself; nor is it black magic by which some heavenly genie is expected to manipulate life to our whims, a kind of Aladdin's lamp that we rub and things are supposed to happen. Prayer is conversing with God. It is family talk as a son or daughter would approach a father. Prayer is friendly, intimate, frank, unrestricted talking with God. You must talk to God about everything for He alone understands your problems and has a solution. Tell Him everything. Tell Him how you feel. Tell Him your complaints. Describe your circumstances and your personal feelings, good or bad, about the situation. Prayer is conversation with God but it is not some high, holy and artificial language that only a

preacher can utter. Prayer to God should always be done with respect and awe but it is in reality having an open and honest talk with God.

Prayer is an Attitude. The Scriptures say that Christians are to pray without ceasing. **“Pray continually” (1 Thess. 5:17).** This verse literally means to pray with the frequency of a hacking cough. Every Christian should be in an attitude of prayer about everything. Prayer goes on in all of our conscious moments. Our prayers must rise above the simple childhood prayer before bed: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.” Prayer is a lifestyle, not just an act.

Prayer Often Involves a Position. There is a time to kneel when praying. Kneeling is a physical, outward act that symbolizes an inward spirit of humility. Paul often bowed his knees to the Father when praying (Eph. 3:14). There is a place for kneeling in both private and public worship, and perhaps evangelicals as a whole have failed to see the value of the position of kneeling in the offering up of prayer.

Prayer Demands Discipline. Prayer is hard work and the person who is going to have a consistent prayer life must discipline his mind to pray. Prayer is a major spiritual work and this accounts for the tremendous conflicts we have when in prayer. The devil does not want us releasing the power of God and the flesh hates discipline of any kind. The person who gives himself to an attitude of prayer all day and fifteen minutes of concentrated prayer each day will experience the mystical workings of a sovereign God.

Prayer Involves Faith. If we really believe in something, we do it. If we really believe in individual and group prayer, we will make every effort to practice it. True faith must always result in action.

Prayer is a Group Act as Well as an Individual Act. Every Christian must spend time in individual, closet prayer. This is essential for any healthy Christian growth. However, the Bible speaks of the necessity for group prayer as part of corporate worship. In the Book of Acts, most of the prayers offered up were by groups of Christians. There is a special power of God in group prayer. Furthermore, group prayer builds a fellowship around Christ and spiritual things. It is easier to pray in a group and the motivation for praying is greater in a group. The Lord Jesus said, **“They (men) should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).** If group prayer gives us a motivation to pray that we may not have for individual prayer, then by all means we should pray with a group. Every Christian should have at least two or three Christians with whom he can pray on a regular basis. Also there is a very special blessing for the local church that gathers together to pray regularly.

D. L. Moody made a statement about prayer that every Christian should take to heart. He said,

“I would sooner know how to pray aright than to own all the gold in Alaska. I would rather have power to move the arm that moves the world than to wear the crown of any earthly king.”

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