

ECCLESIOLOGY
THE LOCAL CHURCH

Lesson 9

Essentials of Worship in the Local Church
Acts 2:42-47

I. THE PATTERN OF WORSHIP (Acts 2:42 “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”)

A. **Christians continued in the Apostles’ doctrine.** The early church met together to study, know and do the Word of God. Doctrine or teaching is the first on the list. If the saints are going to be matured in spiritual realities and equipped for service (Eph. 4:11-16), they must know and apply God’s Word (Acts 20:32). God has given gifted teachers to the church (pastor-teachers or teaching-elders) to instruct Christians in the Apostles’ teaching, which is found for us today in the New Testament. A sound local church will have a strong teaching ministry from both the Old and New Testaments.

B. **Christians had fellowship.** “Fellowship” means the sharing of spiritual blessings in Christ and the sharing of material substance as there was need (Acts 2:45; 4:35). The early Christians communicated with one another, and desired each other’s company.

“Those early Christians talked together of the things of their spiritual life, and there is no surer way to conserve and strengthen Christian life than that of such fellowship.” (G. Campbell Morgan, *Acts*)

C. **They broke bread together.** The “breaking of bread” was the way the early church observed the Lord’s Table. In those days, the Lord’s Table had two parts—Agape (a common meal) and the Eucharist (a thanksgiving and remembrance of the Lord’s death). The Agape was a love feast where the Christians shared food and fellowship with one another. During this time they would sing, quote Psalms, teach, prophecy, speak in tongues, etc. (1 Cor. 14:26). In the middle of the service, an Apostle or Elder would instruct them out of the Word. The Lord’s Table was then closed with the Eucharist where they partook of the bread and wine to remember Christ’s death for sin. This ritual fell into abuse early in the life of the first century church (1 Cor. 11:20-22), and was bitterly opposed by Tertullian, a church father. They put the Agape on Saturday night and the Eucharist on Sunday, but the Agape was then even more corrupted. The custom today is to drop the Agape and just observe the Eucharist. NOTE: Acts 20:7 indicates that the Lord’s Table had a big place in New Testament worship because they came together first to break bread and then Paul preached to them.

D. **They prayed together.** The early church gathered together to pray as a unit. Prayer was essential for their own edification and for the reaching of the lost

world for Christ. Group prayer is always a unifying force that binds believers together.

E. Points to ponder.

1. If any one of the four elements of Christian worship is left out, then a local church is not well balanced and is not following the New Testament pattern. The function of teaching, fellowship, Lord's Table and prayer never changes. However, the form (way it is done) may vary from church to church, culture to culture, decade to decade, etc.
2. It is essential that Christians meet with the local church on a regular basis to worship, be taught, fellowship around Christ, observe the Lord's Table, pray and exhort one another to love and good works. "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).
3. It is interesting to note that the local church is primarily for true believers in Christ. The local church is a place of worship and a place to equip the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12). Unbelievers did come at times to observe the Christian assemblies for they were not secret societies (1 Cor. 14:22-24). Practically this means in our day the church is a place where believers gather to worship and to be equipped for ministry. The local church exists for believers and not the evangelization of the lost. Evangelism is done outside the church in the world.
4. It appears that the New Testament church was informal (but had order), congenial and given over to sharing and praise as well as instruction.
5. The early church definitely had organization but it was kept to a minimum to keep the simplicity of worship. The average church service today is dry and formal, and a person can come to the worship service and never be involved. This did not happen in the early church. The dangers of hyper-organization are:
 - a. One is more involved with programs and ritual than with Christ.
 - b. People substitute church activity for spirituality.
 - c. The pastor becomes "a do-everything man" because he is paid.
 - d. Leadership gets eyes on numbers rather than quality discipleship.
 - e. There is a lack of trained leadership who can do ministry, so people turn to the "professional minister."
6. The purpose of the local church is to help everyone grow in Christ so they can build the body of Christ and be involved in world evangelism (Col. 1:28-29).

II. THE ESSENCE OF WORSHIP

- A. Usage. There are two basic words for worship used in the New Testament. *Praskuneo*, which means "an act of reverence" (John 4:21-24; 1 Cor. 14:25). *Latreuo*, which means "to render religious service or homage" (Phil. 3:3; Rom. 1:9; 12:1).
- B. Definition. "It is not to be confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgment to God of His nature, attributes, ways and claims,

whether outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgment” (Vine, *Dictionary of New Testament Words*, IV, 236). In short, New Testament worship involves both reverence and service.

- C. New emphasis for worship in the New Testament (John 4:19-24).
1. These verses indicate that worship in the New Testament will take on a new dimension that was not in the Old Testament. Old Testament worship came from the heart but was limited because it was centered around the physical as aids to worship—temple, sacrifices, priesthood, etc. But in the New Testament, because of progressive revelation, worship will be in spirit and truth, de-emphasizing the physical aspects of worship. In the Old Testament, these physical things and ceremonies were types and shadows (Heb. 10:1) that pointed forward to the reality to come—a full manifestation of Christ has been made (Heb. 1:1-4).
 2. This worship is to be in spirit; that is, arising spontaneously out of the human spirit which is activated by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16). This worship is also in truth; that is, it is based on the truth of the inspired Word.
 3. The Father who is spirit and truth is constantly seeking people to worship Him in spirit and in truth. He longs for this kind of worship.
- D. Contrast of Old Testament physical worship and New Testament spiritual worship.
1. Old Testament. For Israel there was a literal, physical temple, sacrifices, priesthood and ceremonial worship. This worship embodied itself in outward forms and ceremonies.
 2. New Testament. For the church, there is a spiritual temple (1 Cor. 6:19-20), a spiritual priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9-10); spiritual sacrifices (Heb. 13:15-16) and spiritual worship (Rom. 12:1). The presentation of one’s whole being (body, soul and spirit) to God is the highest form of worship (Rom. 12:1). This is why Paul said, “God whom I serve (worship) with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of His Son . . .” (Rom. 1:9).
 3. Points to ponder
 - a. New Testament worship is spiritual. Anything spiritual cannot be physical. That which is physical appeals to the five senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch. Anything appealing to the five senses could not be spiritual worship. Spiritual worship comes from the human spirit and the heart. It is something internal, not external. Beautiful architecture, stained glass windows, glamorous ritual, etc., are not Biblical worship. These things are not wrong in themselves, but are only aids to worship. Therefore they are nice but not necessary to true worship.
 - b. It should be noted that the Lord Jesus left the church only two physical things to remember Him by and these are merely symbols—the bread and the wine. We may conclude, therefore, that the Lord’s Table is a special time of worship.
 - c. Christians, who put so much emphasis upon beads, crosses, pictures, images, icons, buildings, statues, etc., are emotionally involved with

these physical things. They are running on emotions and feelings and not on what the Bible teaches. Emotions must never take precedence over the intellect as it seeks to find the true meaning of worship from Scripture.

- E. Conclusion. Worship is a moment-by-moment experience whereby one is occupied with God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and presenting his life (body) for the service that God has prepared, whether it is praising, singing, studying the Bible, witnessing for Christ, listening to a sermon, cleaning the house, praying, typing a letter, doing your job well, etc. Worship is constant because the body of the Christian has become the temple of God. It is not right to think that worship is to be experienced just in a Sunday morning worship service. Christians are to assemble together at specific times and places but worship is a continual attitude of the Christian who is constantly worshipping in his or her own spiritual temple (the body).