

**WORSHIP  
THAT PLEASES  
JEHOVAH OUR GOD**

**BY**

**JOHN WADDEY**

## INTRODUCTION

One of the great privileges of life is that of worshiping the great God of the Universe. Because of our love for Him and our appreciation for the gift of this Son (John 3:16) we are drawn to his worship. When Christ saved us, he added us to his church (Acts 2:47). As members of his body, we offer up our worship and devotion to God.

Because of our ignorance of God and the desires of His mind, we needed instruction as to how to worship him in an acceptable manner. This God did not overlook. He sent His Holy Spirit to guide chosen godly men in recording in book form all things pertaining to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). As God gave the Hebrews careful instructions for the building of their tabernacle and their worship therein, so he has given us a sacred pattern to be followed in our Christian worship and service (II Tim. 1:13).

Those of us known to the world as the Churches of Christ are convinced that the worship revealed in the New Testament is suitable for all nations so long as time shall last. Those earliest Christians were guided in their conduct by the Apostles Christ had chosen and empowered (Acts 1:8). The Apostles were not left to their own judgement about the nature of the church and her worship, the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven to guide them into all truth (John 16:13). Thus we, without apology or embarrassment, seek to restore the ancient worship of the apostolic age, believing that in so doing we will be what God wants us to be.

In the pages that follow you will find a hundred studies on the various aspects of Christian worship. The author has made an effort to cover every aspect of this great subject including the most common questions raised concerning worship. In most of the discussion he has been able to appeal directly to scripture to provide a biblical answer for the points he has made. However in answering some of the questions concerning the means and methods of fulfilling the divine ordinances, he has expressed what in his judgement is the best way to proceed. In this last category some might disagree with some of his conclusions. Such is to be expected. It is hoped that readers who happen to disagree on this point or that will keep this in mind. Matters that are clearly stated in God's Word must be accepted as the will of God. In those things we must stand united. In areas of opinion and judgement we must extend charity and liberty if we are to stand united before our Father and in the face of our enemies.

These lessons are sent forth with a prayer that they will benefit and bless Christ's people around the world.

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# WORSHIP: MAN'S NEED, PRIVILEGE AND DUTY

## 1.

### MAN, THE WORSHIPPING CREATURE

Of the several characteristics and traits that distinguish man from the other creatures, worship is one of the most pronounced. In every culture in every age, most men have worshiped something. In their ignorance, the proud Athenians worshiped the unknown God (Acts 17:23). Even the atheistic humanist Auguste Comte proposed a Religion of Humanity complete with his own suggestion for sacraments, saints and rituals... "Another unbeliever wrote, "Religion of some sort is probably necessary... Instead of worshipping supernatural rulers, it will sanctify the higher manifestations of human nature in art and love..." (Julian Huxley ed. **The Humanist Frame**, London, George Allen and Urwin Ltd. 1961, p. 44). A few years ago I read of a government newspaper editorial in atheistic Russia exhorting the masses not to adore the statues of Lenin.

Why is man incurably religious? Solomon writes that God "hath set eternity in their hearts" (Eccle. 3:11a). The Creator made man to worship and serve him. Although most men are living in rebellion to Jehovah, they cannot escape their need to adore something or someone greater and more powerful than themselves.

#### REVEALED WORSHIP

The God who made man as he is did not leave his need for worship unfulfilled. He revealed himself to the human family. In Eden he came down and talked with them (Gen. 3:8-21). The created universe helps man to perceive God's power and divinity (Rom. 1:20). While nature can inspire us to worship, it can never tell us how to worship. God revealed his will for worship through divinely guided prophets who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). The ancient Hebrews were taught to worship by the Law of Moses (Deut. 6:4, 13). The details of acceptable worship were spelled out for them in the Old Testament. Christians are under the New Testament of Jesus (John 12:47). Their worship is based on the commands of Christ and his Apostles (Matt. 28:18-20). The reader should note that Christian worship is not the same as the Hebrew's worship. In both cases worshipers were warned against adding to or taking from God's directions (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-20).

Our worship is not optional. Jesus commands that we **must** worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). If we would please God and hope to live in eternal bliss, we will worship as he directs.

While most everyone has worshiped at some time, not all have thought out a definition for the term. Our English word "worship" means **worthship** and suggests the worthiness of the person who receives special honor (**Baker's Dictionary of Theology**, p. 560). In the Hebrew and Greek tongues in which the Scriptures were first written, two thoughts are reflected in worship: 1. to serve, to render religious service; 2. to adore, to show reverence to (**Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** p. 235-236). Under the Old Law, worship consisted of elaborate rituals, tied to a magnificent temple and professional priesthood. Such a system made its primary appeal to the physical senses.

Under Christ, our worship is "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Christian worship is simple and unpretentious and may be offered to God anywhere. Its entire appeal is to the heart. Paul, the Apostle, argues that the old system was taken away at the cross and we Christians should not feel bound to follow it (Col. 2:14-18). In our public worship we are to adore the Father and his Holy Son in our songs, prayers, gifts and communion. In our daily life we serve him joyfully.

#### DIFFERENT KINDS OF WORSHIP

All worship is not acceptable to the great Jehovah. He speaks of **vain worship** (Matt. 15:9). **Vain** suggests, emptiness, worthlessness. Some **worship in ignorance** (Acts 17:23). Such are exhorted to know and serve the true God through Jesus. There is an acceptable worship that is offered "**in spirit and in truth**" (John 3:24). God actively seeks for men

to worship in this fashion (John 4:23). Christ put it plainly in Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter in the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." Surely this is true of our worship. Good intentions, a heavenly feeling and general approval of ones fellows is not enough. Worship must be **scriptural**, i.e., according to scripture, to be acceptable.

### THE CHURCH AND WORSHIP

The church is God's family of saved people upon the earth. Her primary reason for existence is to worship the Lord. In public assemblies she adores God. In daily activities she serves. We reflect true discipleship and true worship when we "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); when we remember the fatherless and the widows in their affliction (Jas. 1:27); and when we work to strengthen our fellow Christian (Eph. 4:12).

The God who made man, planted deep within him many powerful urges or drives such as the need for food, shelter, sex, companionship and worship. In all of these cases there is a right and wrong way to fulfill them. May all who love the Lord seek his will for worship in the pages of the New Covenant of Jesus and may we be true worshipers who adore and serve Him in spirit and in truth.

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## 2.

### THOU SHALT WORSHIP THE LORD THY GOD

Jesus said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God. And him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). Man's greatest privilege is to worship the Sovereign Creator of the Universe. No other earthly experience can equal worship. For the freedom to worship, men have fought and died. It would be a thrilling privilege to meet the world's greatest musician, artist, or statesman: how much more to come into the presence of the great Jehovah.

Man's greatest *need* is to have communion and fellowship with God and that is precisely the purpose of worship. Despair and darkness hang heavy upon the human heart which because of sin and guilt is separated from God (Is. 59:1-2). In acceptable worship, man the sinner, is allowed to approach the loving Father and receive a blessing (Luke 15:11-24). In Lord's Day worship we remember Christ's death for us in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:23-28); that is a communion, a participation with the Lord (I Cor. 10:16). In our songs and prayers we are conversing with God (Ps. 34:1-6). Man, without God in his life, is like a body without a spirit (Jas. 2:26). But man in a proper relationship with God enjoys the abundant life (John 10:10).

Man's greatest *responsibility* is to worship God in an acceptable fashion. Jesus reminded the woman at the well that God seeks true worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). It is not enough to worship, our worship must be according to the will of the Father to be acceptable (Matt. 7:21). In a day when numerous religions, all of which profess to worship God, clamor for our interest, the wise person will look to the Scriptures to be sure that he is indeed serving God as He desires (Acts 17:11).

Man's greatest *hope* is to live with God in eternity, which is the promised reward of faithful worshipers. In Revelation, chapter 7, John foresaw the redeemed of all nations in heaven, worshipping God (7:5-11). If we want to be with the saved in that grand and glorious worship assembly, then surely we must be among his worshipers now.

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### 3.

## THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF WORSHIP

Man is a worshiping creature. Every heart has its shrine, every tribe has its totem. The impulse to worship is elemental and universal. This is the case because God has placed eternity in the heart of man. (Eccle. 3:11). If he knows not how to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24) man will worship in ignorance and error.

### I. Worship, its Definition

Our word **worship** is from the Anglo Saxon *worth-ship*, which suggests ascribing worth to a person or thing of value. Christian worship is ascribing supreme worth to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Hebrew word for worship, *shahah*, meant "to bow down," i.e., to prostrate oneself. This suggests a reverential attitude of mind and body, a complete submission to God. The Greek term translated worship is *proskuneo*. It is defined "to kiss the hand." The picture roots back to the adoring pet dog licking his beloved master's hand. In response to what God has done for him in Christ, worshipping man surrenders himself completely to God.

### II. The History of Jehovah Worship

The careful student of scripture discovers three distinct developmental stages in the divine worship of God: The simple family worship of the earliest ages, the national worship of ancient Israel and Christian worship. Let us consider briefly the basic details of each.

**Patriarchal:** The earliest recorded account of man's worship is that of Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam. The record simply states that they "brought an offering unto Jehovah" (Gen. 4:3-4). Cain's offering of vegetables was rejected while Abel's lamb was accepted. Hebrews 11:4 helps us understand why Abel's gift was recognized above his brother's. "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain...." Paul tells us that faith comes from hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

In the days of Seth "began men to call upon the name of Jehovah" (Gen. 4:26). This passage suggests a new plane of religious expression that was reached at that time.

The patriarch Noah led his family in offering sacrifices following the flood (Gen. 8:20-21). Abraham well illustrates this stage of religion. The word **patriarchal** comes from the noun patriarch which means **father**. This was a period of time when the father led his family clan in worship. Worship was family centered. Each clan built an altar wherever they made their home (Gen. 12:7; 22:9). Their worship consisted primarily of animal sacrifices and prayers (Gen. 15:9). No written law of God was given in those days. That which the father received from God, in dreams and visions, was passed on to his children. (Gen. 18:19). No mention is made of a specific day of the week, such as the Sabbath, being dedicated to God. In fact, circumstantial evidence from later books indicates that the Sabbath was given to the Hebrews at Sinai (Neh. 9:13-14). It was intended to commemorate their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:15). Thus the patriarchal worship was informal, without priesthood, written regulation, temple, or holy days. This could not be styled inferior, for it was perfectly suited for man in that early stage of time.

**Mosaic.** At Sinai the Hebrew refugees were organized into a nation and a national system of religion was given unto them (Ex. 9:3-6; Deut. 4:6-8). At first this new system of worship centered around the tabernacle (Ex. 25:8-9). This was a portable tent designed for a house of worship. The tribe of Levi was chosen by God to minister in the tabernacle worship. Of their number, Aaron and his sons were designated priests with exclusive authority to lead in the sacrificial service (Num. 3:5-10). Animal sacrifices were offered to God for the nation and individuals (Lev. 16:1-22). The nation of Israel was guided in their life and worship by a recorded revelation which began with the Ten Commandments and Moses' Pentateuch. These were supplemented in time by the inspired writings of the prophets. The Sabbath day was designated as a weekly holy day (Ex. 20:8-12). To this was added numerous annual feast days (Lev. 23:1-44). The tabernacle and



its worship were perfectly suited for a nation of pilgrims migrating through the wilderness. Whenever the nation encamped, in a short time their center of worship was erected and in use. After the occupation and settlement of Canaan, the Lord provided a permanent arrangement for their spiritual life. This was Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Except for a greater degree of grandeur, all items remained essentially the same. Mosaic worship was distinguished from that of the patriarchal age by its priesthood, its central house of worship, its national extension, its Sabbath and yearly holy days, its written code, and public praise by both priests and worshipers which included both vocal and instrumental music (II Chron. 5:11-14; 29:25-28). The temple and its worship had a sensual sublimity which appealed to the physical senses.

During the Babylonian exile (606-536 B. C.), synagogue worship evolved. It was primarily a popular service of devotion, free from the ritual of the temple and the exclusiveness of the priestly service. Following the restoration in 536 B.C. the two systems functioned as corollaries. The synagogue supplied the daily and weekly spiritual needs of the Israelites who often lived far from the temple. The temple continued as the center of national service. In Jesus' day the sect of the Sadducees controlled the temple while the Pharisees usually dominated the synagogues. Worship in the synagogue had four primary facts:

- 1) Recitation of the Shema. (Deut. 6:4-9).
- 2) Prayers and songs.
- 3) Reading of portions of the Law and Prophets by the men.
- 4) The targum which was an explanation of scripture in the vernacular.

The worship of Israel was distinguished from other Oriental religions in the following ways:

1. Israel's God was the only and exclusive God.
2. Jehovah was a personal, living God who actively intervened in history.
3. They had no images in their worship.
4. Theirs was a religion centered around and governed by a God-given book and constitution.
5. The morality of Israel's worship was distinctly higher and purer than her pagan neighbors' religion.

In his death and resurrection, Christ abrogated the old law and its entire worship arrangement (Col. 2:14-17). At the same time he instituted a new and living way to approach Jehovah (Heb. 10:19-25).

While the law had come through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus (John 1:17). Today, God's children come to worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Christian worship is the ministration of the spirit that gives life. (II Cor. 3:6-9). Now, Christ is our perpetual high priest, after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:20). Every Christian is a royal priest, authorized to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus (I Pet. 2:5). Our worship is not limited to Jerusalem or any geographical location on earth (John 4:20-24), rather, true worshipers may offer their adoration anywhere, so long as it is in spirit and truth. The privileges of Christianity are not limited to one nation as before. Now, every creature in every nation is able to participate (Mark 16:15). No more do we offer animal sacrifices, which could never take away sin (Heb. 10:10-12). The new covenant of Jesus is a better covenant than that of Moses and it offers a more excellent ministry and better promises (Heb. 8:6). While that of Moses appealed strongly to the eye and ear, Christ's new way of worship and service appeals more directly to the heart and soul (Rom. 12:1-2; John 4:24).

### III. Christian Worship

At this point we launch into a more detailed study of Christian worship. What are the characteristics of acceptable worship?

Christian worship is **God-centered**. "Worship God," the angel told John.(Rev. 22:9). "He that comes to God must believe that he is ..." (Heb. 11:6). The first prerequisite of worship is expressed by David, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). Those who worship must always guard lest their worship be distracted from God. Worship must not be determined by a preacher, other worshipers, by the physical surroundings such as the building and its comforts or the lack thereof.

Our worship must be **personal**. God seeks true worshipers to worship him (John 4:23). One cannot worship by proxy. My mate or children cannot worship for me. Worship cannot be purchased. Lavish gifts to God are no substitute for personal worship. Being a spectator of others worship is not enough. Every individual must worship Jehovah and give a personal account for his own actions (II Cor. 5:10).

Worship is **corporate**, i.e., congregational. Upon becoming a Christian the believer enters into something larger and more important than himself. He is part of the brotherhood of the saints (I Pet. 2:7). Since we are severally members one of another, we must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together wherein we provoke one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24-25). In I Corinthians 11:20, Paul discusses their assembling together for the communion. As Christians worship together, the believer reaches his highest level of spiritual aspiration and motivation.

**Sincerity** must characterize our worship. Insincere, hypocritical worship was scathingly rebuked by Jesus (Matt. 23:23). We must worship "in truth" (John 4:24). Not only does this famous passage demand scripturally correct worship but that which is honest, genuine and sincere.

Our worship must be **humble**. Pride and self-righteousness defeat every attempt to worship. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God..." (I Pet. 5:6) is the basic premise of worship. We see this illustrated in the case of the Pharisee and the publican who went up to the temple to pray. The proud Pharisee was rejected, while the humble publican went home justified (Lk. 18:9-14). No honest man can contemplate the holiness of Jehovah without a fresh and vivid awareness of his own lack of holiness. Isaiah had this very experience (Is. 6:5).

Worship must be **spiritual**. Through Christ we offer up "spiritual sacrifices" (I Pet 2:5). We serve God with our spirits (Rom. 1:9). We owe to God "spiritual service" (Rom. 12:1-2). Spiritual worship is opposed to the carnal modes of worship of the pagans and even the physically centered worship of Moses' law. Christian worship needs no earthly temple, animal sacrifice, material altar, incense or any item made by men's hands. With his spirit, man worships God the Spirit in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Ritual and formality have little to do with whole-hearted worship to God. This makes Christianity truly an international religion for no matter who he is, where he may live or his circumstances, man can worship God acceptably.

Christian worship is **free and spontaneous**. A study of the New Testament impresses us with the absence of fixed forms or arrangements of the prescribed acts of worship. It was in the third and fourth centuries that the free worship of the primitive church began to be supplemented by a formal system which gradually grew into the massive ritual of Roman Catholicism. The scripturally appointed items of worship may be arranged in any one of a number of patterns and yet be no more or less than God ordered. We hasten to add, however, that free, spontaneous worship in no way forbids planning and order. In fact, the Apostle plainly says. "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14-40).

To be complete, worship must be **expressed in life**. Acts of worship divorced from life are rejected by God. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). One of the humanity's greatest mistakes is to think that worship, by itself alone, will suffice to please God. Through Amos, God ordered the people to shut down their worship services until justice and righteousness were evident in their lives (Amos 5:21-24).

Then, too, **worship must be authorized by Christ** to be acceptable to the Father. All authority has been vested in the Son (Matt. 28:18). Whatever we do in word or deed must be "in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). Surely this broad regulation would include our worship. John warns us that "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God..." (II John 9). We are only authorized to teach "whatsoever" Christ commands (Matt. 28:20). Any act or item of worship not authorized by Christ cannot be acceptable. It is not enough to respond that the Bible does not condemn a certain action, such as instrumental music or counting beads. The very fact that they are not authorized is sufficient grounds to reject them.

Finally, our worship **must be directed to God through Jesus our mediator**. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men....Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). No other mediator is acceptable whether it be Mary, an Apostle, a saint, or an angel.

#### IV. Elements of Christian Worship

It was the practice of the apostolic church to offer unto God five items of worship: songs, prayers, gifts, communion, and scripture study. Since these are the only authorized avenues of worship, no other can be acceptable today.

Prayer is one of the most ancient methods of worship. Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Lk. 11:1-4). Early Christians were steadfast in prayer (Acts 2:42). In prayer, we praise God, petition him for our needs, confess unto him our sins and thank him for our blessings. Acceptable prayer must be addressed to God through Christ (I Tim. 2:5), and according to his will (Matt. 26:39). The worshiper must be living in harmony with God's will if he expects a positive answer (I Pet. 3:12).

Singing is a vital part of our worship. "Christianity is a singing faith. In no other religion does music play so great a part in the worship and witness of all the people."<sup>2</sup>

Two kinds of music are found in the Bible, vocal and instrumental. In the New Testament, however, we only read of vocal music being offered unto God. Had the inspired writers simply said to make music, we would have been free to choose either or both for worship. Since they specified **singing**, that excludes the other form (instrumental) from our service. "Speaking one to another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody with your heart to the Lord..." (Eph. 5:19). (See also Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13; I Corinthians 14:15). Historians agree that "...it is generally believed that the primitive Christians failed to adopt the use of instrumental music in their religious worship." "...the general introduction of instrumental music can certainly not be assigned to date earlier than 5th and 6th centuries..."<sup>3</sup> In our songs we praise God, but also we teach one another the great truths of the faith and exhort each other to walk in the Savior's way (Col. 3:16). In fact, hymns are surely one of our best methods of instruction in doctrine and Christian living.

The Lord's supper is the central feature of the Lord's day assembly (Acts 20:7). Jesus ordained that bread and fruit of the vine be taken in memory of his crucified body and shed blood (Matt. 26:26-29). In communing, we look back to the cross; we look forward to his return (I Cor. 11:26); we look within our own hearts (I Cor. 11:28); we look outward to others as we proclaim the Lord's death (I Cor. 11:26). Since no instructions are given as to how to dispense the sacred elements, we are free to use whatever arrangement is best suited to our needs. The fact that each worshiper is instructed to examine himself before partaking suggests that no one has the right to control who may or may not commune (I Cor. 11:28).

The presenting of gifts to God is an equally important part of worship. We are instructed to give on the first day of the week. (I Cor. 16:1-2). The measure of our gift is, as we have prospered. (**Ibid**). Our gifts are to be planned aforetime and given with a cheerful heart (II Cor. 9:5-7). While the contribution is not part of the Lord's Supper, it should never be depreciated or treated lightly. In giving unto God, we are demonstrating our love and appreciation to him for the wonderful blessings he has showered upon us.

Even Bible reading and preaching are part of our worship to God. Each worshiper participates in this as he hears the message from God's word. It is worship because we hear God's instruction through his word. We learn to live and serve from the teaching. The disciples in Jerusalem continued steadfast in "the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). There is a tendency to count songs, prayers and communion as worship with Bible reading and preaching more in the realm of entertainment or at least a lower type of worship. This is a mistake.

#### V. Generic and Specific Authority

We would do well to take a moment to note how God authorizes things in Christianity. There are two kinds of authority, general and specific. A general command authorizes a matter without spelling out the details. Specific commands pinpoint the very thing to be done. For example, the command to "Go...preach the gospel" (Mk 16:15), is generic as regards the command to go. It leaves unspecified the method of going. One might scripturally use any or all legitimate methods of travel and fulfill this command. On the other hand, the command to "preach the gospel" is specific as to the message to be taught. We have no choice in what we teach for God.

Applied to worship this principle is very helpful. The command to sing in (Ephesians 5:19) excludes playing of instrumental music. The command to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs leaves us free to choose between hundreds of religious songs and yet be pleasing to God. Only non-spiritual songs or songs which teach error would be excluded.

## VI. Divine Essentials and Human Customs and Traditions

An area that often causes problems among Christians is the confusion of customs and traditions associated with the various acts of worship with the divinely required act itself. For example, the ancient practice of one communion cup was thought by many to be as essential as the bread and wine. Some even caused division over the introduction of multiple cups in communion. We must carefully examine the whole range of bible teaching on any given theme and identify the scriptural essentials. In this case, bread symbolizes Christ's crucified body, the fruit of the vine his blood. The container, the table and other utensils we use are left up to the worshipers. So also are such things as the time of Lord's day worship, the meeting house and hundreds of other items. The general command to do a given thing authorizes us to take whatever steps are necessary to fulfill it providing we violate no other divine precept.

The religion of Christ is so basic and simple that it works as well for the sophisticated American as for the primitive bushman. The author has been privileged to worship with "bush" congregations in Southern Africa who met under a shade tree. In their simple way, they worshiped God just as acceptably as we in our modern meeting houses. The trimmings were different but the essentials were the same.

## VII. Some Problem Areas

There are some things commonly observed in the religious world that deserve our attention before we close this study.

Should we observe such religious holy days as Easter and Christmas? G. A. Jacobs, an Episcopalian, writes, "And here it must be...acknowledged that there is in the New Testament no trace whatever of any of those days of hollowed commemoration which are now celebrated in Christian churches." It is an undisputed fact that such holy days were not ordained by Christ and his Apostles. We ask then, by whose authority are they kept. The only answer must be, by man's authority. <sup>4</sup> Worship stemming from the commandments of men is "vain," said Christ (Matt. 15:9). We are "to observe all things whatsoever (Christ) commanded..." (Matt 28:20). Did Christ command us to observe Easter and Christmas? If so, where? Because they were observing days and months and seasons and years," Paul told the Galatian Christians he was afraid that he had bestowed his labor upon them in vain (Gal. 4:11). True Christian worship does not include such holy days.

May women take a leading part in public worship? Two passages relate to this question and determine our practice (I Cor. 14: 33-37 and I Tim. 2:8-14). In the Corinthian passage Paul plainly says, "Let the women keep silence in the churches." He gives us four reasons why:

- 1) It was the universal practice of all the Lord's churches (congregations) (vs. 33);
- 2) They must be in subjection even as the law of Moses taught (vs. 34);
- 3) It is shameful for a woman to speak in the church (vs. 35);
- 4) This was the commandment of the Lord (vs. 37).

In his epistle to Timothy he contrasts the role of men and women.

"I desire therefore that the men pray in every place..." (I Tim. 2:18). "Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection" (2:11). Then he forthrightly declares, "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man..." (2:12). His reasons for this restriction are two: the order of creation and the nature of the fall (2:13-14). In this he says that woman may not fill a role where she will either teach "over a man" or have dominion or authority "over a man." To take a public leadership role in teaching or worship where Christian men are present is a clear violation of this principle. She may freely teach women and children (Tit. 2:3-5), but not men. It is also interesting to note that bishops were to be men who **had wives**, not who were wives (I Tim. 3:1-2).

### Conclusion:

Man does not worship God in order to get something. We can make no bargains with God. Worship is an end in itself. When we try to worship for the sake of certain benefits, the act ceases to be worship for then it is an attempt to use God for personal gain. God must be worshiped for his glory and honor or it is a kind of idolatry, however worthy our motives may be. Worship is primarily the offering of our total selves to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). It is our loving attempt to pay an unpayable debt of appreciation, the expression of devoted hearts to the Giver and Sustainer of our lives.

William Temple wrote: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God".

May we all "ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name; (and) worship Jehovah in holy array" (Ps. 29:2).

### FOOTNOTES

1. James Orr, **International Bible Encyclopedia**, Vol. 5. (Chicago: Howard Severence Co., 1919) p. 311
2. T. B. McDormand, **The Art of Building Worship Services**. (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1958). P. ????
3. McClintock, John; Strong, James. **Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature**, Vol. 6 (New York: Harper and Brothers Pubs., 1980). P 759
4. G. A. Jacobs, **The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament**. (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1878). P. 231.

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## 4.

# UNACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

Modern man is so infatuated with **himself** that he tends to think that God will gladly accept any crumb that he casts toward him. A hungry dog may do so, but the Bible plainly declares that God is not so desperate.

### The Case Established

Through Isaiah, God said to Israel, "What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices?...I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams...I delight not in the blood of bullocks... When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me... Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth... And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. . . when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Is. 1:11-15). The reasons why God rejected their worship are specified: violence, injustice and heartless unconcern for the poor (1:15b-17).

Amos reports God saying to Israel, "I hate, I despise your feast, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them" (5:4-22). Before their worship could be acceptable, justice would have to roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (5:24).

To the Hebrews in Malachi's day God said, "Oh that there were one among you that would shut the door, that ye might not kindle a fire on mine altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you...neither will I accept an offering at your hand" (Mal. 1:10). Their impediment was a lack of appreciation for the worship and institutions of God (1:6b-7, 12). Also they dared to offer second-rate offerings to God which he flatly rejected (1:13-14). Thus our case is thoroughly established that some worship is totally unacceptable, even offensive to our God.

### Some New Testament Examples of Unacceptable Worship

Worship is unacceptable if it is not offered in spirit and truth. "...they that worship him *must* worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). All acceptable worship must involve the spirit or heart of the worshiper. We are taught to obey "from the heart" the divine commandments (Rom. 6:17). Mere outward forms and empty rituals are valueless. Our worship must also be according to the truth of God's word (John 17:17). To go beyond the realm of Biblical; truth is to forfeit God's fellowship (II John 9).

Worship that is by **sight** rather than by **faith** is unacceptable. Paul declares that we walk in faith, not by sight" (II Cor. 5:7). To worship by faith is to worship as God has ordained in Scripture. "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17 KJV). Worship by sight is that which is based on human opinions, traditions or emotions. No man is able to direct his own religious steps in a proper way (Jer. 10:23). The way that seems right often turns out wrong (Prov. 16:25). Worship that stems from man's sinful will is valueless (Col.2:20-23). No matter how beautiful, costly or sincerely done, "in vain do they worship (God) teaching as their doctrines the precepts of man" (Matt. 15:9). May our worship always rest on the solid rock of revealed truth, only then can we be sure it is acceptable.

When we try to impress man, our worship becomes vain. Jesus warns, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them, else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven..." (Matt. 6:1). If we are striving to please men, we should not be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

If we cling to false religion while seeking to worship and serve God, our religion is rejected, Paul wrote the Corinthian brethren, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons. Ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons" (I Cor. 10:21). Ancient Israel sought to serve both Jehovah and Baal (II Chron. 33:15-17). The people in Samaria feared Jehovah and worshiped other gods (I Kings 17:33). Such blending of diverse faiths is called syncretism. It is clearly displayed in Catholicism. It is a common problem on Asian mission fields. An American version is seen in those who want to follow both Jesus' religion and the religion of Masonry. "Masonry is a worship" and a religion (Albert Pike. **Morals and Dogmas of Free Masonry**, p. 526, 219). God is provoked to jealousy by those who want to thus divide their loyalties (I Cor. 10:22).

Those who play friends with the sinful world cannot worship properly. "Friendship with the world is enmity with God" (Jas. 4:4). "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). The carnal, sinful life becomes a barrier between a man and God (Is. 59:1-2). Herein is the contaminate that spoils many a Christian's worship today. We must live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world if we expect God to honor our petitions (Tit. 2:12).

When we are not serious and sincere in discerning what we are about in our worship, God refuses it. In communion, one "eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body" (I Cor. 11:29). To partake in an unworthy manner is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (I Cor. 11:27). What does this say to those who routinely sleep or daydream through worship? Has it any meaning for those young people who whisper, pass notes and play in the assembly? Worshiping the God of the universe is profoundly serious.

Worship is hindered when we are estranged from fellow Christians. "If therefore thou are offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). How many brethren will worship in vain this week because their brother has aught against them?

May our daily prayer be, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Jehovah" (Ps. 19:14). May we so live that our worship will not be rejected.

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## 5.

# ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

What is right? What is wrong? These are natural questions that rise in every human heart. When our hearts turn to religion, we ask how should we worship God? How can we know His will in the matter?

God's will to man is expressed on the pages of the Bible. The inspired writers received "the mind of Christ" and were guided by the Holy Spirit to record the message for us (I Cor. 2:10-13).

Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). He commands us to observe all things whatsoever he commanded (vs. 20). God made him head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). Today we are to honor him even above Moses and Elijah (Matt. 17:1-5). Paul reminds us that "whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). To act "in the name of" a person is to do so by his authority.

Acceptable worship is that which is in harmony with the will of Jesus revealed in the New Testament. Christ, through

his Apostles, ordained that his church commemorate his crucifixion by the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-29). We are commanded to give our gifts unto God on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2). We are instructed to praise God with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts (Col 3:16). We see the early church praying and hearing God's message preached (Acts 4:23-24; 20:7). More than this you cannot find in the New Covenant.

Faithful Christians will humbly worship and serve God, neither adding to nor diminishing from His will (Deut. 4:2). If we wish to see God and live with him in eternity we must so honor his word, for Jesus is the author of eternal salvation only for those who **obey him** (Heb. 5:8-9).

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## 6.

### ASPECTS OF ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP

- \* Acceptable worship must be **Biblical**, i.e. according to the instructions God has given us. Jesus said, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).
- \* It must be **reverent**, i.e., showing proper respect and deference to the great God we are approaching (Heb. 12:13).
- \* It must be with **pure hearts and lives**. "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (Jas. 4:8).
- \* Worship should be with **joyful hearts**. "My mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips" (Ps. 63:5).
- \* God expects our worship to proceed **from our minds as well as from our emotions**. We must worship with the spirit and the understanding (I Cor. 14:15).
- \* Pleasing worship will be **whole-hearted**. We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind (Matt. 22:37). Half-hearted or indifferent worship is not acceptable to Him.
- \* True worship will be **offered with enthusiasm**. "Serve Jehovah with gladness" (Ps. 100:2). Like David, we should be glad when they say to us, "Let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Ps. 122:1).
- \* We should worship the Lord **with the best we have to offer**. "But whatsoever hath a blemish that shall ye not offer: for it shall not be acceptable for you" (Lev. 22:20). Give God your best attention and effort in worship and your best gifts as offerings.

Remember, God is not so desperate for worship that He will accept any scraps or second rate efforts we toss Him. There is no greater blessing than to come before the Creator in adoring worship and be accepted by Him. There is no greater loss than to come before him in an unacceptable way and be rejected.

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## 7.

### THINGS YOU NEED TO BRING TO WORSHIP

Each Lord's Day God expects his children to assemble together for his worship. Just as we need to take certain things with us when we go to work, visit a friend or take a trip, there are things we need to bring with us when we worship.

\* We must bring with us a determination to **revere God** (Eccle 12:13). We do not assemble for fun, play or entertainment. Our purpose is to worship and adore our Lord.

\* There must be a **desire to please God** in all we say or do. That is the essence of worship. Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

\* We must come with an **open mind**. In worship we lift up our songs and prayers, but we also receive instruction in God's Word. We must be prepared to "receive with meekness the implanted word" (Jas. 1:21).

\* To worship acceptably, we must **have a humble, penitent spirit**. At our best, we are still sinners. To approach our righteous, sinless God, we must be truly sorry for our sins and failures and willing to confess them to the only One who can forgive them. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins..." (1 John 1:9). God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6). Like the publican, we come begging, "God be thou merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

\* If we hope to have our worship accepted, we must **bring a forgiving heart**. Jesus made it crystal clear that worship is hindered until we have been reconciled to our brother (Matt. 5:23). Anger, grudges and lack of forgiveness negate what we might offer in worship.

\* We should **bring an uncluttered mind** when we assemble. To commune without discerning the Lord's body is to bring judgement upon oneself (1 Cor. 11:29). Try to have all things possible arranged on the Saturday before worship. Rise up early so you will not have to rush. Spend a few moments in quiet prayer and contemplation. Artists and performers do this before they undertake their performance. Christians need to clear their minds of the cares of this world before they worship (Matt. 13:23).

\* Bring with you a **heart of thanksgiving** (Ps. 95:2). Ungrateful folks should not expect to receive yet more blessings from the Giver of every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17).

\* Come with an **attitude of anticipation**. Worship should be the most blessed and rewarding hour of our week. We anticipate a good meal. We anticipate a great performance at a concert. So we should anticipate a wonderful spiritual feast when we assemble for worship.

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## 8.

### JOY IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

\* David wrote, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Ps. 122:1). Likewise, God wants us to find joy in our worship.

\* We should sing with joy in our hearts and enjoy so doing. "Make a joyful noise unto Jehovah..." (Ps. 10:1).

\* We should find joy in hearing the gospel preached and taught in its purity. "Oh how love I thy law! it is my meditation

all the day" (Ps. 119:97). People heard Christ gladly (Mk. 12:37).

- \* We should give our gifts unto God with joyful hearts for "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7).
- \* Joy should fill our hearts as we remember our beloved Lord in the communion. We are sorry that he had to die for our sins, but so happy that he was willing to do so.
- \* Our prayers and supplications should be offered up with joy (Phil. 1:4).
- \* With joy we should meet and fellowship with our beloved family in Christ. Paul longed to see his brethren at Thessalonica with joy in his heart (I Thess. 3:9-10).
- \* When we assemble for worship it is a time to "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 4:4). We should do our best to leave frowns, sadness and sorrows behind and allow God to fill our hearts and souls "with all joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 14:14). As David said, "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good: Blessed (happy) is the man that taketh refuge in him" (Ps. 34:8).

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## **WORSHIP THAT BUILDS UP ITS PARTICIPANTS**

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### **9.**

## **WORSHIP GOD WITH REVERENCE AND AWE**

God has ordained that we worship him (Rev. 22:9). The church exists to praise God and honor his name (Acts 2:47). Our challenge is to worship God in an acceptable manner. Acceptable worship is conditioned on worshipping according to His revealed will (Matt. 7:21), doing what God expects of us in the way he said to do it.

It is just as important that we worship with appropriate reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28). It is always expected that God's creatures show appropriate reverence toward the Creator (Eccl. 12:13). "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified" (Lev. 10:3). This is especially the case when we assemble as his church to worship Him and study his Word.

When we worship, we stand on holy ground in the presence of the great I AM. Remember the story of Moses before the burning bush, when he stood in the presence of God. Jehovah spoke to his servant and reminded him that in His presence, he stood on holy ground. Moses was filled with awe. He hid his face and was afraid to look upon God (Ex. 3:3-5). Similarly it behooves all of us to keep this foremost in our hearts when the time arrives to approach God in worship. We all should :

- \* Show respect by our silence. "Be still and know that I am God" (PS. 46:10). "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him" (Hab. 2:20). Let all chit-chat cease when worship begins.
- \* Show respect by clearing our minds of all thoughts save those of adoration and praise for God (Jas. 4:8).
- \* Show respect by listening to and accept the instruction from God's Word (Josh. 3:9; Ps. 119:117).
- \* Show respect by appropriate solemnity and gravity (Heb. 12:28; Is. 17:7). Worship is no time for cuteness, for

flippancy, casualness or comedy. This is important for both those who lead and those who follow in worship and service. This sacred reverence should be reflected in our sermons, our singing, our prayers and communion. It should be evident in our classes as well as our worship hour. We who are adults must teach this truth to our children by instruction and by our godly example.

The reason we must worship God with reverence and awe is because he “is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28). He is our Creator and Lord. He has the power to kill and make alive, to wound and to heal (Deut. 32:39). He alone has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matt. 10:28). Because Jesus is in our midst when we assemble, we must show proper deference to his majesty (Matt. 18:20). May reverence and awe always and on every occasion be conspicuous in our assemblies for worship and study.

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## 10.

### THE SERIOUS BUSINESS OF WORSHIP

One of our rich privileges as Christians is to approach God in worship. When we meet on the first day of the week our purpose is to worship the Creator through his Son (I Tim. 2:5). The author of Hebrews reminds us to “offer service well-pleasing to God *with reverence and awe*: for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb.12:28 ). Our sermons, songs, prayers, communion and offerings should be presented to our Lord with the dignity and reverence appropriate for Almighty God. “Serious implies a concern for what really matters. Sober stresses seriousness of purpose and absence of levity or frivolity” (Webster). Those who preach, teach or lead in songs and prayers should be prepared for their task so they will do a good job in leading God’s people in worship. Never should worship be treated in a careless, flippant or foolish way. The God of creation is worthy of our best efforts.

Those who preach should stand as the Sovereign God’s representatives to dying men, beseeching them to be reconciled unto God (II Cor. 5:20). Knowing the terror of the Lord, they must persuade lost souls to turn to Him (II Cor. 5:11). The pulpit of Christ’s church is no place for clowns, comedians or those who treat the church or the gospel lightly. Some preachers obviously have not understood this point.

We expect those who preach to be prepared and do their best when leading in worship. So also those privileged to lead in communion, songs and prayers should prepare themselves and make their very best to do so in a solemn and effective way. In so doing they will honor God and bless all who participate. When guiding hearts in worship to God, there is no place for being cute, winging it and cracking jokes.

Our worship should be a teaching experience so that all who come will have something spiritually valuable to take home with them (I Cor. 14:9, 24-25).

Our services should be conducted in such a way that our visitors will see the beauty of divine worship that is Biblically based. Think back over your experiences in worship. When services are well-led, our hearts and souls are lifted up and inspired. When they are poorly done, the opposite may be the result. The average visitor with a denominational background will be impressed with our a cappella singing, our weekly communion, our lack of ritual or clergy. But he should not be impressed with a casual attitude, poor singing, lack of preparation, lack of reverence.

It is essential that our worship activities edify those who participate. The word edify means to build up, to encourage, to strengthen (I Cor. 14:26). A prayer can only edify if it can be heard, if it reflects the needs of those being led. Songs only edify when the worshipers know them and when they are pitched and led properly. Sermons that are boring, rambling and disconnected cannot edify. Nor can those that are filled with jokes, trivia and little scripture.

When leading in folks in worship, we must consider **how our conduct appears** not only to our fellow-Christians, but **to those who are visiting our assemblies**. Most people from Catholic, and mainline Protestant churches are accustomed to worship that is serious, reverent, solemn, well-planned and smoothly conducted. If they come and observe our worship sprinkled with joking, petty talk and fumbling efforts, think what their impression must be. Thus it behooves all who are privileged to lead in worship to make proper preparation so as to do their very best. Paul was concerned lest he had bestowed labor upon his hearers in vain (Gal. 4: 11). No matter how well prepared and delivered a lesson may be, an atmosphere of irreverence, frivolity or slovenliness in worship can nullify its impact on the heart of sinners. They leave, never to return, thinking, "they did not exhibit proper reverence for God." Paul exhorts us, "Give no occasion of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God" ( I Cor. 10:32).

Whenever we worship Jehovah, always keep in mind that: "Holy and reverend is his name" (Ps. 111:9). Our service should exhibit proper reverence for the Great I AM. Remember, the way we conduct our worship conveys a lesson to our visitors, just as powerfully as our sermon. May that lesson always be positive, constructive and above all else Scriptural. Let us always give our best to the Master.

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## 11.

### HOW THEN SHOULD WE WORSHIP?

When we come together to worship our God, we should be filled deep emotion.

\* There should be joy unspeakable that such is our privilege (Ps. 9:2).

\* There should be overflowing gratitude for all God has done for us (Ps. 107:1-2). "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15).

\* There should be reverential awe (Heb. 12: 28). With fear and trembling we approach the Almighty God (Eccle. 12:13).

\* There should be penitent confession of sin and unworthiness (Is. 6:5).

\* Our prayers should be fervent (Rom. 12:11), in harmony with God's will and by all means reverent.

\* Our singing must be filled with praise, and thanksgiving to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It must reflect appropriate reverence in the sentiments expressed. This eliminate many songs, that while religious in nature, do not emote a melody or theme of sacred reverence to God. Thus we do not use them.

\* Our gifts should be presented to God with love, gratitude and willingness of heart (II Cor. 8: 7). They should be liberal gifts from thankful hearts. We must not think of this as dues to be paid, or an admission fee. It is a gift of love to our beloved Father.

\* Our teaching should be biblical, serious, pertinent to the occasion (Acts 20:27). It should be planned, prepared and clear in meaning. It too should show utmost reverence and respect for God and his Word.

The entire atmosphere of our worship must reflect our love and adoration for the Supreme Being of Heaven and Earth. With the saints of old, we sing, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Ps. 103:1). Like the heavenly hosts, with hearts over-flowing, we proclaim, worthy of praise is the Lord God and his Son (Rev. 4:11; 5:12).

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## 12.

### A WHOLESOME ATMOSPHERE FOR WORSHIP

For man to survive he must have a healthy atmosphere in which to live. Too little oxygen or too much carbon dioxide make human life impossible. So it is with worship. To worship effectively and successfully, the atmosphere must be favorable.

It would impossible to worship God while sitting amid 50,000 screaming fans at a ball game or concert. Thus God tells us, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). It would be most difficult to worship in a noisy factory with the sound of pounding machinery. You could not conduct worship in a room where people are watching and listening to a television broadcast. You cannot worship while carrying on a phone conversation with someone. An individual cannot worship effectively if he is so tired that he has fallen asleep.

There are things that hinder congregational worship, by disrupting the atmosphere for worship.

- \* Cell-phones ringing in the midst of worship.
- \* People wandering in and out of the assembly.
- \* Whispering and conversation during worship.
- \* Children who are allowed to misbehave during worship.
- \* Complaining and criticizing the efforts of other worshipers.
- \* When the services are not conducted in an smooth and organized way.
- \* When things not related to God's worship are injected into the service. Personal observations and asides that have nothing to do with worship can be distracting.
- \* Jokes and funny comments interfere with the atmosphere of worship.
- \* Songs the congregation do not know or cannot sing effectively hinder the worship.

For our congregational worship to be most effective and beneficial

- \* All need to be present and in their seats a few moments before the service begins. This eliminates confusion.
- \* There must be a quiet and peaceful environment in the assembly.
- \* There must be reverence in each heart.
- \* There should be an air of expectation as those present eagerly anticipate receiving a wonderful blessing.
- \* Those present must pay attention to what is transpiring and concentrate on hearing God's word and learning the lesson of the hour.

- \* There must be participation in the songs and prayers by all those present.
- \* Good worship is well-planned and supervised so that each segment flows smoothly, without distraction.
- \* Those who lead in worship must be well-prepared to do their part.
- \* While prayers are spontaneous and not read from a book of prayers, those expressing them should give prior thought to what they will say and how to express themselves.'
- \* Songs should be selected from those we know and rehearsed ahead of time so they will go smoothly and without failure.
- \* Words and thoughts expressed by those who lead should be directly related to the worship of God and designed to edify all who are present.

There is no greater joy or blessing than to worship Jehovah in the beauty of holiness (Ps. 29:2 KJV). But it is a disappointment to go to God's house for worship and find the atmosphere such that worship is hindered or disrupted.

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## 13.

### **WORSHIP THAT UPLIFTS AND MAKES A FAVORABLE IMPRESSION**

When the church assembles for worship several things transpire simultaneously.

1. We adore, praise and honor our God.
2. We are built up, edified and strengthened by our participation.
3. Visitors to our assemblies are taught the way of truth. They also worship with us. They observe our actions and decide whether they want to return and be a part of our congregation.

It is true that God looks at our hearts and not at our outward performance. It is also true that we can still find joy, strength and blessings even when our services are poorly done. But those who are visiting with us tend to view the way we conduct our worship with a more discriminating eye than do we. If we forget, fumble and stumble, we tend to smile or laugh about it. If there is confusion in our worship program, we understand what we are doing and it does not keep us from returning. But the person who is use to worshipping with a church where the services are well organized and each participant knows his role and does it smoothly, is not likely to be very impressed with us if our efforts seem ragged, haphazard and confused.

Paul wrote the Corinthians "let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 15:40). He reminded them that "God is not a God of confusion, but of peace" (15:33). He insisted that "all things be done unto edifying" (15:26). This being the case we owe it to God, ourselves and our visitors to strive to have our worship activities well planned and smoothly executed. To achieve that, all who serve can help:

- \* Arrive at the services sufficiently early that you can know if you are to serve.
- \* Upon arrival, check the service schedule to determine what your assignment may be.
- \* Advise the coordinator that you are ready to fill your assignment.

- \* Before the service starts take a seat near the front of the auditorium so you can quickly and easily step to the microphone or Communion Table and fulfill your task.
- \* If you are helping to distribute the communion, arrange your seating so that there will be no milling about when you take your place.
- \* If you are assigned to pray, step to the microphone so all can hear you.
- \* If you are to make the table talk, be prepared and focused on the Lord's Supper and be brief in your comments.
- \* If you are assigned to lead our singing, have your selection of songs chosen ahead of time. It will be very helpful if you can coordinate your songs with the theme of the sermon. A phone call ahead of time will enable you to determine that. Also it would be good to make sure your selections are familiar to the congregation. That can be determined with a phone call to your preacher.
- \* For all of our members, if you enter the auditorium after the services have begun, enter at the rear door and walk to your seat. It is distracting to stroll across in the front isle while the services are being engaged in.
- \* By all means turn off your cell phones before entering the auditorium. If by chance you forget and your phone rings, immediately shut it off. Don't try to whisper a conversation while we are trying to worship.
- \* All personal conversations should wait until the service is over. If something absolutely must be said, jot it on a note to give to the person.
- \* Do your very best not to do anything that can distract those who have come to worship. Leave your grouching, grumbling and criticisms at home. Put on a happy face.

When we assemble, remember that our actions are part of our sermon that our visitors will see. Your best efforts will encourage them to return. Thoughtless actions could cause them to never come again.

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## 14.

### WHAT DID OUR NEIGHBORS SEE?

Virtually every Lord's Day we are blessed to have visitors in our assemblies and Bible classes. We must assume they are honest souls seeking for God's truth that will make them free from sin (John 8:32). Many of them come with backgrounds in other religious bodies. Most denominational bodies conduct their worship services with great reverence and respect for God. Should people from one of those traditions visit our services we must ponder what their impression might be?

If we approach God with solemn reverence and dignity, they will worship God and declare that God is among us in indeed (I Cor. 14:25). We will be able to teach them the way of the Lord more accurately (Acts 18:26) and bring them into Christ's fold. For this to be the result it is essential that all we say and do be done in a decent and orderly fashion with appropriate reverence (I Cor. 14:40).

If on the other hand they observe chaos, confusion, frivolity and irreverence, they might respond quiet differently:

- a. They might walk away in disgust, concluding that we don't take the worship of God very seriously. Or,
- b. They could conclude that worship need not be considered a serious thing and thus they will attempt to worship God

with less respect than when they sought to worship him in man-made churches with no spiritual standing with the Master. That would be tragic indeed.

The importance of how others are affected by our behavior and example is seen in the following cases. Jesus said, that “whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6). When writing of our influence on others who are seeking after God, Paul wrote, “Wherefore, if meat causeth my brother to stumble, I will eat no flesh for evermore, that I cause not by brother to stumble” (I Cor. 8:13).

When we enter our hour of worship or study, let us all be prepared to “offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe” (Heb. 12:28). May our godly example lead others to the Savior.

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## 15.

### **WE MUST WORSHIP GOD IN AN ORDERLY MANNER**

Our God does his work in an orderly way. We can see this in the universe He created. It is vast in extent, with untold billions of individual pieces (some living and some without life, yet all of them functioning in an orderly arrangement). The creation is intricate in detail, yet it all functions in a predictable way. This is true because God created a system of laws by which the creation is designed to function. Thus, the sun arises each morning in a predictable way. The seed brings forth a predictable crop. The great bodies of the heavens race through space without colliding. Ours is a God of order.

In His spiritual kingdom, God expects his people and his church to likewise function in an orderly manner. Chaos prevailed in the assemblies of the church in Corinth. Paul reminded the Corinthians that God is not a God of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). He expects us to do all things decently and orderly (I Cor. 14:40).

This need for order is most evident in our worship. Acceptable worship is not an accident. Pains should be taken to make sure that our services of worship are properly planned and that each part of the service will transpire in a smooth, orderly way, without confusion.

Preachers must surely plan and prepare their sermons. Those who lead in praise should give thought to which songs they will sing and make sure that those selected will be most appropriate for the occasion, the time and the theme of the day. One would not lead a closing hymn at the beginning of the service, nor a hymn about communion just before the contribution is taken. Nor would we choose to sing **O Why Not Tonight** for the invitation song at the morning service. Those who preside at the Lord’s Supper should give prior thought to what they will say. A service that is unplanned and chaotic does not glorify God nor does it bless those who are present. The stranger in our midst will wonder, “Why do these people show such lack of respect to God?”

Prior thought should be given to unexpected situations and events, lest confusion prevail. Should someone respond asking for baptism, we should be prepared to assist them in their obedience. There should be no confusion in so doing. Should someone fall sick, we should have a plan to see to their needs. Should someone attempt to disrupt our worship, a plan



should be in place to deal with them. If something in our place of worship should malfunction, someone should be prepared to see to it. Should a fire break out or a damaging storm strike while we are worshipping, a prior plan should be in place to meet that emergency. Thought and planning ahead of time will make sure that such unexpected events will not throw the assembly into confusion.

It is true that God has not prescribed a “ritualistic” form of worship, but neither does He want us to a worship in a haphazard, unplanned, chaotic way.

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## 16.

### WORSHIPING GOD IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH

Jesus said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). In this brief statement, our Lord sets forth the essence of Christian worship.

#### True Worship

It is man the creature’s responsibility to worship the Creator. Worship is defined, “to make obeisance, do reverence to.....an act of homage...to God” (Vine’s Expo. Dict. of New Test. Words, pp. 235). Our worship then must be God-centered and not man-centered. More than a duty, it is the exalted privilege and honor of man to worship his God. However, not all worship is acceptable. Jesus tells us that God seeks “true worshipers” (John 4:23). This must be our goal and desire. It is not enough to worship, it *must* be true worship! The term *must* is exclusive. There is no alternative; no personal choice, it *must* be of a certain nature, i.e., “in spirit and truth!”

#### Ingredients of True Worship

The Lord gives two qualifications of true and acceptable worship. We shall notice the last first. It must be “in truth.” There is a true worship. It is regulated and guided by God’s truth. It is prescribed by God. Man, unaided by divine revelation, could never know how to worship acceptably (see Eph. 3:1-6). God’s Word, the Scripture, *is truth* (John 17:17). Therefore our worship must be found in the Book of God in order to be in truth.

#### “What is Truth?”

We can arrive at the same conclusion as above from another course. Paul states, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin”(Rom. 14:23). The same author gives the only source of faith. “So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We can make the following logical deduction from these truths.

1. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin (This includes worship)
2. But faith comes by hearing the word of God
3. Therefore if our worship is not directed by the word of God, it is not “of faith” and is therefore sinful.

#### Truth and Tradition

Our worship must be in truth as contrasted with all forms of idolatry and paganism. But it must also be in truth, i.e., according to God’s written direction, in contrast to the varied forms of Protestant, Catholic and cultic worship that have originated from men. Jesus declares that worship based upon man’s traditions is vain (Matt. 15:9). This principle, when recognized and obeyed, will sweep away all human innovations in worship leaving only the pure worship ordained by

Christ in his New Testament. All special holy days of worship such as Easter and Christmas will be laid aside, leaving only the Lord's Day. No more will men burn incense, light candles, use holy water, make the sign of the cross, count beads, kneel before "sacred" images or pray before "holy relics. No instrument of music, other than the human heart and voice, will assist those who worship in truth. The Lord's Supper will be a simple memorial, not a mass, not a transubstantiation nor a con-substantiation. Our giving will be a sacrifice well pleasing unto God, given cheerfully and liberally (II Cor. 9:7. It will not be a tax paid or a chance on a prize; not the purchase of a meal nor some entertainment at a "church carnival".

True worshippers worship God in truth. Sincerity is not enough in itself. We cannot question the sincerity of Muslims, Hindus, Jews or Buddhists; yet their worship is rejected because it is not in truth, i.e., not as God directs in the Bible. This is no less true of the human innovations in the worship of those who profess Christ.

### **Worshipping in Spirit**

Acceptable worship must be "in spirit." Spiritual worship is opposed to the carnal modes of worship of the pagans and even the physical centered worship of Moses' law. Christ taught there would be no more earthly temples, animal sacrifices, material altars, incense or other items made by men's hands. There would be no more feasts or fasts; nor pomp and pageantry of ritual. In Christ, it is a spiritual worship of God who is Spirit."

Under Christ, the worshiper himself is the temple of the Holy Spirit which he has from God (I Cor. 6:19). Paul speaks of serving God in his spirit (Rom. 1:9). The Christian is to pray at all seasons in the Spirit (Eph. 6:18). We must present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God which is our spiritual service (Rom. 12:1-2). Together, Christians form a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God (I Pet. 2:5). We pray with the spirit and with the understanding; we sing with the spirit and understanding also (I Cor. 14:15). God bestows spiritual blessings on those who are His children (Eph. 1:3). Mature Christians are spiritual but the sinfully immature are carnal (I Cor. 3:1).

### **Spiritual Worship Verses Emotionalism**

To worship God in spirit suggest several things. Worship must be of the highest motives, the most sublime sensibilities of the soul. Yet it certainly is not emotionalism, nor mere animal excitement or sensationalism such as is seen in charismatic churches. It requires no gimmickry; no mystical effects of special lighting; no images or crosses. Such gimmicks betray a search for a "cheap spirituality." Some want "instant spirituality" like instant food that requires little effort to enjoy, rather than a true devotion of the heart unto God. The New Testament gives not the slightest hint of anything remotely resembling the modern charismatic type of worship. True worship makes no attempt to display itself before men and seeks no worldly recognition (Matt. 6:1-16). It seeks only to please God (Gal. 1:10).

True spirituality in worship is "doing the will of God from the heart" (Eph. 6:6). It is sincere in every motive and void of offence (Phil. 1:10). There must be a deep and abiding love for God (Matt. 22:37). This certainly involves the deepest emotions of the heart yet does not by-pass the intellect which God gave us. The fact that God's written revelation must pass through and be absorbed by the intellect of man's mind before his emotions can respond to its appeal, proves the important role of reason in true worship.

Spiritual worship will sometimes bring tears (Luke 6:21); both of joy and sorrow. Again, we will make a joyful noise unto the Lord (Ps. 100:1). Spiritual worship may express its approval with an "amen" (I Cor. 14:16). Acceptable worship involves the whole personality: all the heart; all the soul; all the mind; all the strength (Mk. 12:30). It is not limited to church meeting houses. I have worshiped as meaningfully with brethren under a tree in the heart of Africa as ever I have in an air-conditioned church house.

### **True Worship is Not...**

True worship is not bound to a **traditional arrangement of services**. Often we have unconsciously slipped into a rote manner of worship that allows us to engage in a ritual affair with hardly a serious thought or moment of concentration. Worship is no heartless practice of watching others perform and then paying our dues for the privilege. It is a personal

spiritual involvement in songs and prayers, communion and study and the giving of gifts unto God. It is not just an adherence to customary practices; for example, the invitation song, the 30 minute sermon, the fancy communion ware and the like. It is worshiping in spirit and truth as God directs in the New Testament!

### **Between Two Dangerous Extremes**

We stand in danger of two extremes in the church. One, the extreme of cold, lifeless, formalistic, ritualism, scripturally correct in form but spiritless and dead. The other, emotionalism, with no regard for the authority of Scripture. The latter from the heart perhaps, but wrong by transgressing God's word. Everything must be done in the name of (by authority of) the Lord (Col. 3:17). God rejects either extreme (see Amos 4:21-24; Luke 6:46; I Cor. 14:40).

Sadly, the rising trend of emotionalism has likely been triggered by a blind reaction to the spiritual deadness of many congregations. Extremes beget extremes. Can we not see the true path of acceptable worship down the middle path between the extremes? We need more spirituality in our worship: for the good of our own souls and to remove the stumbling block that may drive others to the opposite extreme. Unadulterated New Testament worship of God will satisfy the soul-needs of mankind. May we correctly perceive it, offer it up to God and teach others to do the same.

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## **17.**

### **YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN WORSHIP**

To worship God is the most sacred of all man's endeavors. The creature dares to approach his Creator. Finite man comes into the presence of the infinite God. Sinful people seek an audience with Jehovah who is pure and righteous altogether. Man, who knows precious little of the ways and will of Almighty God, desires to commune with the divine Source of all knowledge, truth and wisdom. Moses was ordered to remove his shoes for the place where he stood was holy ground (Ex. 3:5). When we enter into worship we too are standing on holy ground. It behooves all who hope their worship will be accepted, to approach God with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28). We should tremble at the thought of offending the God of judgment by thoughtless, careless, disrespectful conduct.

Every member of the congregation must understand that worship is no time for thoughtlessness or silliness. Turn your cell-phones off before you enter the assembly. Worship is no time for conversation. It is not a time for jokes, and hilarity, laughing and giggling. It is not a time for practicing songs the leader or the congregation does not know. It is not a time for voicing complaints or criticisms about fellow-Christians.

When we have worshiped, everyone should ask himself or herself these questions:

- \* Was God glorified by our worship?
- \* Was my conduct duly reverent and respectful toward God?
- \* Were those present uplifted spiritually and edified by being present in our service?
- \* What kind of impression did we make on the strangers in our midst? Were they be led to say, "Surely these people fear Jehovah" or would they ask, "Don't these people realize that ye they are in God's presence, seeking his blessing?"
- \* If I were a member of some other religious body, would the conduct of our worship be such that I would want to come again?

Let each of us resolve that for our part, our worship will truly honor God and inspire those in our midst.

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## 18.

### TWO KINDS OF WORSHIP

There is kind of worship that appeals to the spiritual nature of man and there is a kind that appeals to the fleshly, animal nature. We see this in secular music. Patriotic songs and sweet songs about love, home and family appeal to man's higher instincts while the wild music of the dance hall and rock concert appeals to the lowest aspects of man's nature.

The music Christ ordained for his church was that of "speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Early Christians knew about religious music accompanied by instruments. Jewish converts had seen it at their temple. Gentiles had observed it in their pagan temples. But when they worshiped God through Christ, they praised God with sweet vocal hymns of devotion (Heb. 13:15).

Today some among us are clamoring for instruments of music. They justify themselves by insisting such will help them praise God better. Consider the following quotes that address this very issue.

**Richard Wagner** (1813-1883), famous German composer, made the following observation:

"There is no doubt but that those qualities absolutely necessary to church music, namely, modesty, dignity, and soulfulness are more inherent in the vocal style than in any other. Reserve and humble restraint befits the house of God...Religious feeling finds its most natural expression in vocal utterance, for the human heart is the source of both devotion and song" (*Catholic Encyclopedia* (1911), Vol 10, p. 651).

Of the other type of worship, that which appeals more to the senses, **D. B. Cameron** wrote:

"...this mode of worship fosters a craving for sensational novelties. As it excites the natural sensibilities, it creates a desire for further indulgence of the same nature, for the more that kind of pleasure is gratified, the more its votaries demand. It acts much on people as the exhilaration of strong drink, so that many become quite enslaved at last to the enjoyment of this kind of religious aesthetics. When spirituality decays, people invent external attractions in worship. Many mistake the soothing effects or buoyant feelings produced by fine music for spiritual effects, but they are entirely sensuous" (*Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 1889, pp. 518-519).

**James Beggs** observed:

Some argue "...that organs and a splendid ceremonial must have the effect of elevating and refining the soul, of arousing and exalting all the better principles and feelings of our moral natures; and that, therefore, it is scarcely possible to imagine that their religious use can be absolutely unlawful in the Christian Church. Now all this is a mere delusion, contradicted by history and experience. In proportion as the senses and imagination are excited and gratified, the soul is generally starved...All idolaters maintain that the fine arts generally, but perhaps especially music and sculpture, have a direct and necessary tendency to refine and elevate the human soul above the groveling pursuits of sense and sin. The theory is very plausible, and is apt to be eagerly

embraced by the ignorant and thoughtless. The facts of history, however, teach a very different lesson” (Open Forum, **The Converted Catholic Magazine**, May 1954, p. 159).

**Robert Milligan**, 19<sup>th</sup> century gospel preacher, wrote,

“...the general tendency of instrumental music is to quench the influence of the Spirit in the heart, and to promote in the churches a cold, barren, and lifeless formalism, has I think, been historically demonstrated; for otherwise, how shall we account for the fact that, wherever the organ is used, there is at least manifested a constant tendency to give up congregational singing...” (**The Great Commission**, pp. 208-209).

**C. G. Herbermann** sums it up in a forceful way;

“...the first Christians were of too spiritual a fibre to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice” (C. G. Herbermann, **Catholic Encyclopedia**, 1911, Vol. 10, p. 648).

May we not repeat the mistake of those who seek a sensual experience at the cost of the truly spiritual. JHW

\* Quotes are from James Bales, **Instrumental Music & New Testament Worship**, 1973.

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## 19.

### **PATRIARCHAL, MOSAIC AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

All men everywhere worship something. Since the beginning, God has appointed three kinds of worship, each with its own peculiar characteristics. First there was what has been called **patriarchal worship**. In that, the family worshiped together with the patriarch or father of the clan leading them. It involved animal sacrifice and prayers. The fathers instructed their families in the ways of Jehovah (Gen. 12:8; 18:19). They had no priesthood, no written revelation or central place to assemble for their worship. This system prevailed from Adam to Moses.

When God delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage he constituted them a nation with their own laws and land. With that he also commissioned a new kind of worship. It has been styled the **Mosaic system** since it was through Moses that God revealed it. This was a national system for the Hebrew people (Deut. 5:1-6). It had a central house of worship for the nation which at first was a portable tabernacle that was carried with them from place to place and eventually was settled in Jerusalem. The tribe of Levi was appointed for the priestly tribe and the family of Aaron the Levite was given the responsibility of all public ministrations. The five books of Moses (the Torah) were its written code of law and these had as their primary basis the Ten Commandments. Their designated day of worship was the Sabbath or seventh day of the week. This system had an elaborate ritual of worship and at its heart was a never-ending procession of animal sacrifices. The forgiveness and righteousness it offered its adherents was temporary and based upon their keeping God's law in an acceptable fashion. This system separated the Hebrews from their Gentile neighbors and their idolatrous practices. It ended when Christ was crucified (Col. 2:14-16).

When God sent his Son to redeem humanity and to usher in the kingdom of heaven, he ordained a new form of religion and worship suitable for the citizens of that kingdom. This **Christian system** was designed to be universal, for all

nations (Matt. 28:19-20). It was to be ruled over by the exalted Son (Eph. 1:20-22). It had but one sacrifice, the life of Jesus given on Calvary, which God accepted as the propitiation for the sins of humanity (I John 2:1-2). In Christ's system, all Christians are members of the royal priesthood (I Pet. 2:5,9) and thus qualified to offer up their own sacrifices and offerings to God. It's public worship is centered in the assemblies of Christians (churches) on the Lord's Day (I Cor. 11:20-33; Acts 20:7). It is regulated by the New Testament of Jesus which provides all things that pertain to life and godliness" (II Pet. 1:3). It's day of worship is "the Lord's day" or the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2). This system is age lasting, designed to last until time is no more (I Cor. 15:25-27).

There are fundamental differences in Christian worship and that of the Mosaic system. This fact is often overlooked by our religious neighbors. That system was based on animal sacrifice, ours on the death of Christ. That system was based on Moses' law, ours on the Law of Christ. That was a system of law-keeping, ours is a system of grace. That system was temporary, but our is permanent. That was based on race, ours is based on spiritual relations. That was a system of material ritual, while ours is that of spiritual worship (John 4:24). That promised physical, temporal blessings, while ours promises salvation from sin, spiritual blessings and eternal life. That system was inferior to ours in every way (Heb. 8:6-9).

The marvel is that most of the Christian world prefers to go to that old system for much of their worship and practice, feeling that the New Testament of Christ is too oppressive in its demands. True followers of Christ honor him as the only head of the church (Eph. 1:22) and his New Covenant as the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25). Paul describes those who try to cling to elements of the Old Testament as reverting to the weak and beggarly elements of the world (Gal. 4:9-11). Christians should rejoice and give thanks daily for the wonderful system we have in Christ.

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## 20.

### TO BE A SPIRITUAL PERSON

Christ is set before every Christian as the goal toward which we strive. The more we grow to be like Christ, the more "spiritual" we become. One can be a Christian and yet not be "spiritual." Such was the plight of the Corinthians (I Cor. 3:1). Hopefully the thoughts of this lesson will help us all grow to be more like Jesus, hence more spiritual men and women.

I. Spirituality is greatly concerned about true values, right attitudes and correct motives. Unfortunately, some people engage in religious activities for wrong motives. Pharisees did their righteous deeds to be seen of men (Matt. 6:1). Whatever we do, it must be "to the glory of God," not self (I Cor. 10:31). Even those who preach and teach Christ must be careful lest they do so of envy and strife or other faulty motives (Phil. 1:15-17). The spiritual person follows the path of maximum service and minimal selfishness. He desires "right for the sake of right, truth for the sake of truth, love for love's own sake, honor for honor's sake, humility for the virtue in humility."

II. Spirituality is tested by its comparative interest in temporal and eternal rewards. Temporal rewards are those positions in life which feed pride, give prominence, afford great financial remuneration or otherwise bestow rewards that belong only to the present life. Eternal rewards, on the other hand, look to God and eternity for their fulfillment. Moses gave up temporal rewards of high station in Egypt and cast his lot with God's people because "he looked to the recompense of reward" which God offered (Heb. 11:24-26). Paul said that he held not his life of any account as dear to himself so

that he could accomplish his course and the ministry he had received from Christ (Acts 20:24). His spiritual value system was properly ordered.

III. Spiritual power comes when we weep over our sins and those of others. The greatness of Paul's spiritual strength is seen in the fact that despite all his notable attainments he still felt himself to be "the chief of sinners" (I Tim 1:15). His great heart ached for his fellow Hebrews who were yet in unbelief (Rom. 9:1). He wept for enemies of the cross, rather than despise or hate them (Phil. 3:17-19). May God give us a tender heart and sensitive conscience.

IV. A spiritual soul is able to judge properly between the most important and less important things. He will then have the courage and strength to choose the right, no matter the difficulties involved or the consequences thereof. He knows that one soul is more precious than the whole world (Mark 8:36-37). To be spiritual, one's education, career, profession, and hobbies must be kept in proper perspective.

V. A spiritual person is faithful to a trust. Along with Paul the gospel of God is committed to our trust (I Tim. 1:11). Jesus said that he that is faithful in little is faithful in much (Luke 16:10). If you would be spiritual, whether you teach a nursery class or the adults, whether you clean the building or serve as treasurer, you must be faithful to that trust.

VI. Spirituality is measured by the readiness with which we judge others and the manner in which those judgments are expressed. This includes our attitude toward teachers, elders, preachers and fellow Christians. A carnal mind judges all men untrustworthy until they prove themselves worthy. Those who are spiritual count all men honorable until they prove themselves otherwise. A spiritual heart expresses its criticisms like a gentle nurse (I Thess. 2:7). The worldly heart is harsh and thoughtless. The spiritual heart "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things" (I Cor. 13:7). He dispenses judgement to others in the way he would want to be judged (Matt. 7:12). He always seeks to "judge righteous judgement" (John 7:24). A spiritual soul is careful in the use of "loaded words" such as "liberal," "anti," "extremist," "soft," "narrow." Such words have no precise meaning. They convey a different message to every hearer. In a mixed group, most any Christian could be called by all of these terms. The spiritual person prefers to use Biblical terminology in order to express himself in a non-prejudicial way. He measures his words so that they "may give grace to them that hear" (Eph. 4:29).

VII. Some things that will help us grow spiritually. We grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ by reading spiritual literature (II Pet. 3:18). First in priority is the reading of God's Word. Read it daily, systematically and purposefully. Read good devotional books. Among those volumes that have been helpful to spiritual growth over the years are: John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A Kempis; *Holy Living* by Jeremy Taylor, and *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by Philip Doddridge. We will grow by taking time to mediate upon God's word (Ps. 1:2; 4:4). Like Paul we need to set spiritual goals and work towards attaining them. A good goal is to be more like Christ in word, thought and deed (Phil. 3:16). Honest self-examination is a vital necessity if we are to develop spiritually. The Corinthians needed this and so do we (II Cor. 13:5). Self examination will help us be more patient with the shortcomings of others (Matt. 7:3-5). We need to confess our sins (Jas. 5:16). Those who would instruct others especially need to purge their hearts regularly lest their sins neutralize their message. A proud impenitent heart can not lead students in the paths of righteousness. Frequent prayer should adorn the life of every Christian (I Thess 5:17). If the Son of God needed lengthy seasons of prayer with his Father, how much more do we frail sinners need such? (Luke 6:17). Spiritual souls will associate with those of like precious faith. They will be drawn together by common interests and desires. They will seek the strength other righteous souls can supply. They will want to reciprocate (Heb. 10:24-25). Let every Christian ponder this question: "If Paul wrote me today, would he address me as a spiritual disciple or as carnal?" Should your answer be the latter, will you not take active steps to correct your status.

"O to be like thee, blessed Redeemer, This is my constant longing and prayer."

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## IF ANY MAN THINKS HIMSELF TO BE SPIRITUAL

In the church in Corinth there were some who thought themselves to be spiritual (I Cor. 14:37). They were sure that such things as speaking in tongues and prophesying proved them to be spiritual. Paul's epistle shows that their concept of spirituality was faulty.

So it is today. Those promoting the change agenda think they have rediscovered spirituality. They think they found it in "centering" prayer, mantras, labyrinths, candle light meditationss in a darken room. They are seeking God through the mystical disciplines of medieval Catholicism such as Lectio Divina and Taize. Their spirituality is about as real as the hungry man who dreamed he had eaten and was full (Is. 29:8).

Spirituality is an important aspect of the Christian life. Proponents of the Emergent Church movement have confused the contrived, counterfeit spirituality of Hinduism and Catholic mystical ordrs for the spirituality expected by Christ. To correctly understand what God means by spiritual" we must consider His Word. Spirituality we find to be multifaceted, like a finely cut diamond.

\* It involves ones personal relationship with God. He truly believes that God is and that he rewards the faithful servant (Heb. 11:6). Like Noah, he walks with God in his daily life (Gen.6:9). God is his Father and he is God's loving, obedient child.

\* The spiritual man is united with Christ (Gal. 3:26-27) and totally submissive to his will (Matt. 16:24; John 14:15).

\* Spirituality involves a person's faith in the Word of God. He fills his heart with the Bible's message. He believes it, loves it and does his best to comply with it in every aspect of his life. He is content to hold those spiritual truths revealed in Scripture. He dares not ignore, diminish or change them!

\* His spirituality is manifested in his worship. He offers to God spiritual sacrifices (I Pet. 2:5). He praises God with spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). He only wants to do that in worship that pleases the Father.

\* His spirituality is clearly evident in his daily life and conduct. He walks, i.e., lives by the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). He strives to live soberly, righteously and godly as he awaits the coming of his Lord (Tit. 2:12-13).

\* His spirituality is demonstrated in his relationships with other people, both in and out of Christ's church. When he sees a brother overtaken in a fault, he seeks to restore him in a spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1). He does good to all men, especially fellow-Christians (Gal. 6:10). He loves his neighbor as himself (Matt. 22:39) and treats him the very way he wants to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

\* A spiritual man will bear the fruit of the Spirit in his life. "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control" will be evident every day of his life (Gal. 5:22).

This is a portrait of God's spiritual man. Some have their spiritual lives grounded on some mystical experience borrowed from Catholic monks and nuns. They, like a foolish man, have built their house upon the sand. Others have their spiritual lives resting firmly on Christ the solid foundation (I Cor. 3:10). The one will stand, the other will be swept away in the storms of life (Matt. 7:24-27). Those who really want to please God will be satisfied to walk the spiritual pathway set forth by their great mentor, Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:21).

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## YE WHO ARE SPIRITUAL

A generation ago many people added a new word to their vocabulary. The word itself was not new, but their acquaintance with and use of it was. It was the word "spiritual." Prior to the 1960s preachers and devout Christians knew about spirituality and talked about it. But it was an unknown expression to worldlings. With the advent of the New Age religious movement multitudes began to imagine themselves to be "spiritual." As they use the word, it means "a longing for something beyond the mere material." It is a recognition that "spirit is the prime element of reality" (Webster).

When the Bible speaks of being spiritual it is a different matter. To be a faithful Christian is to be spiritual.

It is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30). It is to deny yourself and take up your cross and follow Christ (Matt. 16:24). It means to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). It means to be obedient to Christ in all things (John 14:15), to live by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:25) and to be led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14). Spirituality involves every aspect of the Christian's life. We are to be sanctified wholly, body, soul and spirit (I Thess. 5:23). It involves loving your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:37) and treating him as you wish to be treated (Matt. 7:12). We can distinguish the spiritual man by the love he demonstrates toward his fellow-Christian and others (John 13:34-35). Spirituality describes a wholesome relationship between a godly person and Jehovah God.

There are in the human heart two contending forces. There is that which desires to have fellowship with the Creator and to please him in all things. There is that which loves the sinful pleasures of the world (Rom. 7:22) and is resentful of God, or at least cares little for Him. Christians renounce the lusts of the world and actively pursue a meaningful walk with God. They are spiritual people in the Biblical sense of the world. Others love the world and the things of the world (I John 2:15). The very idea of being spiritual is boring, even repulsive, to such people. Their deepest joys are found in indulging themselves. For some, that means strong drink, drugs, partying, sexual indulgence, gambling and such like. For others it can mean immersing themselves in philosophy, the search for worldly wisdom and knowledge, science, art, music or poetry. For still others it can be the quest for power, wealth and material possessions. For others it might be a life of adventure, or the out of doors, hiking, hunting, fishing or exploration. For yet others it is a life consumed with sports, whether to play them or to watch others do so.

Between these two extremes are two other types of people who seek spiritually. There is the worldly sinner who wants spirituality without having to give up his worldly pleasures. He finds what he desires in New Age religion. Rather than worship Jehovah who made him and has given a law for him to observe, he prefers to worship nature, art, music or literature. He looks up at the spangled heavens and imagines some force there in the sun, moon or stars and selects that to be his god (Rom. 1:25). He gazes at a crystal, or sits in solitude on some isolated mountain and imagines that the eagle's scream or the murmur of the wind is some spirit talking with him. He congratulates himself that he is now spiritual. When his emotions are stirred to the very depths of his soul he might even imagine that he himself is god.

Then there is the person who says he believes in God and follows Christ, but he is unsatisfied with the spiritual paths revealed in the Bible. He needs and wants more to satisfy his jaded spiritual appetite. He craves subjective experiences that will tingle his soul. He sees his New Age neighbor trek off to the mountain or sit in a candle-lite room and he yearns to do the same. He wants mystery and mysticism with his religion. He would like to experiment with self-hypnosis and mind-altering activities. Not ready to deny Christ and cast off the religion he professes, he looks for a church or a preacher who will meld together New Ageism and Christianity. He finds it in the Emergent Church movement that is now found in virtually all evangelical bodies including a scattered few among our brethren. In this we see the poverty

of postmodern spirituality. It is more pagan than Christian, more contrived than real.

Let no man deceive you: Loving God with all your heart and soul, learning and doing his will, drawing close to him in worship and prayer, faithful service in his kingdom, this is being spiritual. Spirituality is not a technique to be mastered; it is a genuine response to God. His love shed abroad in our hearts will lead us to true spirituality (Rom. 5:5). If we draw nigh unto him he will draw nigh unto us (Jas. 4:8).

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## 23.

### WHEN YOU GO INTO THE HOUSE OF GOD

In Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 Solomon offers words of wisdom needed by Christians in our day. "Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few."

A most difficult lesson for 21<sup>st</sup> century people is how to offer acceptable worship to the Creator. The author of Hebrews wrote, "offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28-29). We need to write these words on our hearts and keep them ever before us when we come to the house of God for worship.

**Reverence** means "honor or respect felt or shown, Deference, esp: profound adoring, awed respect." **Awe** is defined "a profound and reverent fear inspired by deity. Abashed fear inspired by authority or power. Fearful veneration inspired by something sacred or mysterious. A reverent wonder tinged with fear inspired by the sublime."

These definitions of these two words tell us the following about our worship:

- \* There is a seriousness about worshiping God.
- \* There must be reverence and respect when we approach Him.
- \* There must be joy, but never foolishness or silliness in our hearts and conduct.
- \* There must be obedience to his instruction when we worship (I Sam. 15:22).
- \* There must be a hush of quietness (Hab. 2:20; Ps. 46:10).
- \* Our songs must be joyful, but to please him, not ourselves.
- \* Our prayers must be full of praise and thanksgiving, not selfish begging (Ps. 69:30).
- \* Our worship must include a gift of gratitude to our God.
- \* Our dress and demeanor should reflect the fact that we are standing in the presence of Almighty God (Ps. 96:9).
- \* There must be thoughtfulness in our worship. We cannot worship God accidentally or unconsciously. Robots cannot worship. We worship with both our mind and our heart (I Cor. 14:15).
- \* Worship is never irrational or foolish. God speaks to our intellects through His Word. With our minds and hearts we worship him. Wild, unbridled emotion is not the worship in spirit and in truth that God expects of us (John 4:24)
- \* There must be consideration for our neighbor when we worship. They need to understand what we are doing and why. We must remember that what we say and do may lead them to salvation or it may turn them away (I Cor. 14:23-24)!
- \* We must draw near to God with clean hands and pure hearts (Jas. 4:8). By this, God expects us to be clean in our conduct, honest and upright in our lives and sincere in our motives.
- \* We must have a forgiving spirit if we expect God to accept our worship (Matt. 6:12, 15). A grudge in the heart can nullify our worship.
- \* We must be at peace with our fellow man. Any wrongs toward others must be righted if we hope to receive God's blessing (Matt. 5:23-24).

May each brother who leads us and each one who participates in worship remember these sacred truths as we worship the great and almighty Jehovah, creator, sustainer and judge of humanity. We dare not offer the sacrifice of fools!

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## 24.

### WHEN DISCIPLES GATHER TOGETHER

A congregation is alive and well only when its members care enough to assemble and actively participate in worship, Bible study and its activities. It is strange that some disciples find it difficult to see the value of church attendance. There are good and solid reasons for attending all the services of one's home congregation.

#### What God's Word Says About the Assembly

The writer of Hebrews says "and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another..." (Heb. 10:24-25). Although expressed in hortatory form, this shows us the attitude and purpose of those who were faithful and God's disapproval of those who were forsaking the assemblies. Luke tells us that the newly won disciples in Jerusalem "continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching, and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and prayers" (Acts 2:42). If we would be the kind of Christians they were, we will follow their example of steadfastness.

Christ would have each of us "seek...first his kingdom and his righteousness..." (Matt. 6:33). God demands first place in our lives and our time. This suggests that we should give priority to God's worship and study occasions. Paul reminds us that Christ died for people who would be "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14). Would any child of God dare say that worship and Bible study are not good works?

Some may object that attending services is not all there is to being a Christian. This we fully concede. But without faithful participation in the regular gatherings of the church, rarely will a person do other good things for God.

#### We Attend Service Because of Those Who Are Present

The Lord himself promises to be with us when two or more are gathered together in his name (Matt. 18:20). If he were to be literally present in the flesh we could not keep folks away. The fact that he is present in spirit should also inspire us to want to be there.

Faithful Christians who are our brothers and sisters in the Lord will be present. Because we love the brethren we will be present (I Pet. 2:17). Even as we love to attend family get-togethers and school reunions, so will we eagerly make our way to the place of worship to be with those we love.

Each member present imparts a blessing to all others. Each of the several members of the spiritual body working together in due measure make "the increase of the body unto the building up of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). Granted some bad people may be at the assembly, but they are weak in spite of the church, Bible study and worship, not because of it. Wicked hypocrisy will gain little from the fervent prayers, spiritual singing and inspiring sermons. Really such exercises only add to their misery. But souls who go hungering and thirsting for righteousness shall be filled (Matt. 5:6).

#### Purposes of Our Assemblies

First of all we worship God our Father, creator, provider and sustainer. We praise Jehovah "in the assembly of the saints" (Ps. 149:1-2). We give him "the glory in the church..." (Eph 3:21). Our hymns are "a sacrifice of praise to God" (Heb. 13:15). We honor Jehovah with our substance and increase as we give (Prov. 3:9).

In our communion, we remember that Jesus died for our salvation (I Cor. 11:23-24). We express to him our love and appreciation for so great a sacrifice.

We assemble to edify our fellow-Christians and to be edified ourselves (I Cor. 14:26). We exhort and are exhorted to be faithful and zealous for our Master (Heb. 10:24-25). We admonish each other in our psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

(Col. 3:16).

We participate in public worship and study both to teach and be taught. When the saints at Troas assembled they heard a gospel discourse by the apostle Paul (Acts 20:7). The Jerusalem brethren continued steadfastly in the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42). In our songs we teach and admonish each other (Col. 3:16). Even those who are elders, preachers and teachers thus receive a blessing in worship.

Our attendance at worship prepares and equips us for additional service. Those who teach are to "charge them that are rich in this present world...that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate..."(I Tim. 6:17-18). Our public teachers will instruct us to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded the apostles to do (Matt. 28:19-20). At worship and Bible study we will learn how "to give answer to every man that asketh (us) a reason concerning the hope that is in (us)..." (I Pet. 3:15).

#### **Our Loyalty In Attendance Is A Lesson To Others**

Like Paul we say to others "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" i.e. follow my example (I Cor. 11:1). In so doing our light is shining before men and some will be led to glorify the Father (Matt. 5:13-16). More importantly, our families will be led in righteous paths by following us to the Lord's house. Fellow Christians will be encouraged to be faithful to the Lord's cause. Sinners will note our love and loyalty to God and some will go with us to the house of worship.

People are heard to say, "I would attend worship services if my mate would attend." Do not allow yourself to be someone else's excuse to stay away. Be present! Only then can they follow your example.

When we are present at the assembly we proclaim to all our estimate of the church's worth. That which is important to us gets top attention and priority in our lives. Conversely, we tend to neglect those things which we value little. What does your behavior toward the assemblies of the church suggest?

#### **Personal Benefits From Public Worship**

At the services of our congregation we are taught the word of God, whether in Bible classes or by preaching. The knowledge received helps us to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus (II Pet. 3:18) and unto salvation (I Pet. 2:2). Our senses are excited to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14). When we draw nigh unto God in worship he will draw nigh unto us (Jas. 4:8). As we contemplate the suffering Savior and count God's blessings bestowed upon us we learn not to look to our own needs and wishes, but to those of others (Phil. 2:4). Waiting upon Jehovah, our strength is renewed, our weariness fades and we mount up on eagle wings (Is. 40:31).

May we all resolve to live our lives for the Master and never willingly forsake even one gathering of his blessed church. When the doors are open, let us be there with joyful anticipation. With David, let us sing "I was glad when they said unto me, let us go unto the house of Jehovah" (Ps. 122:1).

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## **25.**

### **PROVIDING IMMUNITY TO FADS IN WORSHIP**

Today our congregations are troubled by preachers eager to sample anything proposed for worship that is new or different. Few members would come up with such ideas on their own. They are led astray by enterprising young preachers determined to make a name for themselves.

There are some churches where the promoters of the change agenda cannot gain a foothold. Their schemes for change are dead on arrival. In such congregations brethren have antibodies that make them immune to the smooth and fair speech of change agents (Rom. 16:18).

Those who receive a steady diet of meaningful Bible instruction are safe from this ailment. Knowing God's will, they can spot error, no matter how lovely it is packaged. They have no appetite for anything contrary to the Master's message for his church. They have been fed the meat of the word in their classes and sermons (Heb. 5:14). It has settled deep in their hearts and minds and they will tolerate no changes to the divine plan.

Those whose worship experience is meaningful and genuine are not interested in the promotions of the change agenda. Where elders and preachers provide rich, spiritually uplifting worship, there is no interest in tricks and performance to give them some emotional exhilaration. They are thrilled as they lift up their voices in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). They thrill as they are led in devout, meaningful and sincere prayers to God. They are deeply touched when they commune in memory of the death of their beloved Savior (Matt. 26:26-29). They rejoice at the privilege to give their gifts to the Provider of every good and perfect gift. They feast on well-prepared lessons, spoken with enthusiasm, love and concern. The gimmicks of the promoters of change seem foolish to them. Such things profane the holy worship they already enjoy.

Those who enjoy in a close walk with God have no interest in artificial stimulates offered by the peddlers of change. Their walk with God continues when they leave the worship assembly to live their daily lives (I John 1:7). It is presenting oneself to God as a spiritual sacrifice seven day of the week (Rom. 12:1). Those brethren who live sober, righteous and godly lives laced with prayer and devotion have the deep, meaningful relationship with the Father that satisfies their souls.

Those who are actively involved in meaningful Christian service have no need for entertainment when they come to worship. Having experienced pure and undefiled religion in ministering to widows and orphans and in keeping themselves unspotted from the world (Jas. 1:27), they know unspeakable joy in Christ. They do good to all men, especially to fellow-Christians (Gal.6:10). They are abound in the work of the Lord (I Cor. 15:58). The charades of the change agents seems like silly child's play to them.

Those who are actively engaged in seeking and saving the lost do not need the assistance of performers in order to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4). No greater thrill or satisfaction can be known than leading a lost soul to the Master. It is much like the birth of one's child. To have witnessed the power of God and his gospel (Rom. 1:16), in transforming sinners into saints, changing those who formerly were like lions, but in Christ are like lambs, puts all the show time stuff in the shadows.

While a few disciples might be able to find these blessings by their own initiative, most will need the guidance and leadership of godly preachers and elders, who like good shepherds lead them to the green pastures. Now is the time to take inventory and determine the spiritual status of your flock. You cannot afford to wait until the agents of change appear in your midst. Sheep will follow their shepherds, but the shepherds must lead the way.

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## 26.

### PROFANING THE HOLY

In ancient times things that were sacred and devoted God were described as "holy." Especially were the items associated with the worship of God in his temple considered holy. To misuse or mishandle God's sacred things was the sin of profanation (Lev. 19:8). For profane hands to touch that which was holy was a great offense to God and a shock to the sensibilities of his righteous servants. "They shall not profane the holy things...which they offer unto Jehovah and so cause them to bear the iniquity that bringeth guilt" (Lev. 22:15). God charged unfaithful priests with having done "violence to my law, and (they) have profaned my holy things; they...made no distinction between the holy and the

common...” (Ezek. 22:26).

When Korah, Dathan and Abiram challenged Moses and Aaron for the leadership of Israel, it was not only rebellion but profanation (Num. 16:1-40). When Uzziah, the king of Judah, entered the holy place and sought to offer incense it was a profane deed for which God severely punished him (II Chron. 26:16-21).

Some acts of profanation were flagrant and diabolic. Such it was when Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria erected an image of Zeus in the temple of God. He then ordered a swine to be sacrificed and its blood scattered over God’s sacred things. Other profanations were not deliberate or malicious, nevertheless they were harshly dealt with by Jehovah. When David was moving the ark of the covenant from Kiriath-jearim to Jerusalem, he failed to follow the divine procedure that it be carried by staves, on the shoulders of the Levites (Deut. 10:8; I Chron 15:2). They carefully placed the ark on a new cart draw by oxen. When the oxen stumbled, Uzzah, one of the attendants, fearing the ark was going to fall, reached out to stabilize it. Not being a Levite, he was not authorized to touch the ark. God smote him and he died (I Chron. 13:10). This harsh lesson emphasized for all ages the importance of absolute respect for all things holy of Jehovah.

The Church of Christ, purchased by the dying blood of God’s Son, is holy (Acts 20:28). So is His testament, ratified and sanctified by his precious blood (Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:17-18). Holy also are the doctrine, ordinances and practices ordained by the founder, head and savior of the church. We are warned against teaching “a different doctrine” (I Tim. 1:3).

No mortal man is authorized to tamper with or change the holy things of Christ’s religion. To add to or take from them is to invite disaster (Rev.22:18-19).

- \* When preachers and teachers presume to ignore, modify or change the holy practices, principles and doctrines given by Christ they are placing profane hands on that which is holy!
- \* When God says that we are to “hold the pattern of sound words” (II Tim. 1:13) and promoters of change deny that there is a divine pattern, they profane the Word of God.
- \* When change agents attempt to change the praise ordained by heaven from “singing and making melody with your heart” (Eph. 5:19) to singing and making melody on an organ, they have profaned that which is holy!
- \* When they seek to change the Lord’s Supper from a sacred memorial (I Cor. 11:25) to a joyous festival and part of a fellowship meal they have profaned the holy.
- \* When they would replace the proclamation of the gospel (Mk. 16:15; Rom. 1:16) with stories, jokes and promotions of common, ordinary things, they are profaning the holy.
- \* When they turn the worship of God into a theater for entertainment it is profanation!
- \* When they would elevate women to positions of public leadership in the church even though God has specifically denied that to them (I Cor. 14:33-34; I Tim. 2:11-12), they have profaned God’s holy things.
- \* When they seek to gain possession of houses of worship and schools built and paid for by other Christians for the honor and glory of God and use them for their new doctrines and practices, such is profanation.
- \* When they discount and make fun of the sacred name “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16), such is profanation. Such sarcastic expressions as the “Churches of Christ of the yellow pages” smells of profanation.
- \* When they dare to tell sinners that they can be saved by grace, before they are immersed in the name of Jesus for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38), they are profaning the holy.
- \* When they deny that Christians are in any way or sense under the law of Christ, even though the Holy Spirit teaches that we must be submissive to the royal law of Christ (Jas. 2:8), the perfect law of liberty in Christ (Jas. 1:25) they are profaning the Holy will of God.
- \* When they seek to broaden the fellowship of Christ’s family to those not born into it (John 3:3,5), they profane it.
- \* When they pit their human wisdom against the revealed will of God that too is profanation.

Given the severity with which God dealt with profaners of his sacred things in days past, the prudent man will take care not to take any unauthorized liberties with God’s Word, his church, his doctrine and his worship today. Lest we be found in complicity with profaners, every man and woman should roundly reject any and all men who proposes to make changes to the holy things of God. We don’t want to partake of other men’s sins (I Tim. 5:22) nor their punishments.

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## REACHING FOR GOD THROUGH CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY

A half century ago C. S. Lewis, the Don of Oxford, observed that the hearts of all men seem to incline toward pantheism. In his day, the average conservative Protestant would have thought his observation fanciful, even outlandish. Most members of the Church of Christ would have thought it absurd. But if we flash forward to the present, Lewis' observation is no longer outlandish nor preposterous. While the denominations of mainstream Protestantism are lost in the swamp of skepticism and unbelief, many evangelical preachers are leading their flocks into the misty twilight of contemplative spirituality borrowed from pagan Hinduism and medieval Catholicism. These practices have come into those churches via New Age practitioners in contemporary America.

Weary with worship prescribed by the Holy Spirit and jaded with their humanly devised methods of worship, many folks are hungering for a soul-tingling mystical experience. Postmodern evangelicals are offering them all kinds of mystical exercises. They use ancient mystical practices to induce altered states of consciousness (often described as *the silence*). While the current version is dressed in Christian terminology, the basic premise of contemplative spirituality is pantheism which asserts that "God is all" and all is God. The next step is called *panentheism* which means "God is in all," including those pursuing Him through this medium of meditative prayer.

Among the mystical experiences being promoted are:

- \* Taize Worship. A candle light service in a darkened room design to stir the soul to high emotion.
- \* Zoe Worship. A program special songs, prayers and meditations considered to be superior to traditional worship.
- \* Breath Prayers. These are brief prayers repeated over and over to oneself.
- \* Mantras, a word or phrase used in meditation to induced an altered state of mind.
- \* Centering, efforts by contemplation to discover the center of your soul its relation to God.
- \* Prayer Labyrinths. Labyrinths in which one walks or contemplates while in deep prayer and meditation.
- \* Lectio-Divina. The repeated reading of a single verse of scripture seeking for some new or different meaning that would not normally meet the eye. A word or phrase of the verse might be chosen and repeated endlessly in hopes that the Holy Spirit will speak to you.

Change agents operating among Churches of Christ are eagerly following the promoters of the Church Growth Movement, the "Emergent Church" program and similar movements. (The Abilene Christian University Lectures (9/16-19/2007) promoted many of these themes) Contemplative spirituality is the fad of the day. Some are already utilizing contemplative methods to enhance their withered spiritual lives. Without doubt, there will be more experimentation in various forms of contemplative spirituality as they seek for some new experience with or from God, outside of and without his written Word. What they find is not a revelation from God. Rather, it is the ruminations of their own sinful minds and hearts. They find justification for the desires of their hearts. God paints an unflattering picture of the human heart. It is depicted as "deceitful above all things, and it is exceeding corrupt..." (Jer. 17:9). Alienated from God, the thoughts of man's "heart are only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

One cannot help but wonder what will be the final destination of those on the mystical road of contemplation? How long will it be before we hear of pilgrimages to sacred sites, solitary vigils in the wilderness, sackcloth and fasting, prayer beads and incense, monasteries and nunneries? They can't be too far behind since they are part of the contemplative spirituality package.

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## THE LAW OF SILENCE

Total respect for God's word demands more than many are willing to give. We must recognize and accept the authority of God's silence. He does not have to say "thou shalt not" in order to prohibit a thing. Failure to recognize or accept this principle has been one of the fundamental, underlying causes of our religious differences. Some of those who went before us recognize the importance of this principle.

Church historian, J. M. D'Aubigne, wrote, "Luther was desirous of retaining in the church all that was not expressly contradicted by Scripture, while Zwingle was intent on abolishing all that could not be proved by Scripture" (**History of the Great Reformation of the Sixteenth Century**, pg. 342).

Dirk Phillips, Anabaptist preacher, wrote, "It is evident that whatever God has not commanded and has not instituted by express commands of Scripture, He does not want observed nor does He want to be served therewith, nor will He have His Word set aside nor made to suit the pleasure of men." (This was written by Phillips in the 16th century in his book **Vindication**, quoted by J.D. Murch, **Christian Only**, p. 15.)

That there is such a principle is clearly stated in I Corinthians 4:6 where Paul writes "that ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written." We see it applied in at least four instances.

In Acts 15:1 we read of certain brethren who taught circumcision as a Christian doctrine and insisted on its observance. The Apostles and elders wrote the brethren concerning this practice: "we have heard that certain (men) who went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls; to whom we gave no commandment" (Acts 15:24). They proceeded to repudiate the actions of these certain men. Even though circumcision had been commanded under the Old Covenant, it could not be bound upon the church since no commandment concerning it had been given.

In establishing the superiority of Christ over angels, the author writes, "having become by so much better than the angels, as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou are my son..." (Heb. 1:4-5). The very fact that **God had not said** to one of the angels these words which He spoke of the Son is proof of their inferiority to Christ.

While explaining the need for the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ, the writer says, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah: as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests (Heb. 7:12-14).

When the Passover feast was instituted, God ordained that it be observed on the fourteenth day of the first month (Num. 9:1-5). When some men were unable to observe the feast for reasons beyond their control, they asked Moses if they could do so at a later date (vss. 6-7). No Scripture said "thou shalt not observe the feast at a different time." Yet even the great lawgiver Moses dared not to authorize such an exception without a commandment from Jehovah (vs. 8). When divine permission was given, only then did he allow the exception (vss. 9-11). Moses respected the law of silence.

### The Application of the Law of Silence for Us Today

We are limited in our Christian faith and practice to that which God has authorized in his Word. Jesus said, teach "them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). Paul warns that we must not go beyond the things which are written (I Cor. 4:6 ASV). John reminds us that only those who abide in the teaching of Christ enjoy the blessings of the Father and Son (II John 9). We do not ask "where does the Bible forbid a thing?" rather we ask, "where is it authorized?"

A thing may be authorized generally or specifically. The command to "Go preach the gospel" (Mark 16:15), is a **general**



**command** that authorizes any and all modes of travel. "**Preach the gospel**" specifies what must be taught, thus forbids the teaching of human opinions, traditions, and philosophy.

We must never presume a thing is acceptable simply by the fact that it is not specifically forbidden. God did not specifically forbid carrying the ark of the covenant on an ox cart, yet doing so cost a man his life (1 Chron. 13:6-10; 15:2, 13).

Even the world recognizes this principle. The pharmacist who fills a doctor's prescription is not at liberty to substitute another substance simply because the doctor did not say "thou shalt not" do so. He is bound to obey the law of silence!

If we do not respect the sacred silence of God's Word, then no one can object to infant baptism or sprinkling, counting beads, burning of incense, and a thousand other things that God did not specifically forbid being introduced into the faith and worship of the church. The concept that "I can do anything God does not forbid" in Christian worship lets in an avalanche that few are ready to accept. Nadab and Abihu violated this law by offering strange fire in worship which Jehovah "had not commanded them" (Lev. 10:1-3). God had not specifically forbidden the use of their fire by direct command. However, it was forbidden since he had specified that for incense they were to use the fire from the perpetual fire on the great altar before the tabernacle (Lev. 16:12-13).

It is the silence of the New Testament on instrumental music in worship that leads us to reject that practice and other like additions to our faith and worship. J.D. Murch comments on this theme:

"Within the last generation the Church of Christ has made a phenomenal growth. This is due to two things:

1. Its people have stood like a rock of Gibraltar for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," amid the doubt and confusion superinduced by liberalism. They have challenged the spirit of compromise and worldliness and dared to be a "peculiar" people teaching and practicing what they believe is the Bible way of life.
2. **They have come to realize that the silence of the Scriptures must be respected as well as the commandments of Scripture, but that obedience to its silences permits freedom of judgment and action (Christians Only, pg. 313).**

Sadly, few Christians understand the "silence of the Scriptures" today. Every leader and teacher should familiarize himself with this important concept not only that his own faith might be strong, but that he might also teach others. When a generation grows up that does not know this principle of truth, they may well reason like Martin Luther, "I can do anything the Bible does not specifically forbid." Woe to the church when that day comes.

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## 29.

### IS ALL OF LIFE WORSHIP?

Mr. Waddey: I have learned that the five Greek words used by the Bible writers to indicate worship all refer to daily life and activities and not church worship. We assemble to encourage one another, rather than go through acts of worship.  
Jim

Dear Jim: If as you say, "there are five different Greek words used by NT writers in making reference to worship and without exception, each has reference to the Christian life, not to the assembly...and the primary purpose of assembling is to encourage one another," would it not be acceptable to omit the corporate worship to God in our assemblies and spend that time golfing, or fishing with other Christians just so long as we encouraged them?

I can assure you all of life is not worship. True, Romans 12:2 does teach us that what we do in our daily lives is "spiritual service" (ASV) that we present unto God. A quick check of my **New Testament in 26 Versions** shows that at least 6 translations render the term "worship." Obviously there is some sense in which the righteous deeds we do in our daily life are "like" gifts offered unto God. But no thinking person would argue that "every thing" we do is worship. At the risk of being crude, I mention that every human being has certain daily bodily functions that surely are not worship; nor is sleeping, or feeding your dog, watching a ball game, chewing gum or a thousand other mundane things of daily life.

All of us sometime worship outside of the assembly. For example: when we pray at home; when we have devotionals with our families; when we have other Christians into our homes for songs and prayers; when we visit folks who are shut-in and serve the Lord's Supper to them. In such cases we with pray with them and sometime read Scripture and sing hymns. But any or all of these things do not take the place of our corporate worship when the body of Christ assembles together (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1-2).

It is certainly true that all of life must be lived with reverence and devotion to God, but for some reason the earliest Christians all felt constrained to assemble each week for a corporate occasion of worship to God through Christ, even if such put them at great risk of harm. When circumstances and situations isolate us from other Christians we can worship alone as did John (Rev. 1:10). Yet God indicates that he wants us to assemble with others for some purpose (Heb. 10:25). Two Christians could encourage each other and never assemble. Yet Jesus promised to be with the two or three that gather in his name (Matt. 18:20).

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## 30.

### **MUST OUR WORSHIP ALWAYS BE IN A CONGREGATIONAL ASSEMBLY?**

Brother Waddey: We have an Annual Ladies Retreat hosted by one of the congregations in our area. It is held at a camp over a weekend and the women have their own worship service on Sunday. The host congregation is about 30-45 minutes away from the location but another congregation is just 15 minutes away. What do you think of this practice? George

Dear Bro. George: Remember that Solomon and Stephen both said that "the most high dwelleth not in houses made with hands" (Acts 7:48). We do not have to be in a "church building" to worship acceptably. In terms of history, church buildings emerged long after the church began. Also Jesus said where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst (Matt. 18:20). So long as the worship offered is in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and according to God's Will the ladies can worship as acceptably there as in a church building. In Bible Camps and Retreats brethren commonly worship at the site of their meeting. It would be inconvenient and time consuming for them to get dressed and made up suitable for a church assembly where other worshipers were dressed and coiffured as usual. Also the time and logistics of transporting a large group to a meeting place would pose a problem. At the encampment they can assemble and worship without all of that. Another way to see this is to imagine yourself on a ship crossing the Pacific. What do you do when the Lord's Day comes. If other Christians are on board you get together in someone's cabin and sing, pray, commune and study Scripture. So when at camp. When no men are present, women can conduct their worship since in doing so they would not be teaching or having authority over men (I Tim. 2:12).

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## 31.

### **DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT MENTION CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP?**

Dear Mr. Waddey: You state that there are “five items of worship: songs, prayers, gifts, communion, and scripture study.” What scripture names “songs, prayers, gifts, communion, and scripture study” worship? What scripture names worship as “corporate, i.e., congregational?” What scripture names worship as the purpose of the assembly of the “apostolic church?” Hugo

Dear Hugo: What do you do when you attend a church service with other Christians? What did the Jews do when they went to their temple or synagogue? They worshiped and so do we. True, some moderns go to church to sleep, some to socialize and others to seek entertainment, but true Christians go to worship. The church in Troas assembled on Sunday to take the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7). While assembled, they heard a lesson from God’s Word. When we sing we make melody in our hearts unto the Lord (Eph. 5:19). Our songs and prayers are “a sacrifice of praise to God...that is the fruit of lips which make confession to his name” (Heb. 13:15). As children of God we are “built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (I Pet. 4:5).

Christ purchased the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). He built it on the truth that he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:18). If, as you imply, congregational worship is not divinely appointed and if there are no specified items of worship, then perhaps you would be so kind as to tell us the purpose of the church and her gatherings. Your foolish thinking leads you to an empty vacuum, a meaningless church with nothing to do.

When a sincere reader opens his New Testament, there are some fundamental presuppositions. Christ came to save all who would in faith come to him. He called them out of the world into his kingdom which he calls his church (Matt. 16:18). In his church men worship and serve him. Paul wrote letters to the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) and the church in Corinth. In I Corinthians 11 -14 he discussed several aspects of congregational worship.

Me thinks the unspoken implication of your questions is that you really do not want to be bound by Scripture in your spiritual activities. Like others before, you want to serve God on your terms and collect heaven as your reward. Christians are under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ (Rom. 8:2). We are to observe all things whatsoever Christ commanded (Matt. 28:20). The New Testament is the divinely given record of His will for his people and his church. It is the sacred pattern by which we are to measure and do all things (II Tim. 1:13).

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## 32.

### **GOLDEN NUGGETS REGARDING WORSHIP**

From a long forgotten source I borrowed these memorable thoughts.

\* *"Heartless praise is not praise at all! It is worthless, an insult to God."*

\* *"In worship, the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart."*

\* *"If worship is mindless, it is meaningless."*

\* *"Faith, not feelings, pleases God."*

\* *"Today many equate being emotionally moved by music as being moved by the Spirit, but these are not the same. Real worship happens when your spirit responds to God, not to some musical tone. In fact some sentimental, introspective songs hinder worship because they take the spotlight off God and focus on our feelings."*

For these worthy thoughts from a forgotten author I give thanks to God.

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## 33.

### THE FINE ART OF WORSHIP

What a marvelous privilege it is that we, the work of His hands are invited to worship the Almighty Creator. We worship God as we live for Him and serve Him in daily life (Rom. 12:1-2), in deeds of kindness to others (Gal. 6:10). We are also privileged to worship him in the company of fellow-Christian when we assemble as his church (Acts 20:7). We sing, we pray, we present our gifts, we commune, we listen to His words for us.

Just to worship is not enough. We must worship God in the way that He ordained. Neither is it enough to do just the correct things.

\* Our worship must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

\* It must be with the spirit and the understanding (I Cor. 14:15).

\* It must be from a heart of undivided love (Matt. 22:37-38).

\* It must be to the glory of God rather than for man's glory (I Cor. 10:31).

\* It must be according to the divine pattern he has shown us in Christ's testament (Heb. 8:5; II Tim. 1:13).

\* It must be offered to God through Jesus, the one and only mediator he will accept (I Tim. 2:5).

\* It must be offered from a pure and sincere heart (Jas. 4:8).

\* It must be accompanied by holy living (Rom. 12:1-2)

\* It must be accompanied by a willingness to forgive those who sin against us (Matt. 6:15).

As our worship is offered up to Jehovah, it also blesses all of those present as it edifies their hearts and directs them toward the Father, His divine will and our eternal home. With David we should always be glad when they say to us, "Let us go unto the house of Jehovah..." (Ps. 122:1).

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## 34.

### THE SOUNDS OF WORSHIP

What are the sounds of worship? When I ponder this question precious memories flood my mind.

- \* I remember joyful sounds of Christians praising God in songs, hymns and spiritual songs. No instruments, no hands-clapping, just the melody made in their hearts as they worshiped.
- \* I remember the simple, humble prayers of devout brothers in Christ, as sometimes with choked voices they petitioned the Father on high.
- \* I remember the quietness as a brother asked us to sit in silent reflection for a few moments before he led us in prayer.
- \* I remember hearing the sacred words of scripture as they were read in our hearing.
- \* I remember the words of men of God who shared with me the lessons they had gleaned from their study of God's Word.
- \* I remember the amens uttered by godly souls who felt constrained to voice their agreement and approval of the lessons being taught.
- \* I remember the trembling words of a responding soul confessing faith in Christ that they might have their sins washed away in baptism.
- \* I remember the tearful words of a penitent Christian asking for the prayers and forgiveness of his fellow-worshippers.
- \* I remember the happy expressions of greeting and farewell spoken by Christians to each other as they gather before and after our worship.

These are precious memories that I hope never to forget. Some of them are from my earlier childhood. I hope you have similar memories of "the sound of worship."

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## 35.

### WORSHIP SERVICES THEN AND NOW

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when our brethren gathered to worship they did the same things we do today. They sang, prayed, gave of their means, communed with Christ and listened to a lesson from God's Word.

In one noticeable way our services are different from theirs. In those days sermons lasted from one to two hours. Prayers might last fifteen minutes. Song leaders might lead ten songs and sing all seven verses of some hymn.

In those distant days, life was much simpler. There was little money for travel and entertainment. Attending church was more than worship, it was also a social event and community gathering. There were no organized sports. Education for children was not mandatory nor always available. Most folks worked on the farm. After six days of grueling work, they were glad to spend two-three hours seated in the house of worship. Few churches had a regular preacher who lived and worked among them. Various preachers visited their community on a rotating basis. For some, they had preaching only

once a month. In many cases, the regular preachers were not learned and polished men. So when a skilled and knowledgeable preacher visited they were very willing to spend two or more hours listening to his rare lessons.

But we live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Everything about our society and culture has changed. We live by the clock. In most homes both the husband and wife work in the business world. Children have a demanding schedule for school and homework. They have numerous extra-curricular activities. Members often live several miles from the place of worship. People rush to and fro on busy streets, trying to earn a living and keep body, soul and family together. We still worship each Lord's Day. We still have our prayer meetings and Bible classes. But we have changed. We don't care much for the preacher who takes an hour for his lesson and we would really be provoked with the man who would keep us for two hours. The consensus is virtually universal that 30 minutes is adequate for a gospel sermon. If proper preparation is made, the preacher can deliver the goods in that time frame.

We don't pray for 15 minutes. Some might actually fall asleep if asked to sit that long with their eyes closed. Two to five minutes is generally thought to be adequate for a congregational prayer. Neither do we sing all the verses of the hymns that are in our book. Most modern editors of hymnals have already edited out all but three or four verses of the songs included in their books. Occasionally we encounter a song with more than four verses. But for the same reason we don't have one or two hour sermons, we don't need to sing all the verses of every song. Most worshipers would rather sing four songs of three verses than three songs of five verses. Older members find it exhausting to sing all the verses of lengthy songs. They need a break to swallow and take a deep breath. In singing we are offering up our spiritual sacrifices to God (Heb. 13:15). We are expected to sing with grace in our hearts unto God (Col. 3:16). But if the song is continued too long, our minds are distracted from worship to wishing it would soon end. If we are standing, some are wishing that we could take our seat. The burden of too many verses is increased if the song is pitched too low or too high or is sung so painfully slow that the worshipers feel dragged along. Songs sung thusly are not conducive to true worship.

Experience teaches us that worship is more meaningful, fulfilling and rewarding if those who lead the various aspects of it consider their neighbors and fulfill their assignments in a timely way. At home we may pray for an hour, read the Bible for an hour, sing a dozen songs with all the verses, but in our worship assemblies we should constrain ourselves. Solomon advises us, "...when thou goest to the house of God...let thy words be few" (Eccle. 5:1-2). Tis still good advice.

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## WORSHIPING GOD IN SONG

36

### SACRED MUSIC 101

Just as today's school kids know little or nothing about history, Western Civilization and America's illustrious past, so many in the church (including preachers) seem to know little about the history of the religion of Christ and of our attempts to restore the faith and worship He instituted. From the great **Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature** by McClintock and Strong ( Vol. 6, pp. 757-759), we offer the following basic introduction to the worship of the early Christians.

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It was the practice of the early Christians to praise God with congregational singing. **Pliny** in his letter to Trajan (103-104 A.D.) observed that Christians would “meet before day to offer praise to Christ. **Tertullian** (160-220 A.D.) and **Eusebius** (260-340 A.D.) described the praise worship of the church in their day thusly, “Arising at the dawn of the morning, they sang hymns to Christ as God” (**Eccle. Hist.** 3:32). **Justin Martyr** (100-165 A.D.) wrote, “We manifest our gratitude to him by worshiping him in spiritual songs and hymns, praising him for our birth, for our health, for the vicissitudes of the seasons, and for the hope of immortality” (**Apology**, 5:28). “Their psalmody was the joint act of the whole assembly in unison,” according to **Hilary** (A.D. 355). **Chrysostom** (347-407 A.D.) wrote, “It was the ancient custom, as it is still with us, for all to come together, and unitedly to join in singing....all join in one song...” (**Hom.** 9: Vol. 12:, p. 349). **McClintock and Strong** then conclude, “Such was the character of the psalmody of the early church...”

Under a section appropriately headed “**Innovations**,” the authors note, “The appointment of singers as a distinct class of officers in the Church for this part of religious worship, and the consequent introduction of profane music into the church, marks another alteration in the psalmody of the church. These innovations were first made in the 4<sup>th</sup> century; and though the people continued for a century or more to enjoy their ancient privilege of all singing together, it is conceivable that it gradually was forced to die, as a promiscuous assembly could not well unite in theatrical music which required in its performers a degree of skill altogether superior to that which all the members of a congregation could be expected to possess. An artificial theatrical style of music, having no affinity with the worship of God, soon began to take the place of those solemn airs which before had inspired the devotions of his people. The music of the theater was transferred to the church, which accordingly became the scene of theatrical pomp and display rather than the house of prayer and of praise, to inspire by its appropriate and solemn rites the spiritual worship of God.”

The Church Historian **J. A. Neander** wrote, “We have to regret that both in the Eastern and the Western Church their sacred music had already assumed an artificial and theatrical character, and was so far removed from its original simplicity that even in the 4<sup>th</sup> century the abbot **Pambo of Egypt** complained that heathen melodies (Accompanied as it seems with the action of the hands and the feet) had been introduced into their Church psalmody”

**Jerome** (342-420 A.D.), in remarking upon Eph. 5:19, says: “May all hear it whose business it is to sing in the church. Not with the voice, but with the heart, we sing praises to God. Not like the comedians should they raise their sweet and liquid notes to entertain the assembly with theatrical songs and melodies in the church, but the fire of godly piety and the knowledge of the Scriptures should inspire our songs...”

**The Roman Catholic Council of Trent** (1545-1563) “arranged the choral service on a proper footing, freeing it from all extraneous matters, gave choral music also a sanction which it had hitherto wanted. From that time the Church of Rome began to display that profound veneration for choral music which it has continued to manifest down to the present day” The same spirit that worked to introduce the choirs and solos in ancient times is still at work and is seen in our agents of change.

In section III, under **Use of Instruments in the Church**, **McClintock & Strong** continue, “The Greeks as well as the Jews were wont to use instruments as accompaniments in their sacred songs. The converts to Christianity accordingly must have been familiar with this mode of singing; yet it is generally believed that the primitive Christians failed to adopt the use of instrumental music in their religious worship.” “...the general introduction of instrumental music can certainly not be assigned to a date earlier than the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> centuries; yea, even **Gregory the Great**, who towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century added greatly to the existing Church music, absolutely prohibited the use of instruments. Several centuries later the introduction of the organ in sacred services gave a place to instruments as accompaniments for Christian songs, and from that time to this they have been freely used with few exceptions. The first organ is believed to have been used in Church service in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Although our position is presently a minority view such was not always the case. Notable scholars from various religious bodies understood the Bible's teaching just as we do.

\* **Charles Spurgeon**, the greatest Baptist preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England, refused to allow instruments of music in his Metropolitan Tabernacle.

\* **Adam Clark**, the brilliant Methodist Bible commentator wrote, "the whole spirit, soul and genius of the Christian religion are against this (instrumental music); and those who know the Church of God best, and what constitutes its genuine spiritual state, know that these things have been introduced as a substitute for the life and power of religion; and that where they prevail most, there is least of the power of Christianity. Away with such portentous bauble from the worship of the infinite Spirit who require his followers to worship in spirit and in truth" (Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 684). He continued, "I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them (instruments) productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe they were productive of much evil...instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor."

\* **John Wesley**, founder of Methodism is quoted by Clarke as saying, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither HEARD nor SEEN."

John Calvin, founder of Presbyterianism wrote "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists (Catholics) therefore, have foolishly borrowed these, as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise, but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostles is far more pleasing." (Commentary on Psalm 33).

\* **Thomas Aquinas** Roman Catholic theologian wrote, "instrumental music as well as singing is mentioned in the Old Testament, but the church has accepted only singing on account of its ethical value"...Therefore their use is unwise, and consequently the Church refrains from music instruments" (*Summa Theologica*, Question 91, Article II).

**Alexander Campbell**, great preacher and scholar of our Restoration Movement, wrote, "That all persons who have no spiritual meditations, consolation and sympathies of renewed hearts, should call for such aids is but natural. Pure water from the flinty rock has no attraction for the mere toper or wine bibber. A little alcohol, or genuine Cognac bandy, or good old Madeira is essential to the beverage to make it ruly refreshing. So to those who have no real devotion or spirituality in them and whose animal nature flags under the oppression of church service, I think that instrumental music would no only be a desideratum, but an essential prerequisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion. But I presume to all spiritual-minded Christians, such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert." (*Millennial Harbinger*, Series 4, Vol. 1. p. 581). (These quotes as cited by James Tolle in his excellent tract, *Instrumental Music in Worship*.)

Keep this information safely stored and when the sirens of change seek to convince you that our congregational *a cappella* singing is only our tradition, share it with them for they obviously know not the Scripture nor the past history of the church.

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## WHY WE PRAISE GOD AS WE DO

Dear Mr. Waddey: Why do you of the Church of Christ have no instruments of music with your singing? Ray

Dear Ray: Please allow me to explain why we worship as we do.

- \* It is not a matter of personal preference, i.e., it is not that we do not like the use of instruments. I enjoy playing several different musical instruments.
- \* It is not a question of afford-ability. We could afford a piano or organ if we wished to have it.
- \* It is not a desire just to be different from others.

We worship as we do with our **a cappella** singing because:

- \* That is what we understand the Bible to teach.
- \* That is how the early Christians worshiped for the first 600 years.
- \* We are convinced that it would be wrong for us to do otherwise.

Jesus instructs me to "teach (his disciples) to observe all things whatsoever he commanded" (Matt. 28:20). As we read through the New Testament we find that the churches were exhorted to "sing and make melody in their hearts" (Eph. 5:19). Not once do we read of the early church praising God with instruments. This is noteworthy because many Christians of that first generation were Jewish. In their temple they had worshiped God with instruments. Their Old Testament often spoke of praising God with instruments. Yet, that first generation and many following did not do so. We must ask why? The reason is they were not authorized to do so by Christ, the head of the church (Eph. 1:22).

Since we are not under the Old Testament, but under Christ, we cannot go back to the Old Testament to find approval for our worship (See. Matt. 17:1-5; 28:18). Nor can we go there and pick out just a thing or two we want to do.

The picture of the redeemed in heaven, praising God with harps, is figurative, symbolic language. They have golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. Their harps signify the beautiful new song they are singing (Rev. 5:7-9).

Even the founders of the major denominations knew that instrumental music had no place in Christian worship. John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, Charles Spurgeon, the greatest of all Baptist preachers and Alexander Campbell admired leader of Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ all taught against the use of instrumental music in worship, since it was without Bible authority.

There are two different ways of approaching Christianity. The one way says I can do only that which the Bible authorizes, nothing more. The other way says I can do anything the Bible does not specifically forbid. Since the Bible does not specifically forbid the use of instruments in worship, some conclude that they can use them. But neither does the Bible specifically forbid the burning of incense, the counting of rosary beads and hundreds of other things that men have introduced into the worship of the church....all without the authorization of Jesus. We believe the first way is the

way set forth in the Bible.

For these and other reasons, we sing our praises without instruments. We realize that such is not the way of the world. We understand that many people will choose not to worship with us because of our lack of instrumental music, but we must obey God rather than trying to please men (Acts 5:29; Gal. 1:10). I hope these thoughts will help you to understand why we worship as we do.

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## 38.

### WILL GOD ACCEPT INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP?

God tells us to worship him in song (Col. 3:16). Men have added instrumental music to the worship. Does God accept what has been added to his expressed will? Consider the following:

\* Christ has all authority. He said, "Go...teach all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all things...I have commanded you..." (Matt. 28:18-20). We are to observe only what Christ has commanded in our service to him. But he does not command instrumental music for worship. Therefore, we should not use instrumental music in worship.

\* Paul teaches us to admonish one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody (not on instruments) but with our heart (Eph. 5:19). In the New Testament, there is no mention of instrumental music in the worship of the church. This point is further emphasized when we realize that Jesus, the apostles and Jewish converts were all accustomed to the instrumental music used in their temple worship.

\* A musical historian notes that, "Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments, was permitted in the early Christian Church" (**Music, History and Ideas**, p. 34).

\* Instruments of music were first introduced into churches in 670 AD by Pope Vitalian. This was after the church had been thoroughly corrupted by apostasy.

\* Paul warns us "not to go beyond what is written"(I Cor. 4:6). John says, "Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God" (II John 9). To add instrumental music to our song worship is going beyond the doctrine of Christ. Those who do so "have not God."

\* Moses relates the story of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron who were priests of God. God commanded that when burning incense in worship they should use the fire from the perpetual altar of the tabernacle. They presumed it was alright to use fire from some other source. When they drew near to offer this strange fire, God made the fire flash out and consume them (Lev. 10:1-3). This drastic lesson teaches us not to add anything to God's worship that is not approved and taught by Him.

Churches of Christ worship God with vocal congregational singing. This is according to Scripture.

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## **DOES THE BIBLE AUTHORIZE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP?**

Bro. Waddey: "If Jesus did not condemn the use of instruments in worship, how can we?" Mitchell.

Dear Mitchell: The conclusion we reach will depend upon the concept we hold about how God authorizes a thing.

Luther, with others following, argued, "I can do anything the Bible does not condemn. Zwingli and others correctly argued, "we can only do what God has authorized in his word. Churches of Christ have followed the Biblical approach of Zwingli. Those who became the Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches accepted such items as instrumental music in worship, followed Luther's concept. Zwingli was right since the Bible lays down that proposition. Note the following:

Jesus instructed us to teach disciples to "observe all things whatsoever (he) commanded" the Apostles to do (Matt. 28:20). Anything he taught them, personally while here or through his emissary the Holy Spirit, I am authorized to teach. That which he did not command, I cannot teach with his approval. I can read where we are instructed (thus authorized) to sing unto God, but I cannot read a line about the use of instruments of music in worship. (See Eph. 5:19 and Heb. 2:11-12).

If I abide in the teaching of Christ, I enjoy the blessings of the Father and his Son. If I go beyond that doctrine in my teaching and practice I have not God (II John 9). I can sing praises in worship within the boundaries of Christ's teaching, but to add instrumental accompaniment, I must go outside the teaching of Jesus for my authority. Notice how some go to the Old Testament, some to tradition, some to human wisdom. But no one can find its authorization in the New Testament of Jesus.

Paul warns us in 1 Corinthians 4:6 (American Standard Version) "not to go beyond the things that are written" in our religious practices. If I abide by his instruction, I can only sing in worship, for that is all that is written. We freely grant that the New Testament nowhere forbids by name the use of instruments, but it does not approve nor authorize the practice by the principles stated above.

To argue for instrumental accompaniment on the grounds that it is not specifically forbidden, proves too much. Scripture nowhere forbids me to use soft drink for the communion or catsup on the holy bread. Yet all would immediately take exception if I did so. Why? Because Scripture plainly tells us what to use; bread and fruit of the vine (Matt. 26:26-29). If I should not go beyond what is written in the communion worship, on what grounds should I go beyond what is written in the song worship?

Remember, Christ did not condemn instrumental music, burning incense, counting beads, holy water, infant baptism, sprinkling for baptism, clerical uniforms and a hundred other items of humanly originated religious practices. If that justifies us in the use of musical instruments, then it must of necessity approve the other items as well. Few would follow this logic to its end.

As to the matter of church buildings and song books, we must remember that God authorizes things in two ways: (1) Specifically, and (2) Generically. When He instructed Noah to build an ark we see both of these illustrated. The ark, its dimensions and materials were specified. Noah was not free to change the number of decks, windows and doors, not to use any other material than gopher wood (Gen. 6:14-16). The kind of tools, the number of helpers and the schedule of work were not stated. God left this to Noah's judgment. He was authorized to use whatever tools, helpers and schedule he needed to fulfill the general command to build the ark. In like manner, the charge to assemble and worship authorizes Christians to secure a suitable place so as to comply with the command. The command to sing authorizes such incidentals

as songbooks, song leaders and pitch pipes.

God's command to build an ark could not be stretched to cover building a permanent temple. It took another command to do that. The authorization to sing cannot be construed to cover a different kind of music such as the instrumental variety.

Of course, since we are under the New Covenant of Christ, the fact that the Hebrews were authorized to use instruments in their temple worship, is of no consequence to us. Their use of instruments is in the same category as their use of animal sacrifices, incense and the Levitical priesthood. All were authorized by a former law not currently binding upon us.

Faithful Christians are committed to doing what Christ authorized, in the way he prescribed and for the reason he gave. That is the meaning of restoring New Testament Christianity.

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## 40.

### **DID DAVID HAVE GOD'S AUTHORITY TO USE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP?**

Bro. Waddey: My question is about instruments in worship. I am a member of a church in which I play the drums for our praise team, up until learning about your beliefs, I never considered that it might be wrong. There is nothing inherently evil about it in anyway, and it is still praising God. I know that you are going to say that the New Testament does not mention the use of instruments and so you simply choose not to use them. That is a simple and harmless decision, but in the Old Testament David praised with the sound of trumpet and with the harp and lyre and symbols and so on and so forth. You would reply to this by saying that they also sacrificed bulls and burned incense, but Christ fulfilled and completed the old laws and we do not live by those anymore. The point I make is that David did not praise God with music and instruments, dancing and whatever else he could because God commanded him to, he praised God that way because he loved him, and because he wanted to do everything he could to praise God. Christ set aside the Old laws, but that was not a law in the first place. David did not praise with instruments because of a law, and I don't think that I have to stop doing it because of a lack of one. Just because Christ didn't say to do it, doesn't mean that he was opposed to it. Just as God was not opposed to the way David praised, even though he didn't specify it. I am eager to hear your response to this. I am not writing to tear down your beliefs, because it is surely not wrong to praise God in the way you choose, I am simply seeking to further my understanding of my faith. Peter.

Dear Bro. Peter: From the contents of your letter I can discern:

- \* That you most likely are a member of the Church of Christ;
- \* That your congregation has now adopted the use of instrumental music in your worship;
- \* That you had never been taught why Churches of Christ have not and most still do not use instrumental music in worship;
- \* That when you encountered such teaching someone either tried to provide you a justification for what you are doing or pointed you to written material prepared by one of our progressive brethren which seeks to assure you that you are not wrong in playing your drums while the church is worshiping.

Unfortunately you have gotten faulty advice. If you will read **II Chronicle 29:25** you will find that when King Hezekiah reformed the Temple worship "he set the Levites in the house of Jehovah with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet; *for the commandment*

*was of Jehovah by his prophets...*” David introduced instruments of music in the temple because “the commandment was of Jehovah by his prophets” namely, Gad and Nathan. Thus your argument about David fails.

You should remember that although the Old Covenant authorized the use of musical instruments for those it governed, you are not a Jew. You are a Christian. You are not amenable to the Law of Moses, but to the Law of Christ (Matt. 28:18, 20). On the day of judgment you will not be judged by Moses, David or the Old Testament, but by the words of Christ (John 12:47-48). Christ, through his Apostles, has told us to sing and make melody in our hearts unto God (Eph. 5:19). When you sing you are doing what he has told you to do. When you play your drums you are doing what your preacher wishes or perhaps what you wish to do. But your preacher has no authority to grant you that permission, and you have no right to presume to offer to God what he has not approved.

As you friend and brother in Christ, I hope you will take these thoughts to heart and cease from your unauthorized practice. Be content to worship your Creator as He has instructed you. You need never fret about that being wrong.

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## 41.

# IS THE USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP REALLY A SIN?

Mr. Waddey. Do you believe it is a sin to use instrumental music in worship? Newton F.

Dear Newton: In answer to your inquiry, Do I think the use of instrumental music in the worship of God is sinful, my answer is, yes. My reasons for so thinking are as follow:

- \* We are commanded to observe all things that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20). But he did not command us to use musical instruments in our worship to God. Rather he told us to sing and make melody with our hearts (Eph. 5:19).
- \* We are warned against “abiding not” in the doctrine of Christ (II John 9). Those fail to do so have not the blessing of the Father or the Son. But to use instruments of music in our worship is to go beyond the doctrine that Christ gave us.
- \* We are taught neither to add to nor to take from the words God has given us (Rev. 22:18-19). But to use instrumental music in our worship is to add to what God has told us.
- \* Numerous Old Testament examples show us that when God commands his people to do something, he expects them to obey him just as he instructed. Note the cases of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-4) and Uzzah and Ahio (I Chron. 13:6-10; 15:11-15).
- \* Sin is the transgression of God's law (I John 3:4). God instructed us to sing our praises unto Him (Eph. 5:19). That is his will and our responsibility. To do something different is to sin.
- \* Historically we know for a fact that early Christians did not worship God with musical instruments. It was a thousand years before such were widely used.... and that in the corrupted medieval church. Hence we worship God as we do, singing and making melody in our hearts unto Him.

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## 42.

### **IF THERE ARE HARPS IN HEAVEN, WHY CAN'T WE HAVE THEM IN OUR WORSHIP?**

Dear Mr. Waddey: I read in the book of Revelation that we will have harps to play in heaven. If we will have them in heaven surely we are allowed to have them in our church worship today. Julie

Dear Julie: Do you really think that in heaven God is going to give you a harp to play when you worship him? Do you know how to play a harp? Do you know how to tune a harp? Who would coordinate the playing of millions of harps simultaneously?

The fact is, a careful reading of Revelation 5:8 will make it clear to you just what is meant by harps in heaven. Note that John describes the elders as "having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are *the prayers of the saints and they sing a new song....*"

- \* The golden bowls of incense represent the prayers offered by the saints and
- \* The harps represent their singing of praises to God and his Son.

If you were serious in trying to use this passage to justify the use of instrumental music in worship then every one who was worshipping would need to have his own harp....not one person playing the organ or a dozen in a praise band. You would also need to be offering incense with your prayers.

These two phrases are part of the gorgeous symbolism used by the Holy Spirit to show us how beautiful heaven will be to our human eyes. The symbols are not designed to direct our congregational worship. You are making the same mistake the Jehovah's Witnesses do who read about the 144,000 before God (Rev. 7:4) and mistakenly conclude that only 144,000 will get to live in God's presence in eternity.

When you sing God's praises with your lips and from your heart (Eph. 5:19), you are worshipping as the earliest Christians did. That is a historical truth that no one can deny. Why would you want to try to worship God in some other way for which you have no assurance of His acceptance?

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## 43.

### **GOOD ACAPPELLA SINGING PREACHES A POWERFUL MESSAGE**

Before he entered politics, Gen. James Garfield, later President of the United States, preached among the Disciples of Christ/Christian Churches. A note in his diary expresses his thoughts regarding a visit to the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle in London, England. He went there in 1874 to hear Charles H. Spurgeon preach. Spurgeon was considered

the greatest preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Each week thousands flocked to his church to hear his powerful lessons. He insisted that the song worship in his congregation always be a cappella. He equated instrumental accompaniment with other additions of Catholicism. Garfield wrote,

“At half-past eleven Spurgeon came in, and at once offered a short, simple earnest prayer, and read and helped the whole congregation to sing Watts' stirring hymn: *There is a land of pure delight.*”

For the first time in my life I felt some sympathy with the doctrine that would reject instrumental music from church worship. There must have been five thousand voices joining in the hymn. The whole building was filled and overflowed with the strong volume of song. The music made itself felt as a living, throbbing presence that entered your nerves, brain, heart, and filled and swept you away in its resistless current.”

(Published in the 1883 volume of *Century Magazine*, and is quoted in "Charles H. Spurgeon: His Faith and Works," H.L. Wayland, Copyright 1892 by the American Baptist Publication Society. Adapted)

It is not just singing that makes such an impression. There are several factors, that combined, leave such an impression.

- \* The worshipers must engage in the singing with zeal and enthusiasm.
- \* The ability to sing the four parts of harmony also adds much to the beauty of singing.
- \* The song leader must be an able singer who also knows how to lead a congregation..
- \* He must pitch his songs correctly and set the proper meter. To sing “The Old Rugged Cross” in an upbeat tempo destroys the beauty of the lyrics. To sing Marching to Zion in the meter of a funeral dirge does the same.
- \* The songs must be wisely chosen. A song that is unknown by or beyond the ability of the congregation will not be lovely to those visitors who hear them struggling with it.
- \* Songs must be appropriate for their place in the worship. An opening song should be a call to worship such as “God is Love.” The song before prayer should be a prayer song or one that teaches about prayer such as “The Beautiful Garden of Prayer.” The song before communion should relate to the death of Christ or the act of communing. “I Gave My Life for Thee” is excellent for this occasions. Before the lesson, a song that is related to the subject of the hour is helpful. If the lesson is on Missions, “Send the Light” is an excellent choice. Invitation songs should invite sinners to respond to Christ. A closing hymn should express that idea. “Take the Name of Jesus With You” serves this purpose well. A multitude of hymns are available for each aspect of worship.

Just as sermons are planned, so should the songs be planned. These two aspects of our worship, when well done, not only edify the Christians assembled for worship, they go far in teaching and persuading the lost to surrender their lives to the Savior. For many visitors who come our way, we will have only one opportunity to teach and persuade them to chose the Savior’s Way. We must never allow them to go away with an unfavorable impression of the Lord’s church.

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## 44.

### **THE VOICE CAN DO WHAT AN INSTRUMENT OF MUSIC CANNOT DO**

From some unknown author I gleaned the heart of this brief lesson. To his thoughts I have add some additional thoughts and scriptures. (JHW)

The Bible says to Speak to one another in songs (Eph 5:19).  
The Voice can do this, an Instrument of music cannot.

The Bible says to Teach one another as we sing (Col 3:16).  
The Voice can do this, the Instrument cannot.

The Bible says to Admonish others who are present (Col 3:16).  
This the Voice can do, an Instrument cannot.

The Bible says to Sing with spirit (1Cor.14:15).  
The Voice can do this, the Instrument cannot.

The Bible says to Sing with Understanding (1Cor.14:15).  
The Voice can do so, but the Instrument cannot.

The Bible says to Make melody in heart (Eph 5:19).  
The Voice Can do this but the Instrument cannot.

The Bible says Offer the fruit of your lips to God (Heb. 13:15).  
The Voice Can do this, but an Instrument cannot. (Adapted).

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## 45.

### **SOME THOUGHTS FOR THOSE WHO LEAD GOD'S PEOPLE IN PRAISE**

When Christ ordained that his disciples speak "one to another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19), he left to our discretion and judgment how our singing would be directed. Without specific instructions, we are left to such principles as "Let all thing be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40). "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace (I Cor. 14:33). "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). So our fathers did what others had done before them and chose those who were capable, to lead them in this aspect of worship.

Among the needed qualifications to be an effective song leader are:

\* The ability to sing. Not all have this gift and some do not recognize their lack of ability.



- \* A love for singing. Only those who love to sing will put the necessary time and energy into developing their skills and effectiveness.
- \* A basic knowledge of music that enables him to properly lead the church in praise.
- \* A musical ear, i.e., the ability to detect the difference between harmony and dissonance, to stay on the key in which the song was begun.
- \* Familiarity with the songs to be sung. One cannot lead a song he does not know.
- \* Ability to sing without instrumental accompaniment. Since that is the style of music instituted by Christ we must be able to lead a congregation in a cappella singing.
- \* A voice sufficiently strong to be heard by the audience and to lead a multitude in praise.
- \* A reasonable amount of self-confidence to stand before an audience and lead them in worship.
- \* A wholesome, godly life that will command the respect of others.
- \* A love for the church that will prompt him to be faithful in attendance and the life of the congregation.
- \* Personal hygiene, grooming and dressing habits that are expected of a public representation and leader of God's people.

There are a few additional suggestions that are important to effective leading of praise in worship

1. Choose songs known to the worshipers.
2. Rehearse your songs ahead of time so you will be prepared to lead them well during the worship service.
3. Be careful to sing your selections in the proper meter. A hymn sung too fast or too slow can lose much of its effectiveness.
4. Remember that your job is to lead the saints in song worship. The preacher's task is to bring the lesson. This does not mean that a brief preface to a song is out of order. Just remember to be brief.
5. Choose your songs carefully so each one fits smoothly and properly into the worship of the hour. An opening hymn is ideally a call to worship. A hymn of praise is always appropriate. A related song before the Bible reading and communion is helpful. Coordinate your selections with the lesson of the hour.
6. Be prompt in beginning the invitation song lest the delay hinder the lesson's effect on some prospect.
7. Always be prepared to limit the number of verses or even the number of songs should circumstances demand it.
8. Also be prepared with an appropriate song should someone respond for baptism.
9. Remember that just because a song is in our hymnal it is not necessarily suited for our worship.
10. Just because the editor of your hymnal has chosen to print 4 or 5 verses of a song, you are not obligated to sing all of them.
11. Use good judgment in selecting your songs. If your members are not capable of singing a complex or difficult song, do not attempt it. Whatever the ragged result, it will not enhance worship.

You play a vital role in the worship of God's people. Always view your task as a stewardship from God. Be sure to give God your very best effort.

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## THOUGHTS ABOUT WORSHIPING GOD IN SONG

Our hymnal contains some 700 songs suitable for worship to God. Hymns vary in theme, content, rhythm and tone.

- \* Some hymns are best suited for extending a gospel invitation.
- \* Others are designed to prepare our hearts for communion.
- \* Some are ideal to prepare us for giving our gifts to God.
- \* The words of some songs express our worship and praise to God in heaven.
- \* Others are designed to teach those about us.
- \* Some teach great historical or doctrinal truths about God and his will.
- \* Some are exhortations to obedience, diligence or faithfulness
- \* Some are warnings to sinners.
- \* Some express our hope and desire to please God and live with him in eternity.
- \* Some songs are reflective, urging introspection.
- \* Some are proclamations of the glorious gospel.
- \* Some are prayers.
- \* Some are somber and solemn;, others are joyful and spirited. The tempo of a song combines with the words to express certain moods or emotions.
- \* Some are designed for beginning, others for closing a worship service.

Good singing is inspirational and uplifting. Well-chosen and well-directed songs add greatly to the quality and value of the worship experience and to the success of the sermon. Those who lead God's people in worship should carefully select and arrange their songs so they will help make the worship service not only "acceptable unto God" (Rom. 12:2), but that it will also edify those who participate (I Cor. 14:26).

**An opening hymn** should be one that calls saints to worship. Generally it will be one of a more spirited rhythm to draw the attention of all to the business of the hour.

**Before Scripture reading**, a song focusing on the glories of the Bible is appropriate.

**Before communion** a song that reflects the suffering and death of Christ is best suited.

**Before the offering** a song that reflects on God's gifts to us and our need to give back to Him is needed.

**Before the lesson**, it is good to coordinate this song with the one who will deliver the sermon. The song can set the stage and prepare the hearts of the people for the message. It is good to consider the words of this song, lest its theme be counterproductive. All have heard the story of the song leader who chose "Ready To Suffer" for his song before the lesson.

**For the invitation**, this song also can often be coordinated with the lesson to continue its exhortation to obedience.

**When one has responded** to confess his or her faith, songs about commitment, baptism, the new birth and salvation are most appropriate.

**Before dismissal** one of the wonderful songs, bidding farewell and encouraging faithfulness, will provide a meaningful

thought for all to take home with them.

In heaven we will praise our Lord throughout eternity (Rev. 5:9-10). We should think of our worship here on earth as our rehearsal for that glorious day when we sing before His throne.

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## 47.

# SONGS THAT ENHANCE THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE

### I. A Suggested Plan for Lord's Day Worship.

1. An opening hymn. This should be a call to worship such as "Lord We Come Before Thee Now."
2. A hymn of praise to God such as "Hallelujah Praise Jehovah."
3. A song to prepare the congregation for prayer such as "Father Hear the Prayer We Offer."
4. A song to prepare the worshipers for Communion such as "When We Meet in Sweet Communion."
5. An instructional song or song of exhortation. "Am I a Soldier of the Cross."
6. A song to prepare for the sermon such as "Break Thou The Bread of Life."
7. An invitation song such as "Come to Jesus."
8. A closing hymn, such as "Take the Name of Jesus With You."

II. Since we strive to build our service on a one hour time frame, the leader will not be able to sing all the verses of all the songs. A wise plan is to select appropriate verses for the occasion. One verse of an opening hymn, perhaps two verses before the prayer and the same prior to the Communion. By so doing, more songs can be sung and we can still stay within our time frame.

1. Songs that are especially long, or very slow, need to be limited in their number of verses.

When a song becomes boring we have lost its value for worship.

2. Remember that elderly people can be exhausted when songs are too long, leaving inadequate time to catch their breath and swallow.
3. For most hymns 3 verses are adequate. It is true that our grandparents use to sing all five verses, and they also listened to sermons for 60-90 minutes and 10 minute prayers. We have learned that it is better to limit our time for sermons and prayers and for the length of our songs.
4. When we sing our invitation hymn (This is our American tradition, and a good one that we want to keep) there are some things to remember:
  - a. There should be no delay between the preacher's last word and the first word of the song. Delay can cause the convicted sinner to loose his chain of thought and might allow Satan to keep him from responding.
  - b. The invitation song must of necessity be a well-known song that all can sing.
  - c. If the audience is composed of faithful Christians it is redundant to sing numerous verses of an invitation appealing to sinners to come to Christ. One verse is sufficient in such situations.

5. For a closing hymn one verse is adequate.

III. For our morning worship hour we should remember:

1. To avoid songs with complicated choruses.
2. Avoid songs with difficult melodies.
3. Avoid songs with bass, tenor or alto leads
4. Avoid songs not well-known to the congregation.
5. Avoid songs the leader is not fully confident of leading.
6. Avoid songs known only to members of the Church of Christ. Remember one of the most noticeable things to a visitor are the strange, unknown hymns. The most arresting thing is the singing of hymns with which he or she is familiar.
7. Never forget that our singing is as important to our worship and potential growth as is our preaching. Just as prospects are favorably impressed by good, well-delivered sermons and classes, so they will be favorably impressed by good singing. As poorly prepared and delivered sermons turn folks away, so will poor singing.

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48.

## THINGS SUITABLE FOR WORSHIP

To have musical talent is a gift from God. Music can be wonderful form of recreation. We are entertained by our favorite kind of music. With musical skills, a person can earn a living. Music is used in the worship of God. Different kinds of music are suited for different occasions. For example for wedding we have wedding music, the same for funerals. For victory parades we play marches, for small children's parties we play kid's music. Music designed for worship is not suited for square dances, nor is the hoe-down suitable for worship.

God has told us that in this Christian age we are to "sing and make melody in our hearts" unto him (Eph. 5:19). It is a wonderful thing to be able to play the saxophone, the guitar or the drums, but they are not appropriate for the worship of the Creator and Savior. A wise person knows that there is an appropriate time and place for things and observes that propriety. A faithful child of God does what the Master specifies without arguing. That is what it means to call Jesus Lord (Luke 6:46). That is what it means to be his servant (Rom. 6:16-18).

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## SHOULD WE USE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS?

Dear Bro. Waddey: When weddings and funerals held in the church building, is it proper to use instrumental music? CH

Dear CH: Before we can properly understand and answer this question we first must clarify two important points:

1. The church building is not the church. The church is the body of Christ, which consists of his saved servants (I Cor. 12:27). A building is an expediency created by men to house the assemblies of the saints. Hence a thing that might not be allowed in the worship of the church, might not necessarily be wrong in a building used by the church for her worship.
2. Weddings and funerals are not worship services ordained by God. They are family/social events that Christians engage in. They are certainly not wrong and there should be not objection to them being conducted in the meeting house of the church.

While God has specified the kind of music he wants us to offer him in our worship, he has not done so for weddings and funerals. While we are under divine instructions to “sing and make melody in our hearts” for worship (Eph. 5:19), no such restriction is placed on social events such as wedding and funerals.

That said, there is yet another consideration in deciding this issue. While a thing may be lawful, it may not be expedient (I Cor. 6:12). Because we have been troubled in the past by brethren who were determined to introduce instruments of music into the worship of the church, many elders have determined not to allow any mechanical instruments of music into their buildings. Past promoters of instrumental music often slipped the instrument into the worship by first getting it into the building for social purposes. We have a resurgence of that element again today

For some who are immature Christians, it is hard to distinguish between allowing an instrument for a wedding or funeral and to do so for a worship service. Wise elders have every right to say no to those desiring to do so if it would create a problem for weak members.

If allowing the use of instruments for such activities in the church’s meeting house would cause confusion, it should be foregone for the name of unity in the family (I Cor. 8:8-13; Rom. 15:1-3)).

Another important point to remember is that God created his congregations to be self-governing. Hence so long as they do not violate some clearly stated biblical principle, a congregation might choose to handle such matters differently than you or I might. We should respect their freedom under Christ to make such decisions.

While in my mind I can see a clear difference between worship assemblies and such events as weddings and funerals, and would not be confused or offended should elders allow an instrument to be used in a wedding or funeral, I fully respect those who feel such should not be done.

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## WORSHIPING GOD AS WE COMMUNE

### 50.

#### COMMUNING WITH CHRIST

As the Lord Jesus and his Apostles shared their final Passover Supper, “he took bread, and when he had blessed, he brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take ye: this is my body. And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them: and they all drank of it. An he said unto them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Very I say unto you I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:22-25). With these solemn words, he informed them that he would soon be taken from them. But he also promised that he would again share the new memorial with them in the coming kingdom of God. The kingdom of which he spoke is his church. Remember, he said, “upon this rock I will build my church... and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 16:18). In being saved, God translated us out of the power of darkness and into the kingdom of his dear Son (Col. 1:13). Fifty days after Passover, the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, empowering them to declare the reign of Jesus as Messiah and the terms of salvation and admission into his kingdom. When the people asked what they must do, they were told to repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus. The Lord then added to the church such as were being saved (Acts 2:1-47). Those privileged to be in his church/kingdom assembled on the first day of the week to participate in the communion of Christ (Acts 20:7) and across the centuries millions more have followed their example. When we gather around the Lord’s Table, the solemnity of the occasion is mixed with great joy when we remember that Christ has promised to be there, sharing with us, even as he did with his Apostles that betrayal night. This helps us understand his promise in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.” Understanding this, we will never want to miss the Lord’s Day assembly and the sacred communion with Christ.

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### 51.

#### A PROPER ATTITUDE FOR COMMUNING WITH CHRIST

- \* Assemble around the Lord’s Table, not because you are obligated to do so, but because it is a wonderful privilege.
- \* Participate, not to show others how righteous you are, but because you deeply love the Lord Jesus and wish to be a true and genuine disciple of him.
- \* We need to commune, not because we are strong in faith and practice, but because we are weak and often fall short of God’s glory.
- \* Participate in this sacred feast, not because you have earned heaven’s approval, but because you desperately need the grace and mercy that God has extend to you in Christ.
- \* Participate, not to rebuke others who failed to do so, but to seek God’s blessing and direction for your life.
- \* Take the blessed emblems, not for your belly, but for your soul’s deepest need.
- \* Take them remembering what a awful price Christ paid for your redemption.

\* Eat the bread and drink the wine, knowing that without the event which they memorialize you would surely perish because of your sins.

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## 52.

### WHEN WE MEET IN SWEET COMMUNION

When the sentence of death had been decreed upon our Lord, the soldiers “stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe...they platted a crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spat upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head. And they...led him away to crucify him” (Matt. 27:27-31). In the communion, as I contemplate Jesus’s suffering there are lessons I should take home with me.

\* I should carefully guard my heart from those sins that helped crucify our Lord, lest I “crucify him afresh and put him to open shame” (Heb. 6:6).

\* I must never try to humiliate a fellow human, who like me, is made in God’s image.

\* I will never mock or ridicule my neighbor, even if I feel he is in the wrong.

\* I must never allow myself to hate another person, lest that hatred lead me to do him harm. He that hateth his brother is a murderer (I John 3:15).

\* I will never persecute a person or a group of people because they act, believe or worship different than I do. I will try to understand their point of view and be tolerant of them as I strive to win them to Christ. . To do otherwise means I have not the spirit of Christ (Lk. 9:55).

\* I will never allow myself to be swept into violence by the influence of rabble rousers or the actions of a mob. “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil” (Ex. 23:2).

\* Should I ever have to render judgment on any man, I will not be harsh or vindictive, but will strive to be merciful as God has been merciful to me. Judgement without mercy will be upon those who have shown no mercy (Jas. 2:13).

(Adapted from B.A. Abbott’s **At the Master’s Table**)

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## 53.

### THE HOUR OF COMMUNION, A TIME OF MIXED EMOTIONS

The most sacred hour of the Christian’s week is when he assembles with fellow-saints to remember Christ in the Lord’s Supper. This is a time of mixed emotions.

\* It is a time of **shame** as we contemplate the painful fact that our sins made necessary for Him to die (I Tim. 1:15).

\* It is a time of **sorrow** for those wrongs in our lives.

- \* It is a time of **thankfulness** that God so loved us that He sent his beloved Son and that Jesus so loved us that he laid down his life for us (II Cor. 9:15).
- \* It is an occasion of **joy** because our sins are forgiven and we are now reconciled to God (Phil. 4:4).
- \* It is a time of **hope** that a home in heaven awaits us because of Christ's dying love (Rom. 8:24-25).
- \* It is a time of **tranquil peace**, because we are now at peace with our Creator and Judge (Phil. 4:7).

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## 54.

### SEVEN ASPECTS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

When we assemble around the Lord's table each Sunday it is good to remind ourselves what it is all about.

**I. It is Messiah's meal** to which we are invited (Mark 14:25). He promises to be present with us on every occasion (Matt. 18:20).

**II. It is a memorial to our Lord**, reminding us of his suffering and death on our behalf (I Cor. 11:24-25).

**III. It is a time for thanksgiving** for the blessing of salvation of which it reminds us (Matt. 26:27).

The word "thanks" is from the Greek word *eucharistia* from which our English word eucharist is derived. This is commonly used for communion by some of our religious neighbors.

**IV. It is covenant meal.** Jesus said, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). The old covenant of Moses was taken away (Col. 2:14). Christ gave us a new covenant and dedicated, ratified and sanctified it with his blood shed on Calvary (Heb. 9:18-24).

**V. It is a proclamation**, telling the world that Christ died for us and will return to claim us (I Cor. 11:26).

**VI. It is a time of sharing and fellowship with the family of believers** in the local assembly and with all saints around the world (I Cor. 10:16-17). This is the definition of "communion." Thus Paul reminds us that we "come together to eat" (I Cor. 11:33).

**VII. It is the observance of an ancient and sacred tradition** (I Cor. 11:23). It was first given by the Master himself on the night he was betrayed, then passed on by the Apostles to those whom they taught. A tradition is that which is received and passed on. Across two millennia, millions of saints have passed on to their children and those new in the faith this sacred tradition. It is our duty to do the same today. Nothing in this holy feast is of human origin. It was given to us by our Savior.

I am indebted to Jimmie Jividen for the heart of these thoughts. \*\*\*



55.

## **CHRIST OUR PASSOVER**

To deliver His people from their slavery in Egypt, God had to break the will of Pharaoh. To do that He resolved to rain death on the first born of all Egypt. To shield His people from the wrath, He ordered them to kill a lamb and mark the door posts and lintels of their homes with the blood. When the hour of judgement came, all those under the blood were spared (Ex. 12:1-13). Our old hymn captures the thought of this event, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

Centuries later, God looked down on a world of sinners doomed to judgement. Wishing to save all He could, He sent his only Son to rescue them (John 3:16). Jesus, like that Passover lamb in Egypt, died for all who wanted to escape Satan's dominion and live with Jehovah. Every person who is saved, bears the sign of Jesus's shed blood in his life (1 John 1:7). When the trumpet of judgement sounds the angels will pass over all of those bearing the scarlet mark in their hearts. Today we celebrate that sacrifice of Christ that makes our salvation possible.

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56.

## **FOOD FOR THE INNER MAN**

Just as our bodies need physical nourishment, so our inner man needs nourishment suitable for its health and growth.

The God of all provisions supplies this need for us. Jesus told his disciples, "Very, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. ...For my flesh is meat (food) indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." (John 6:53-54). These mysterious words are commonly misunderstood. But the Lord himself explains his meaning later in verse 63. "It is the spirit that gives life: the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." It is the teaching of the Master that nourishes our souls. To grow strong in the faith we must "long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that (we) may grow thereby unto salvation." When we assemble for worship, we feed on the teaching of Christ and when we commune we feed our souls by remembering the price paid for our salvation. May we never miss an opportunity to participate in this feast of spiritual things.

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57.

## **ONE BREAD AND ONE BODY**

Paul wrote, "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread...In like manner also the cup, after supper saying...this do as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:23-24). Each time we gather for communion we are part of a historic stream of disciples

who for some 2,000 years have engaged in this same observance. A practice that has survived for such a long time and continually involves more and more people, has some great power and message behind it. Customs come and go. Traditions fade after a few generations. But the Memorial Supper of Christ's death lives on. Like the widening circles on a lake, its observance daily spreads to still more people in more countries. As we commune today, Christians in hundreds of nations around the world join with us in the holy feast; all saved by the blood of Christ, all members of his spiritual family, the church, all living their lives for Him and all hoping for a home in heaven. As you commune remember that although "there are many members," we are "but one body" or church (I Cor. 12:20). And as "the bread we break," "is a communion of the of the body of Christ," so we Christians, who are many "are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread" (I Cor. 10:16-18).

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## 58.

### THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB OF GOD

When sin entered the world, there was a need for sacrifice to deal with its guilt and restore the offender to good standing with God. Thus we find Abel offering his lamb as his sacrifice (Gen. 4:4-5). Cain's vegetable offering was not acceptable.

From that day until the present, "without the shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). For thousands of years men offered up their animal sacrifices. They could suffice for the short term, but their sin debt kept accruing. It was impossible that the blood of bulls and goats could permanently take away the guilt of sin (Heb. 10:4). To achieve forgiveness that was effective once for all times, God sent his only begotten Son (John 3:16). His death at the hands of wicked men God turned into the suitable sacrifice for the sins of all humanity; one grand sacrifice with complete and permanent effectiveness (Heb. 9:14, 23, 26). That sacrifice we remember in this memorial feast.

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## 59.

### JESUS, OUR SACRIFICIAL LAMB

In ancient Israel sinners brought a sacrificial lamb to God's altar to make peace with the Lord they had offended. Some 1977 years ago Jesus began his ministry among the Hebrew people. John the Baptist, a prophet sent by God, declared Jesus to be "the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Peter reminded his readers that they had been redeemed "with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish...even the blood of Christ..."(I Pet. 1:18-19). He was "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). It was ever in God's plan that his Son would be the sacrifice for the salvation of man.

The lambs that Israel offered were consumed in the offering. Our Lamb was slain but death could not hold him. On the first day of week, following his death, his tomb was found open and empty. He was raised, never to die again. Now he ever liveth to make intercession for us (Heb. 7:25). Each Lord's Day since has been a memorial to his resurrection.

When we commune we remember his sacrificial death for our sins (Matt. 26:26-29). Also, till he returns, we proclaim to the world about us, his death and what it accomplished (I Cor. 11:26).

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## 60.

### THE ESSENCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

When God's people assemble to partake of the bread and wine of communion it is essential that their minds be involved in the service, else it is only bread and wine for the belly.

- \* It should be a moment of **retrospection**, as we look back to Calvary (I Cor. 11:25).
- \* It is a **commemorative** occasion as we celebrate what Christ did on our behalf the day he died (Matt. 26:27).
- \* There is a **prospective** aspect to communion as we as we look forward to Christ's return (I Cor. 11:26).
- \* There must be **introspection**, as we are to look into our own hearts and examine ourselves (I Cor. 11:28).
- \* It is a **corrective** occasion; a time to reflect on our own spiritual state and make the necessary adjustments.
- \* It is an occasion of **instruction** as we proclaim the Lord's death to the unbelieving world about us (11:26).
- \* It is **separative** in nature because it marks the distinction between those who are Christ's disciples and those who are not; those whose destiny is heaven and those who will not enjoy its glory.

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## 61.

### DO WE EAT AND DRINK THE BODY AND BLOOD OF JESUS?

Dear Bro. John: I am studying with a very intelligent elderly man who claims no belief in God. He told me he has trouble accepting the idea of "eating the body of Christ and drinking His blood." He says the very thought smacks of cannibalism and is a major 'turnoff' to him. Can you give me a good response that could convict him for the Lord? Dan

Dear Dan: I would ask the gentleman if he would have any trouble participating in a memorial banquet to his favorite president, Reagan if he is Republican, Kennedy or Roosevelt if he is Democratic. Such events are often observed on their 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, etc. Such a meal honors the man for his life and work. Our communion is a memorial to the founder of our faith. Since Jesus died for our salvation and to bring about his church, it is fitting that we observe a memorial to that sacrificial event. Thus the Master said, "This do" in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:24-25).

He has obviously heard the teaching of the Catholic Church of "the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements of the communion." Explain to him that this is a misunderstanding of the message of the Bible on the subject. A memorial meal in honor of a great person is not an cannibalistic rite.

John 6:53 reads, "I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in

yourselves.” Taken alone, these words might seem to say that we literally eat his flesh and blood. But by reading on to vs. 63 we find the true meaning. “It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life.” Thus as Jesus drew this lesson to a close, he explained that he spoke in figurative language. If one ate the actual flesh and blood of Jesus it would profit nothing, but the Spirit-filled words he spoke feed the spirit of man and give him life.

You might also point out to him that God himself has forbidden man to eat blood, whether of man or beast (Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:20). Therefore Christ would not be telling us to go contrary to God’s expressed will.

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## 62.

### SHOULD COMMUNION BE OBSERVED DURING A FELLOWSHIP MEAL?

Dear Bro. Waddey: Did the early Christians partake of the Lord’s Supper as they shared their love feasts?  
Franklin B.

Dear Bro. Franklin: As I read I Cor. 11:20-22, I see Paul mentioning three kinds of meals.

- (1). The Lord’s Supper (vs.20);
- (2). Meals that should be eaten together (vs.21)...these I would take to be their love feasts or fellowship meals which you mention (Jude 12);
- (3). Meals that should be eaten at home (vs.22).

As I understand these verses, the Corinthians were confounding the Lord’s Supper and their fellowship gatherings. In those gatherings some of them were selfish or thoughtless. They had abundance but did not share their bounty with those who had little. Also they ate to excess. They would not even wait until everyone was present for the meal and thus they ate before others arrived (11: 33-34). Their conduct revealed their lack of love and oneness as God’s people (vs.22b). The Apostle indicates that this was the result of “divisions” that existed among them (vs.18). Paul’s rebuke, seems to say that those only interested in filling their bellies, with no thought of others, should do their eating at home. Mixing the Lord’s Supper with their common meal had further complicated their misbehavior. In fact it was impossible for them to properly commune in such circumstances. By eating their common meals at home, and separating such from the Lord’s Supper, their coming together would not be “unto judgment” (11: 34). His strong rebuke, “What, have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God” seems to be sufficient warning for us not to mix the sacred meal and the fellowship type of meal.

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## CAN WE COMMUNE ON DAYS OTHER THAN SUNDAY?

Bro. John: In a discussion on the day for observing the Lord's Supper I stressed that it is for the first day of the week. No other day is authorized. A student replied, "We sin, study the Bible, pray, etc on other days of the week. Why cannot the Lord's Supper be taken on another day?" Can you help me answer this? Warren

Hello Warren: The people who respond as you have described do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

- \* Jesus said we take it in remembrance of his suffering and death (Luke 22:19).
- \* It is a proclamation of the Lord's death to the unbelieving world (I Cor. 11:26).
- \* It is a time of introspection (I Cor. 11:28).

**But the Lord's Supper does not wash away sins.** It is not the way God has appointed for Christians to receive forgiveness for their failures. Evidently, since these folks argue we sin on all days of the week, therefore we should commune all days of the week. Where might they have found such a faulty idea? In Catholicism! The basis of their Mass is that there is alleged to be forgiving power in partaking of the communion when it is blest and transformed by the priest. Thus it is taken daily, on holy days, at weddings, funerals, prior to death, etc. Of course the Scripture no where says this. If we need forgiveness we are told to confess our sins and ask God for pardon (I John 1:7-10)

We worship on the first day of the week because that was the day of Christ's resurrection (Mark 16:2). The church began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost which always came on a first day of the week (See. Lev. 23:15-16). The purpose of the church's Lord's Day assembly was to "break bread" (Acts 20:7). From the earliest historical records of Christianity, the Christians met and communed on the first day of the week.

The question would be, Why would any Christian be pushing to ignore the above, plus the 2,000 years of Christian history that he might commune on some other day? An humble, obedient servant obeys his Master without questioning and disputing his instructions. A rebellious servant refuses to submit his will to that of his Master. This is the spirit of the change movement that has beset us.

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# WORSHIPING GOD WITH OUR GIFTS AND OFFERINGS

## 64.

### WHEN WE GIVE OUR GIFTS UNTO GOD

When we assemble for worship we sing, pray, commune, hear God's Word and give our gifts to the Father. From ancient times, God's people have brought their gifts to Him to demonstrate their love and gratitude for his blessings (Prov. 3:9-10). When Christ established his religion he taught his disciples to be generous givers (Luke 6:38). Through Paul, he instructed us to give our gifts on the first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2). Our gifts provide the resources for the church to help the needy (Rom. 15:26) and support the preaching of the gospel (Gal. 6:6). It provides the means for us to have a place to meet and provisions for worship.

We sometime hear thoughts expressed before the contribution is taken that seem to imply that non-members are not to participate in the giving. They could well conclude that their gifts are not wanted or welcomed. When we address our audience about giving we need to give serious thought to what we are saying and how it is expressed. Consider the following points:

- \* We should never apologize for the fact that we are taking a collection. This is a God-ordained part of our worship.
- \* We do not tell our guests they need not sing, nor bow their heads as we pray, nor listen while we preach. **Why should we say anything to the effect that they need not give?** We want and expect them to participate in most other aspects of worship. We should not discourage their participation in giving to God their gifts.
- \* We should never discourage folks from showing their love to God and their appreciation to the church by giving their gifts.
- \* The church has been blessed by many non-members who have made generous gifts to her work. For their gifts we should be thankful. God, through their generosity, is blessing us.

When presiding at the collection, one could read an appropriate passage, or say something to the effect, "We now have the opportunity to show our love and appreciation to God for what he has done for us." Then offer a prayer of thanksgiving. We should always think before we speak. Remember the message of Paul, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26).

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## 65.

### WHY WE GIVE OUR GIFTS TO GOD IN OUR WORSHIP

Involved in our worship to God is the giving our gifts and offerings to God (I Cor. 16:1-2). God wants us to give liberally and cheerfully (II Cor.9:7, 11). The funds we give are used for the purposes God has designated in his word.

- \* Our gifts support those who preach the gospel among us. "Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him

who teacheth in all things" (Gal. 6:6). The Lord proclaimed "that they the proclaim the gospel should live of the gospel" (I Cor. 9:14). We provide support for our local preacher and for those guest speakers who come our way.

\* With our gifts, the church supports missionaries who take the gospel to distant places. Paul "robbed other churches, taking wages of them that (he) might minister unto ( the Corinthians)" (II Cor. 11:8-9). Millions of souls languish in sin, in ignorance and error. They desperately need the gospel. God raises the question, "How shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach except they be sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

\* The church uses its income to care for the poor and unfortunate (Jas. 2:14-17). Widows and orphans are assisted by the church (Jas. 1:27). We do good to all men as we are able, but especially to those who are fellow-Christians (Gal. 6:10).

\* We use our resources to assist other congregations in good works. The church in Jerusalem assisted the church in Antioch by sending them a preacher to help them (Acts 11:22-24). We sometimes help sister congregations care for the poor when the need is greater than they can supply (Acts 11:27-30).

\* With our contributions, we provide for the daily operation of the church. We provide a place for us to meet. We pay for our utilities, etc. We provide such things as hymnals, communion ware and supplies and literature. We purchase the supplies necessary for our Bible classes to help our people grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (II Pet. 3:18).

\* With our gifts we support good works done in the name of Christ (Tit. 2:14; I Tim. 6:18).

\* We provide the tools that help us evangelize our community and in other places where needed. This includes newspaper lessons and advertisements, printing and mailing of our material to newcomers.

God has given his church the honor and privilege of assisting him in these various ways. The duty rests upon the church and the honor should be hers for fulfilling it. Our generous gifts make it possible for us to do good things for the Master. As we worship, let us be generous in our giving to God so that his work can be carried on successfully here and abroad and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10).

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## 66.

### HOW TO GIVE YOUR GIFTS TO GOD

Modern man has so much material wealth that he has difficulty knowing what to do with it. Especially does he have difficulty in giving his money to the Lord's Cause. The gifts we give reflect the measure and extent of our love and concern for the most important and strategic influence in the world! The Lord's kingdom stands between us and the destruction of all that we hold dear. The church is in the forefront of the conflict against immorality which threatens to swallow us up. She is our chief defense against unbelief, Islam and paganism. She is the conscience of the nation and the cornerstone of free government. If the church fails, all else is lost.

God ordained that the church be supported by the free-will offerings of its members. He has provided us guidelines as to how we should give.

1. We must learn to give **joyfully**. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). We should never begrudge giving unto God. Some say give until it hurts, but Paul teaches us to give until it makes you happy. The word translated "cheerful" could as well be rendered hilariously. This principle needs more emphasis today.

2. Christians must give **purposefully**. "Let each man do according as he hath purposed in his heart" (II Cor. 9:7). We

must, with wisdom and deliberation, plan to make the best use of our gifts. Our stewardship should be planned as all other items in our budget. Henry Luce, late publisher of Time-Life magazines said, "It is my conviction that the only money which has any significant chance to turn the tide of the present crisis throughout the world, the only money which can turn this crisis into another triumph of the human spirit, is money which is given in Christ's name, administered by his ministers and his services." We should plan our giving to support our home congregation, world missions, preacher training, Christian education and benevolence. Every family should likewise plan their will so that their support can continue even after they are gone.

3. Our giving must be **systematic**. "Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store" (I Cor. 16:2). Having planned our giving, we must then work our plan (II Cor. 9:7). As often as we are prospered we should give. Even when absent from the home service we must give, for we have prospered. When sick or away, the faithful disciple will still lay by for his Lord.

4. Christians must give **proportionally**. The poor widow gave all that she could and her two mites were sufficient (Mark 12:41-44). The size of the gift is not as important as the proportion of income it represents. The widow's gift was more proportionally than the larger gifts of the wealthy. A story is related of two men who destroyed themselves in despair. The poor man had won \$5,000 and wasted it all in a one day spending spree. The other, a rich man, had lost all but \$5,000 on the stock market. One man's treasure was another man's poverty. Every Christian should begin his giving with a tenth of his income as the saints of old did, and then grow in the grace of giving (II Cor. 8:7).

5. Christian giving must be done **religiously and prayerfully**. Our brethren need to be taught that laying by in store on the Lord's day is an act of worship. It is not paying dues or buying services, it is not a matter of taxation. David exhorted Israel, "Ascribe unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name: Bring an offering, and come into his courts, O worship Jehovah in holy array..." (Ps. 96:8-9). When we worship through giving, we must give God the first and best of our prosperity. He will accept no less (Mal. 1:13b-14). For such faithful stewardship, God promises to open the windows of heaven and pour out such blessings that there shall not be room enough to receive it (Mal. 3:10). Benjamin Franklin, the patriot, wrote, "The use of money is all the advantage there is in having money. Wealth is not his who has it but his who enjoys it."

An unknown poet once wrote:

A vain man's motto is: Win gold and wear it.  
A generous man's: Win gold and share it.  
A miser's: Win gold and hoard it.  
A prodigal's: Win gold and spend it.  
A broker's: Win gold and lend it.  
A gambler's: Win gold and lose it.  
A Christian's: Win gold and use it.

How would God describe your attitude toward material wealth? May it be our daily prayer that God will strengthen us to resist Satan's temptation to be greedy and help us grow in the grace of giving. (II Cor. 8:7).

\* The author is indebted to Charles M. Crowe, **Stewardship Sermons**, for the heart of this lesson.

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67.

## ARE CHRISTIANS COMMANDED TO TITHE?

The Hebrews, living under the Law of Moses, were command to tithe i.e., give one tenth of their income to the support of the priesthood (Num. 18:21). We Christians are not under the law of Moses (Heb. 8:6-13). We are subjects of Christ and his New Testament. We are to obey all things that he commanded (Matt. 28:20). A careful study of the New Testament will show that tithing is not taught there. Our teaching is, that "on the first day of the week we lay by in store" to meet the needs of God's work (I Cor. 16:1-2). We are to give according as we purpose in our hearts and without grudging or necessity (II Cor. 9:7). This does not mean that we Christians should feel comfortable about giving less than those Hebrews. Rather it means that we give because we love God and want to do so. "God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:7). Many denominational churches press tithing because their members do not give generously and they feel it is the only way that they can get adequate funds from them. Others do not understand that we are no longer under the Law of Moses. Churches of Christ follow the New Testament and do not tithe.

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## THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN WORSHIP

68.

### THE CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER LIFE

The book of James has much to say about the Christian's prayer life. To James, prayer is vital to the disciple's spiritual life. It is food for his soul. Without prayer, he will surely weaken and die spiritually.

I. "If any of you lacketh...let him ask of God" (1:5). Verse 5 connects in thought with vss. 2-4 where James had pointed out that temptations were intended to prove one's faith and develop patience. One might wonder, "How can I have the wisdom to understand and deal with such temptations? I am not that wise." James responds, "If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God." To further encourage the Christian to ask God for this, as well as all other needs in life, he hurriedly adds, that God gives "generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty" (J. B. Phillips).

Experience in life teaches us that many gifts are made undesirable buy the way they are given. "There is a kind of giver who gives only with a view to getting more than he has given; who gives only to gratify his vanity and his sense of power by putting the recipient under an obligation which he will never be allowed to forget; who gives and who then continuously casts up the gift that he has given" (Wm. Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, pp. 53-54). But our God gives generosity to his children without upbraiding or reproving them. All would agree that the Christian is free to ask for all things he lacks, not just wisdom. Of course, our requests must always be according to God's will (I John 5:14).

Something of the character of God is seen in verse 5b, "let him ask of God who giveth." Literally from the Greek it reads, "The giving God." This declares the fact that such is a characteristic of our God. Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights (Jas. 1:17).

Verse five teaches:

- 1) We are to look to God and ask Him for our needs, both spiritual and material;
- 2) That giving is a trait of God's personality;
- 3) He gives to all His children, regardless of their station in life;
- 4) He gives generously;
- 5) He gives without reproaching or making us feel foolish or guilty.

II. We are to "ask in faith, nothing doubting" (1:6). Thomas Manton writes, "We must put up no prayer but what we can put up in faith;...and faith must not wander out of the limits of the word. If you have a promise, you may be confident that your requests will be heard, though in God's season. You cannot put up a carnal desire in faith...where we have a certain promise, we must no way doubt of His will; for the doubt must either proceed from suspicion that this is not the word or will of God, and that is blasphemy; or a fear that He is not able to accomplish his will and that is down-right distrust and unbelief. Therefore, where we have a clear sight of His will in the promise, we may have a confidence towards Him" (*Commentary on James*, p. 48). Again Manton says, "...All doubts are but disputes against a promise..."

Verse 6 teaches us that God gives rich blessings to those who:

- 1) Ask in prayer;
- 2) Ask of God;
- 3) Pray in faith and confidence;
- 4) Do not doubt that God can and will answer according to His holy will.

III. James warns against "asking amiss." In 4:1-4 "James is ...setting before his people a basic question...whether your aim in life, is to submit to the will of God or to gratify your own desires for the pleasures of this world? And his warning is, if pleasure is the policy of life, then nothing but strife and hatred and division can possibly follow." "To obey the will of God is to be essentially selfless."

IV. "Ye lust and have not." "The craving for pleasure in the end shuts the door of prayer. If a man's prayers are simply for the things which will gratify his desires, then his prayers are essentially selfish and therefore, it is not possible for God to answer them, for to answer them would be to do nothing other than to provide the man with ways of sinning. The true end of prayer is to say to God, Thy will be done. The prayer of the man who is pleasure dominated is, my desires be satisfied..." (Barclay, *op. cit.* 118).

Some people fail to reach their desires and goals in life, because they ignore God and proudly try to succeed alone. Other fail because they have sinful goals that God forbids. Still others fall short because they pray wrongfully. James stresses the failure of all selfish prayer.

V. There are several other impediments to effectual prayer.

1. God will never do wrong in answer to prayer. We need not ask it.
2. Neither will He change his revealed will to please man.
3. He cannot be expected to violate the laws of nature He has long since established.
4. Doubts in the pray-er's heart impede prayer (Jas. 1:6).
5. To neglect to work for the fulfillment of your needs will disappoint your prayers. God has ordained that man first do his best before Heaven supplies the rest (Phil. 2:12; II Thess. 3:10).
6. Lack of persistence robs many of Heaven's blessings. Jesus says we "ought always to pray and faint not" (Luke 18:1-8).
7. Wrong doing limits our prayers. "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28:0).
8. Mistreatment of one's family causes prayer to be hindered (I Pet. 3:7).
9. Self-righteousness will leave even a religious man with an unanswered prayer (Luke 18:9-12).

10. Selfishness blocks God from supplying our requests (Jas. 4:3).
11. Insincerity neutralizes prayers. Jesus rebuked the prayer practice of the hypocritical Pharisees (Matt. 6:5-7).
12. Failure to forgive a brother forces God to deny our petitions for forgiveness (Matt. 6:12-15).
13. Factiousness hinders our prayers before God (Matt. 5:23-24).

VI. Our prayers must be conditioned on "if the Lord will" (4:13--15). This section deals with the sin of presumption, i.e., acting without taking God into account. "...Note that James does not say there is anything wrong about making plans for the future, nor does he denounce business or merchants or even the desire to make money. What he does reprove is such absorption in worldly affairs that one leaves God out." ... "They lived as if time were absolutely theirs, as if destiny were in their hands. Yet James underscores the truth that man proposes but God disposes" (H.P. Colson, **The Practical Message of James**, p.72).

The Christian's entire life, with all its intentions and activities, is to be under the guiding principle, "If the Lord wills," how much more so, in his prayer requests. The saintly Apostle John writes, "This is the boldness which we have toward him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us" (I John 5:14). The will of God is made known to man today through the inspired writings of our Bible (I Cor. 14:37.) We are not to seek God's will in the fantasies of emotionalism, mysticism or seances, nor as those who falsely claim to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. Like the Bereans, we still need to search the scriptures daily to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11). We should never make plans and then ask God to bless them. What we should do is to consult God before making our plans and thus let Him in on the planning. If we allow him to guide us, we may with confidence ask his blessing on our actions" (Colson p.73).

In every prayer there are three parts: 1). The wish, a desire for something; 2). The word, the wish expressed in prayer; 3). The work, which helps to bring the desired results.

God's children should pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17). "Daily prayers are the daily visits which change belief that God exists, into belief in God as a loved and trusted friend" (D.J. Campbell). "Prayer is not merely an occasional impulse to which we respond when we are in trouble; prayer is a life attitude" (W.A. Bueller, **The Ency. of Rel. Quotations**, p. 344).

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## 69.

### **WILL GOD HEAR YOUR PRAYER?**

Man is a praying creature. Especially when a crisis comes. Will God hear and answer your prayers?

I. A man healed by Jesus said, "We know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshiper of God and doeth his will, him he heareth" (John 9:31). He was correct, for Peter says, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears unto their supplications; But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil" (I Pet. 3:12). "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination" (Prov. 28:9).

II. To pray to the Father in heaven and expect His response, you must be his child! (Matt. 6:9). How does one become God's child? Paul reminds Christians, "Ye are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27. Belief and baptism will save you, said Jesus (Mark 16:16). If you have not believed in Christ and been baptized, you are not yet God's child! You are yet a sinner; and God does not hear the sinner's prayer. Can the one who continually neglects God's Word and will, refusing to obey him, really expect an answer to his requests?

III. There is however one prayer the sinner can expect God to hear. Saul of Tarsus asked, "What shall I do Lord?" (Acts 22:10). In God's written word, the Bible, your answer can be found. In faith, accept Jesus as your Savior (Acts 16:31). Turn from your sins in repentance (Acts 17:30). Confess your faith and love for Jesus (Rom. 10:9-10) and be buried with Christ in baptism, for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 10:48; Rom. 6:3-4; Acts 22:16).

Do this and God will add you to his church (Acts 2:47), which is his family (I Tim. 3:15). If you "ask anything according to his will, he heareth..." and you may know that he will grant your petitions (I John 5:14-15).

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## 70.

### PRAYING GOD'S WAY

Repeatedly in his Word, God admonishes and even commands us to pray. "Let every one that is godly pray unto thee..." (Ps. 32:6) "Pray without ceasing" (I Thess 5:17). Our prayers are to be offered to God, not men, not angels nor saints long departed. "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven..." (Matt. 6:9). We bow our knees unto the Father (Eph. 3:14).

When we pray, we talk to God in heaven. We praise and adore him (Ps. 111:1), thank him (Ps. 69:30) and beseech his blessings for ourself and others; for his kingdom (Col. 1:9-14), for our rulers (I Tim. 2:1-3) and for our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We confess unto him our sins and ask for his pardon (Matt. 5:12).

Prayer is not a dialog or conversation where we talk to God and he verbally speaks back to us. Poets and song writers often depict the Christian in conversation with God. Their pious expressions are not to be taken literally but figuratively. Mystics think and report that after their long and lonely fasts and meditations they hear God's voice speaking to them. Such is either wishful thinking, or the imagination of their fevered minds. Remember the Native Americans and Buddhists used this same exercise of meditation and fasting in solitude to find a vision from their pagan gods. We do not doubt that they see or hear something, we question that is a vocal response from Jehovah. For God's response to our prayers, we must look to his Book.

Our reason for this conclusion is that God has made it abundantly clear that today he speaks to us through the Bible. Consider the following verses:

- \* "Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith" (Heb. 3:7). The writer then cites Psalm 95:7, "Harden not your hearts."
- \* "No prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For...men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet. 1:21).
- \* "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches" (Rev. 2:6). The Lord in these words is referring to the letters written to the seven churches of Asia.
- \* "And God spake all these words, saying, I am Jehovah they God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 20:1). He then proceeds to give us the ten commandments with their explanation and application.
- \* "The word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). This refers to the written message in contrast to the words orally spoken by Christ.
- \* "The opening of thy words giveth light; It giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps. 119:130).

- \* "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart..." (Jer. 15:16).
- \* "We walk by faith" (II Cor. 5:7), but "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).
- \* The things Paul wrote "are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37).

When we have talked with God in prayer we must then look to his revealed word to find his words he would share with us.

We can perceive God's answers in the events that follow our prayers. Sometimes the answer comes soon, at other times it make take weeks, months or even years. Sometimes the answer is a silent No!

Those who are weary of walking in the old paths of God's Word and are enamored with the gimmickery of denominationalism are often found imitating their religious neighbors. They love to talk about how God spoke to them in their prayers, or how in some moment of solitude they heard a small still voice. While lay-people might plead ignorance, those who are preachers and elders really have no excuse for such Ashdodic statements .

Let every child of God be frequent in prayer and let them also be daily students of his Word (Acts 17:11). That combination will produce a godly soul, well rooted and grounded in truth.

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## 71.

### SHOULD WE LIFT UP OUR HANDS WHEN PRAYING?

Bro. Waddey: First Tim 2:8 says: "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." I have a charismatic friend who would like to know why we don't teach that we should hold up our hands in praying **as this verse says to do?** Is that not **taking away** from what Paul said that "men pray everywhere, **lifting up holy hands...**"? Carrie

Dear Carrie: In Bible times people sometimes lifted up their hands in prayer (I Tim. 2:8). But we also observed that they sometimes fell on their faces (Matt. 26:39). Sometimes they lifted up their eyes to heaven (John 17:1) Sometime they smote their breasts when praying (Luke 18:13). Sometimes they knelt (I Kings 8:54). Sometimes they stood (I Kings 8:55-56) and at other times they prayed upon their beds (Ps. 4:4). Daniel prayed to God with fasting, dressed in sackcloth and with ashes on his head (Dan. 9:3). The Psalmist taught his people to worship God in "holy array" (Ps. 96:9). This speaks of garments suitable for worship. The ancients often wore white when approaching God. All of these different ways of expressing their prayers demonstrates that there were many different ways to come before God in prayer. All of these various postures were acceptable ways to approach God depending on the circumstances. If one wishes to lift up his hands while praying it certainly would not be wrong, but it would not be a necessary part of his prayer. Some ancient women prayed with their heads veiled because that was the social custom of their world. Yet we do not have such a custom in our society today.

You might point out to your friend that if she insists that hands must be lifted, the passage specifically says, let the **men pray in every place**, lifting up holy hands. Thus by her approach, one could say it does not apply to women, since they are not mentioned.

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72.

## **SHOULD WE PRAY IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT?**

Dear Bro. Waddey: Is it acceptable to begin a prayer by saying the words, "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Jamie

Dear Bro. Jamie: In baptism we are baptized *into* a saving relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Even there the words are not a sacred formulae. For in the several cases mentioned in the book of Acts, we do not find the administrators of baptism saying those words. That is what happens when we are baptized. It is not wrong to say those exact words, but not essential. Remember no specific words are prescribed.

The Roman Catholics with all their pomp and ritual make much of saying "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" for weddings, funerals, prayers, etc. Some Protestants, wanting to have more pomp and ceremony in their services have borrowed this practice. Our brethren do not because the Bible does not teach us to do so. We do not need to imitate teaches of error. Jesus is our mediator ( I Tim.2:5). We are instructed to approach God in prayer, in the name of Christ (John 14:13). This should be sufficient for those who wish to please the Father.

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## **THE ROLE OF PREACHING IN SACRED WORSHIP**

73.

## **THE ROLE OF PREACHING IN THE WORSHIP ASSEMBLY**

When Christ launched his ministry to humanity he did so by delivering a gospel lesson to a group of believers gathered to worship God (Luke 4:16-27). In his great Sermon on the Mount, the Master warned of things we must avoid in our worship (Matt. 6:1-8). He taught us how to pray (Matt. 6:9-15). He told us that to worship acceptably, we must be at peace with our neighbors (Matt.5:23-24). He taught us to trust God for the necessities of life and the proper view of material things. (Matt 6:19-34). When the church in Troas met for worship, a sermon was delivered by Paul (Acts 20:7). In Corinth, when they "came together," the prophets, i.e., inspired preachers (I Cor. 14:3-4), instructed them (I Cor. 14:26-29). Paul urged Timothy, who served the church in Ephesus, to put the brethren in mind of Paul's instructions (I Tim. 4:6).

Most of our preaching is done in the worship assemblies of the church. When we preach, in as much as we are leading God's people in worship, we must be careful that our lessons edify those who sit in the presence of Jehovah! We should always keep in mind, the Apostle's rule, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26).

Sad to say, not all preaching edifies and promotes true worship of Jehovah.

- \* Most obvious is, preaching whose content is contrary to God's will. Jesus himself warns us against false prophets (Matt. 7:15). In some cases, wicked men stand before the church and teach the "Doctrines of demons" (I Tim. 4:1-2). For that they will answer to God!
- \* We could add, preachers who use their allotted time in the worship service to entertain their audience with cute stories, jokes and meaningless trivia.
- \* Preachers who use their time to promote themselves and their own personal interests fail to encourage true worship.
- \* When preachers act as showmen and actors they do not facilitate the worship of God.
- \* When sermons are not matched by godly lives and consistent actions, they fail to uplift the audience.
- \* Then, there are sermons that are poorly prepared, dull and boring. They cannot edify! Diligent study and preparation could easily take care of this problem so that the hearers receive a blessing (II Tim. 2:15).
- \* Sermons that are weak on Scripture and filled with opinions of the speakers or of human wisdom fail to enhance worship. The Lord expects preachers to "preach the word," i.e., His Word! (II Tim. 4:2).
- \* Sermons that stir up faction and division can only hurt those who have assembled for worship. Factious men and their message only harm the church (Tit. 3:10).
- \* Sermons that are filled with rancor and invective, or delivered with a hateful tone, hurt rather than help worshipers. By speaking the truth in love, we help our auditors grow up in all things unto Christ (Eph. 4:15).
- \* When sermons are irrelevant to the needs of those present, they do not edify and promote true worship.

May we who serve the Lord Jesus, preach as though we were standing in the presence of the great Jehovah. May we preach **only God's truth**. May we deliver to our hearers **the whole counsel** of God and not a partial gospel! Let us avoid vain babblings (II Tim. 2:16) and the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). Let us preach the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) and do so with fervor and zeal (Rom. 12:11). When we do so, those who have listened will go away saying, "It was good for us to be here this day. Our understanding is clearer, our spirits are renewed, our faith and hope are strengthened. May God bless him who brought us "the Word of the Lord!"

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## 74.

### SPOILED SERMONS

Most people fail to realize the importance of the role of preaching to the general welfare of mankind. God ordained that by preaching the gospel we might be saved (I Cor. 1:21). By the preaching of God's message the whole moral realm is improved and uplifted (Tit. 2:11-15). Through the work of the preacher, saints are educated and the church is strengthened (I Tim. 4:11-16). By preaching, the truth that makes men free is scattered through-out the world (John 8:32).

When we contemplate the value of a soul and the eternal consequences of one being lost in hell, we can better appreciate the importance of preaching that seeks to save that soul (Mark 8:36-37).

Another angle from which to measure the value of a sermon is the time and energy invested into it by the preacher. A man might spend 12-20 hours of hard work preparing for his 30 minute delivery. Then there is the matter of the collective time spent by a congregation hearing the lesson. Three hundred people will spend 150 man-hours listening to a gospel message. Tragically many sermons are spoiled or severely damaged by factors that need not be.

I. A preacher may spoil his own lesson. This he may do by inadequate preparation. The lesson might be poorly arranged

and organized and thus an important point be left cloudy or unclear. His delivery may be poor and thus dull rather than sharpen the comprehension. His choice of words might be such that they would arouse prejudice and hostility and hinder the hearers from an unemotional consideration of the message. His should be words "fitly spoken" (Prov. 25:11). Some preachers have distracting habits such as nervous twitches, toying with their glasses, continually clearing their throat, interrupting their message with asides that have nothing to do with their lesson, rocking on their feet, exaggerated use of their hands or too much humor or sarcasm.

In a far more serious vein, a preacher's sermon may be neutralized by his own failure to practice what he preaches. In the words of the old cliché, "How can I hear what you are saying when what you are is forever thundering in my ears?" We must live and serve that we may cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ (I Cor. 9:12).

II. Good sermons may be spoiled by poor building facilities. An auditorium that is hot and stuffy has caused many an auditor to sleep through a great gospel lesson. A temperature that is too cold doesn't help either. It's hard to concentrate with chattering teeth and numb toes. A poor sound system likewise can wreck a good lesson. Many times the audience is left guessing at the key word or point of emphasis of a soft spoken man. Sometimes the words bounced and echo about the building and the message is muffled or lost in the distraction. Every congregation should have a responsible brother appointed to see that such things are properly adjusted and that the minister's sermon has a fair chance for success. Like Paul, we should be anxious to do all things for the gospel's sake that we might save souls (I Cor. 9:22-23).

III. Sermons can be spoiled by the hearers. Obviously the brother or sister who sleeps or day dreams through a sermon receives no benefit from it, regardless how wonderful its content. A fussy, crying baby has kept many a sinner from hearing that vital truth that could save his soul (James 1:21). Every mother should feel a responsibility to her fellow worshipers to quickly remove her fussy babe to the nursery room. The baby can't help his conduct but Mama can. Rowdy, undisciplined children have disrupted thousands of sermons. These are kids old enough to be trained to behave in public. What is desperately needed is firm-handed discipline from Mom and Dad. "A child left to himself causeth shame to his mother" (Prov. 29:15). Probably Solomon had in mind some other point but the application is evident. We do our youngsters a grave disservice by allowing them to misbehave continually in worship. They are learning attitudes about sacred things and such attitudes are not wholesome. It is a basic fact that if we want properly behaved children we will have to train them up in the way they should go. (Prov. 22:6). Older children should know better than to carry on conversation during worship. Unchecked problems of this kind reflect parental failure; either to train or to look after. Some adults have never outgrown this rude practice. How tragic that they themselves miss the value of instruction that could benefit them for eternity and at the same time rob other worshipers of the same. It takes both teaching and training to make our worship decent and orderly (I Cor. 14:40).

IV. Sermons are frequently spoiled by the song-leader. The lesson may have pricked the heart and stirred the conscience. The sinner is convinced that he must do something, then the song leader muffs the invitation hymn. Perhaps it is the wrong pitch, or maybe he had the wrong tune in mind. Seldom will responses be seen in such a confusing situation. Those who direct singing must sense the importance of their roll. The choice of "encouragement hymns" is crucial. What are the words saying to the hearers? Remember that in singing we are to teach one another (Col. 3:16). Having the song properly pitched is essential. Straining voices and snickering kids are absolutely destructive to the occasion.

Song-leaders, unless you enjoy "perfect pitch" use your tuning fork or pitch pipe. Also, the song should begin at the instant of the preacher's final word so that no time will be allowed for a diversion of thought. In singing, as in every other leadership role, "Let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26).

If we truly believe that the destiny of souls hang in the balance; if we believe that men can be saved through the power of the proclaimed word, surely we must give all diligence to guarantee that God's word finds and unimpeded access to the sinner's heart. Let each of us review our conduct to assure that we never spoil the sermon.

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## 75.

### GOD HAS GIVEN NO SPECIAL MINISTERIAL TITLES

Sometimes when folks visit our services they wonder why we worship and practice Christianity as we do. Occasionally someone will ask, “**Why don’t you call your preacher ‘reverend’?**”

We do not use religious clerical titles for several reasons. **First**, neither Jesus nor his Apostles used such titles. It would be presumptuous for me to do so.

**Second**, Jesus said “be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven.” He then concludes that “whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled...” (Matt. 23:8-12).

**Third**, such titles imply that preachers are in a class distinct from other Christians. In fact, most denominations make a distinction between clergy and laity. The Bible makes no such distinction. All disciples are called God’s “*kleros*” or clergy, translated “heritage” (Eph. 1:11), and all are called God’s “*laos*” or laity, translated “people” in Titus 2:14. All Christians are described as members of the “royal priesthood” (I Pet. 2:9). In view of the above we refer to our preachers as “ministers” (I Tim. 4:6) and evangelists (II Tim. 4:5). We call them “brother” so and so (Matt. 23:8). We do not refer to our preachers as “pastor” because that term is used in scripture to refer to men who are selected to be elders or overseers of the congregation, an office different from that of a preacher. This is demonstrated in Acts 20 where Paul speaks to the elders of the church in Ephesus (vs. 17) observing that the Holy Spirit had made them bishops (overseers) and describes their work as “feeding and protecting the flock of God” which is the duty of a pastor or shepherd (vs.28-29). Since our commitment is to follow the New Testament in all things and practice Christianity as it was in the beginning, we observe these standards regarding our preachers.

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## 76.

### SHOULD MINISTERS WEAR SPECIAL CLERGY GARMENTS?

Jesus condemned the Jewish religious leaders who drew attention to themselves by their distinctive “clergy garments.” “But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments...” “But do not ye after their works...” (Matt. 23:2-5). Under the Old Covenant there was a separate, distinct priesthood, consisting of the descendants of Aaron and the Levites (Lev. 8:1-7). They did wear special garments as prescribed by God (Ex. 39:1-30). Christ is our one and only high-priest. No man fills this office. Under Christ, all Christians are royal priests, equally authorized by Christ to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto Jehovah (I Pet. 2:5,9). Hence none should be distinguished by special clothing as a uniquely holy class. As in all other matters, we seek to replicate the faith and practice of the first Christians. Hence our preachers dress as do all other Christians.

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# THE DAY GOD ORDAINED FOR WORSHIP

77.

## THE SABBATH DAY AND THE LORD'S DAY

There was a time when gospel preachers contended with Sabbatarian teachers about the appointed day for Christian worship. Now we hear some who are untaught and unsound in the faith, saying we could as well worship and commune on Saturday as on the first day of the week. They have no doubt observed their Catholic and Protestant neighbors doing so and thought, "I want to try that."

For the following reasons we assemble for worship on the first day of the week.

- \* The Lord Jesus arose from the dead on the first day (John 20:1).
- \* On the first day he appeared to his disciples following his resurrection (John 20:19; 26).
- \* The church began on the Day of Pentecost which always fell on a first day of the week (Acts 2:1-47; Lev. 23:15-16).
- \* The church in Troas observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week and Paul preached for them (Acts 20:7).
- \* The church in Corinth was instructed to give their gifts for God's work on the first day (I Cor. 16:2).
- \* John the Apostle "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).
- \* History declares that the early Christians uniformly worshiped on the first day to commemorate Christ's death and his resurrection.

The Lord's Day is not the "Christian Sabbath." The Sabbath was an institution of the Old Covenant and was given exclusively to the Hebrews. Nowhere in the Old Testament were Gentiles rebuked for not observing the seventh day Sabbath. Deuteronomy 5:1-22 makes it clear that the Sabbath law was given to the Hebrews.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus and his disciples kept the Sabbath." We must remember Jesus was a Jew, living under the law of Moses (Gal. 4:4). Thus, he would keep the Sabbath as every devout Jew was expected to do. It is true that Paul went into synagogues and preached on the Sabbath, but no verse that tells us that he "kept the Sabbath" in the fashion of the Hebrews prior to Christ's death. Paul did say, that the old law was nailed to the cross of Christ, therefore we should let no man judge us regarding a Sabbath day (Col. 2:14-17). He also said if man "receives circumcision, he is a debtor to do the whole law" (Gal. 5:3). We could fairly say that if a man receives the Sabbath, he is a debtor to do the whole law. The Apostle goes on to say that those who try to be justified by the law (of Moses) are fallen away from grace...are severed from Christ (Gal. 5:4)

Sabbath advocates cannot cite a single New Testament verse that tells us how Christians should keep the Sabbath today. They do not understand that we are in a different kingdom than were those Jews. Christ said to his Apostles, "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them....teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him (Heb. 5:9). Christ is head over all things to the church which is his body (Eph. 1:22). Sabbath advocates do not understand this. They think they are still under Moses's law at least in respect to the Sabbath.

It is true that Jews counted their days from sundown to sundown. Thus the first day of the week actually began for them on our Saturday evening at sundown. We however are not Jews nor do we live in first century times. In Western Civilization, our first day is counted from 12:01 Sunday a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Within that time frame we should assemble to break the sacred bread.

Paul teaches us in II Timothy 2:15 to "rightly divide the word of truth" (KJV) or "handle aright the word" (ASV). One aspect of that is to make the proper distinction between the Old and New Covenants. It is the words of Christ, not Moses, that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48) In the New Testament of Christ, the weekly assembly of Christians for worship and communion is observed on the first day, not the seventh day Sabbath.

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78.

## IS SUNDAY THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH DAY?

Mr. Waddey: Should Christ engage in common work on the Lord's day? Mike

Dear Mike: If we were Jews, living under the old covenant, we would be forbidden to do any menial or servile work on the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8-10). But we are not Jews and we do not live under the Law of Moses. We are Christians, living under the reign of Christ and his New Covenant. In his death on the cross, Christ took the Old Law out of the way, nailing it to the cross. Consequently we are to let no man judge us in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day which were a shadow of things to come, but the body (the reality) is Christ (Col. 2:14-17). We are to obey all things Christ commanded (Matt. 28:20).

As we examine the New Covenant, we find incorporated within it nine of the Ten Commandments, but not the Sabbath law. Since Christ did not tell us to treat the First Day of the Week as a sabbath (i.e. a day of rest) nor did he order us to abstain from work on that day. Our obligation on the First Day is to worship God and remember Christ's death and suffering in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:24-26; Acts 20:7). Having done that, we can use the day for other legitimate purposes. For some that would be work, for others recreation. Others might visit with family and friends. Some might use it to rest.

Some try to make the Lord's Day "the Christian Sabbath Day" and insist that Christian not work on that day. But they ignore other stringent prohibitions of the Mosaic Sabbath law, especially the penalty for violation of the sabbath. No food was to be prepared for eating on the Sabbath day (Ex. 16:22-29). No fuel for fire was to be collected on that day (Num. 15:32-36). The penalty for violating the Sabbath was death (Num. 15:32-36). We are not free to pick and choose the portions of God's law we wish to observe.

Given all the above, there is nothing wrong if you wish to spend the First Day of the week resting (Rom. 14:5-6). We can all profit from a weekly day of rest. But there is nothing wrong if a brother works or plays on that day, so long as he takes time to worship the Lord.

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## **SHOULD WE FOLLOW THE JEWISH CUSTOM WHEN MARKING THE LORD'S DAY?**

Dear John: I believe the way we measure our days was changed from the Jewish method around 190 A.D. by the Roman Bishop. When they came together in Troas to break bread, I am sure that Paul did not talk all day and half the night (Acts 20:7). We should do things the way they are written in the Bible. Bill.

Dear Bill: Perhaps a few questions will help clarify the matter:

- \* If you work days from 8:00 to 5:00 do you get up at 6:00 a.m. or 6:00 p.m.?
- \* Does your work day begin at sun up or sun down?
- \* Do you conduct your business by the Jewish calendar or by the current Gregorian calendar?
- \* When you attend worship on Sunday morning at 10:00, are you worshipping on the First Day of the Week or on Monday?
- \* Does a congregation sin if it assembles to commune with Christ on Sunday morning at 10:00?
- \* If we must begin the Lord's Day at sundown on Saturday, what are those Christians to do who live in the Arctic regions where they have nights that last more than 24 hours and periods of light that do the same?

We grant that the Jews counted their days from sunset to sunset. That was based on the creation time frame of Genesis 1. However we are not Jews. We do not live under the Old Testament code. In the New Testament of Christ, he gives us no instruction about how we count time or at what hour to begin our days. When the Hebrews were God's chosen people and virtually all of them lived in the little nation of Palestine, they were all in the same "time zone." Sunset came at the same hour for all of them. Today Christ's church is spread around the planet earth with worshipers in all the 24 time zones. We measure our days from midnight to midnight wherever we may live. We assemble to worship the Lord on the First Day of the week.

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## **WHO SHOULD LEAD THE CHURCH IN WORSHIP?**

## **WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE WORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP OF THE CHURCH**

We live in the midst of the Feminist Revolution. The champions of this social/political movement have challenged every traditional concept about the role of women in the home, society and the church. Without doubt, some of the old ideas needed challenging. Some of the changes have been wholesome and beneficial. In two areas however, the goals of the feminists are in direct conflict with the will of God as revealed in the Bible. This poses no problem for most feminists

since many of them reject God and Christ, and refuse to recognize the Scriptures as having any authority in their lives. However, to those women who fear God and follow Jesus; who order their lives by the New Testament and hope to spend eternity in heaven, their liberties must conform to the divine plan.

In the realm of the family: God ordained that “wives be in subjection unto (their) own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church...” (Eph. 5:22-23). Husbands are expected to “love (their) wives, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it.”

For the church, God declares: “As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law” (I Cor. 14:33-34). “Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness” (I Tim. 2:11-12).

From these injunctions we learn that women are not allowed to fill leadership roles over men in the administration, worship and public teaching of the church. Men are to be selected as elders (I Tim. 3:1-2). Men are to be the preachers, evangelists and teachers of the congregation.

This does not mean that women have no role to fill in the life and teaching of the church. A woman can teach women and children (Tit. 2:4-5). She can be a leader among the women in their activities. But mixed classes of men and women are to be taught by men and public worship is conducted by men. In rare cases where no men are present, then women could do anything that needed to be done since they would not be exercising authority over men by so doing.

Such doctrine is anathema to committed feminists, but to women of God, it is truth and righteousness and must be accepted. Tragically, most of the denominations about us have capitulated to the noisy demands of the feminists. May God grant all of us the courage to stand faithful to his revealed will, even if the whole world rejects it.

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## 81.

### WOMEN IN THE PULPIT

A common topic in the news media these days is the question of women serving as gospel ministers. If one is interested in pleasing God, he must look to the New Testament of Christ for the answer to this question. If he is interested in pleasing self, he will scorn that God-given document and seek approval in public opinion and social change.

Christ built the church (Matt. 16:18) and claims all authority in matters relating to it (Matt. 28:18). He authorized his Apostles to record his will on all things regarding the faith and practice of his church. Paul wrote, “The things which I write unto you...are the commandment of the Lord” (I Cor. 14:37). Through his divinely appointed apostolic ambassador Christ announced the boundaries of woman’s work in his church.

“As in all the churches of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law” (I Cor. 14:33-34).

“But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness” (I Tim. 2:12).

He who is serious about serving God will gladly accept these divine restrictions. He that "goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching...hath both the Father and the Son" (II John 9).

Should all the conferences and conventions, synods and bishops in the world cast their vote for women preachers it would not change God's Word one whit. If society in toto endorses women filling pulpits it would only be the wish of the creature against the will of the Creator.

Women share the image of God with men (Gen. 1:27). Together they are one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). But the God who created men and women and the church has assigned the public leadership role to males (I Tim. 3:1-2). One has no greater value than the other. It is a matter of divine decree.

To be a Christian is to confess Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9) and ourselves as his servants (Rom. 1:1) A faithful servant will honor and obey his Lord's will in reference to women and the ministry. To challenge the Master's will is to be unfaithful.

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## 82.

### **MAY WOMEN ASK QUESTIONS DURING THE WORSHIP SERVICE?**

Dear Bro. Waddey: Is it scriptural for women to ask questions during the worship service? Emete

Dear Bro. Emete: Paul's prohibition regarding women in worship is that they are not "to teach nor usurp authority (i.e., have dominion over) over a man" (I Tim. 2:12).

In I Corinthians 14, Paul is dealing with confusion and disruptions in the assembly. He reminds them that God is not the author of confusion (14:33). He insists that all things must be "done decently and in order" (14:40) and "unto edifying" (14:26). After saying, "let the women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak" (14:34), he adds, "if they would learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home..." (14:35). Thus we can conclude that in the worship assembly women should be students, hearers and not teachers. They are not allowed to teach over or have dominion over men. If in the midst of worship a question occurs to them, they should refrain from interjecting that at that time lest it cause confusion. They should seek their answers in some other setting.

I would note that there are some exceptions to this prohibition. For example: If a sister did not hear the number of the hymn to be sung, she could ask. If she wanted to be saved, she could ask, "What must I do to be saved?" If she wished to be baptized, she could confess her faith publicly. She might properly ask, "What is the time for the next assembly?" She could request prayers for herself or her family. In a Bible class where questions are in order, she could ask her questions in an appropriate way.

The things to remember in this matter are:

- \* Women are not to assume the role of a preacher or teacher of a group that includes men in the church.
- \* Women are not to try to exercise authority over, or have dominion or control over men.

\* Women are not to be asking questions or disputing with teachers in the assembly which would create confusion in the worship.

\* Women may teach women or children in Bible classes without violating these principles. They may teach men in private settings such as their homes. We see that Priscilla and Aquila taught Apollos in a private setting (Acts 18:26).

While we want to obey every precept given by God, we do not want to make laws of our own, or forbid that which God allows.

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## 83.

### SHOULD WOMEN BE USED IN SERVING COMMUNION TO THE ASSEMBLY?

Dear Bro. John: Should ladies be used to serve the Lord's Supper to the congregation? Our elders say the Bible does not mention serving communion so they can do this without violating any command. They insist that they will not allow ladies to lead prayer, lead singing or teach the assembly, only serve communion. Neville

Dear Neville: I personally think it is a mistake to have women serve the communion in the assembly of the church. I am aware that proponents argue that serving food is a servant's job, not that of a leader. In a home or church fellowship meal such would be true, but in the worship assembly of the church it would be different in my estimation. This is a wedge for a greater goal. While your elders may sincerely plan to limit the ladies to this one extension of service, others will not be satisfied with the accomplishment. If they can get the ladies into this public role, they will then push for additional opportunities for them to fill. In other areas we describe such actions as driving a wedge or stepping onto the slippery slope.

It is true that the Bible says nothing about serving the communion. This is the case because our method of having it served to the seated congregation is a relatively modern way of doing things. A couple of hundred years ago folks walked up to the table to be served. You still see this in the Catholic Church. When Jesus instituted the supper the participants were seated around a table. Our method is scriptural since God has not told us just how it is to be served.

The larger question is that of the relation of ladies to the men of the church in the assembly. They are to be in subjection to the men (I Tim. 2:11-12). Since in our society and age, to help at the Lord's table is viewed by our people as a leadership opportunity, it seems to me our ladies should not strive to fill that position. The question is more than what it *might* lead to.

In our culture and society and in the long tradition of our brotherhood men have filled this position and it has been viewed as a leadership role. Culture and tradition do play a role in helping us decide the way some things are done. For example in the first century a man dressed in a robe. In our culture we dress in pants. If I decided to attend worship dressed in a robe, it would not violate a specific scriptural prohibition, but it would surely be a distraction to other worshippers. In some tropical societies, for a man to appear shirtless is of no import. But to attend worship here shirtless would definitely leave a bad impression and should not be done. In Africa, most Christians observe the custom of women worshipping with their heads covered with a scarf or some other kind of head covering. If we went there to worship and

our ladies were uncovered it would be viewed as a shameful thing to them. There was a time when our missionaries in Mexico requested that U.S. ladies visiting their church services not wear sleeveless blouses as the locals viewed such as the dress of immoral women. Christian women visiting should respect this cultural viewpoint. So should we respect the cultural and traditional view when we appoint those who are to serve the communion in our assemblies.

Are you aware that some of those promoting the agenda of change among our churches are already using women to lead public prayers, read Scripture, teach mixed adult classes, lead singing, help serve communion and even preach? Their highest authority for these changes is the theology of the Feminist Movement. When Jeremiah pled with his neighbors to “see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way; and walk therein...they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). So do our change agents!

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## 84.

### WOMEN’S ADORNMENT IN WORSHIP

The church in Corinth was a troubled church. In his first epistle to them, Paul cataloged and addressed a number of those issues. In the first half of his eleventh chapter we can identify some of those problems.

\* There evidently was some confusion about the ascending authority God has ordained. Ultimate authority rests in God the Father, then Christ the Savior and head of the church, then man and then woman (11:3).

\* He then addresses how the two sexes should reflect their respect for this heaven-ordained line of authority in their worship (11:4-7).

\* Next he gives the theological basis for this ascending authority. First he appeals to creation. Man was first created and then woman. She was made from his flesh and bone (11:8). He reminds them the first woman was created for the man and not man for the woman(11:8-9). (See Genesis 2:18). Both male and female are of equal value and essential to the survival of the race (11:12).

\* He then says that woman must openly demonstrate her respect for the headship God placed over her and also because of the angels (11:10). To refuse to, or fail to do this would dishonor her head. He says the woman, when praying or prophesying, should have “authority on her head.” (The words “a sign of” are not Paul’s but those of the translators who add them attempting to explain or interpret Paul’s meaning).

\* He appeals to their own sense of propriety, asking, “Judge ye in yourselves: is it seemly (i.e., appropriate) that a woman pray unto God uncovered? This is a rhetorical question obviously meaning, “No, it is not.”

\* He then reminds them that even nature itself teaches that if a man have long hair, it is dishonor to him. But for a woman to have long hair is a glory to her, for her hair is given her for a covering (11:15). **This is the key or pivotal verse in the discussion.** It identifies just what the covering is of which he writes....long hair. He then points out just how offense occurs in this regard. For a man to have long hair is to be covered in worship and thus dishonors his head, Christ. For a woman to cut off her long hair and wear it closely cropped is to be uncovered in worship and thus dishonors her head.

It seems that some of the ladies of the church had heard Paul’s teaching that in Christ male and female are one (Gal. 3:26-27). They had cast off the traditional veil which women were expected to wear. Some had cut their hair in a masculine style. In the assemblies of the church, their conduct was embarrassing to their families and shocking to their neighbors.

Paul used the occasion to teach a broader lesson about the roles God intended for men and women to fill in the home



and the church.

In Corinth, the pagan priestesses of Aphrodite (who were temple prostitutes) wore their hair cut short. For a Christian woman to do so made them look like those shameless priestesses and was considered a shameful thing. It brought public scorn upon her. It also showed dishonor for her head, the men of her life: father, husband, fellow-Christians and even Christ and God the Father. Evidently this is the problem Paul was addressing.

Admittedly, this is a perplexing passage to interpret and commentators are generally disagreed on its meaning and application. If, however, we read from Paul's conclusion backwards to his opening statements perhaps we can better understand his purpose and meaning.

1. He closes by insisting that nothing contrary to the foregoing instructions is to be found in other churches of God (11:16b).
  2. A woman's **long hair** is a glory to her and it is **given to her for a covering** (11:15), but a man with long hair dishonors himself (11:14).
  3. For her to have her hair shorn is a shame equal to being shaven. (In all societies for a woman's head to be shaven is embarrassing or even shameful). But if a man does not cut his hair it dishonors him (11:14).
  4. Paul says it is a shame (unseemly) for a woman to pray (uncovered), but he has already stated that her long hair is given her for a covering.
  5. For a man to pray or prophesy with his head covered dishonors his head which is Christ (11:4). This is true "because he is the image and glory of God" (11:7). Man ought not to come before God with long hair covering his head. To do so dishonors his head. A woman who prays or prophesies uncovered (with her hair shorn) dishonors the men of her life as well as Christ.
  6. His conclusion is a woman's long hair is her God-given covering. If she worships without her covering (her long hair), she dishonors her head. If she worships without her long hair, it is the same as being shorn or shaven, a shameful thing.
  7. One may ask "How long is long?" No specific length is stated, the point is that it must be long in contrast to the man who should wear his hair short. The length of neither is specified and will vary from generation to generation and from society to society. God expects his people to adorn themselves in a way that easily distinguishes between the two sexes. "A woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto Jehovah..." (Deut. 22:5). For a man to have long hair is a dishonor and for a woman to wear her hair cropped like a man's is likewise shameful (I Cor. 11:14).
- \* When a Christian man or woman adopts styles of clothing, or hair, which are commonly viewed as immoral, anti-social or degrading, it violates the principle taught here. By going against social conventions we cause others to think ill of us and the Lord we serve.
- \* The words translated "covered" or "veiled" are from Greek work *katakalypto*. Those rendered uncovered are variations of *akatakalypto*. The former is defined by Vine as "having (something) down the head." It is a fact that the a veil worn by some ancient women fits Paul's definition of "having something down the head" but so does a woman's long hair which Paul says is given her for a covering. The definition of the word makes it evident that a hat, such as modern women might wear, would not fulfill the expectations of Paul's instruction.

Paul insists that there should be no contentions about this matter (11:16). God's will must take precedence over worldly customs and styles of dress and coiffure.

Several important principles are revealed in this passage:

1. The importance of keeping the sacred traditions committed to us by the inspired teachers (11:2).
2. The divine progression of authority: woman, man, Christ, God. This all must respect and conform to both in the home and church (11:3).
3. The importance of freely and openly respecting that authority (11:4-5).
4. The importance of respecting social conventions of the society in which we live (11:6, 13-14).
5. In adorning ourselves, we must be concerned about pleasing God and not just being stylish.
5. Care must be taken lest our freedom in Christ be used in a way as that brings reproach on us and the Lord's church.

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## **ANSWERS TO SOME ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ABOUT WORSHIP**

**85.**

### **IS CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP SCRIPTURAL?**

Dear Bro. Waddey: We have some members who are pushing for us to have contemporary worship services in our church. Just what do they mean by this? Should we go along with their demands? Jerod.

Dear Jerod: The word "contemporary" is an adjective that describes a thing as being marked "by characteristics of the of the present period: Modern" (Webster). When applied to worship it means worship that is modeled after that which is common in today's religious world in contrast to that which is patterned after the biblical record. Among the contemporary items found in some of our churches are: a casual atmosphere, instrumental music, songs borrowed from the world of Contemporary Christian music, singing groups, soloists, etc., interpretative dancing, dramatic skits, entertainment-style preaching with little or no biblical content, bodily actions by the worshipers such as clapping hands to the music, raising hands toward heaven, applauding, testifying and inviting members of other faiths to speak for the assembly or class, allowing women to lead singing, lead prayers, serve communion and even speak in worship assemblies, etc..

To define and describe contemporary worship is to demonstrate that it is based on something other than scripture. Rather than being worship ordained by Christ (Matt. 28:20), it is "will- worship" (Col. 2:23). Rather than being the kind of worship of the early church (II Tim. 1:13), it is worship like that found in modern denominational churches. Those promoting it sin like the ancient Hebrews who wanted a king so they would be like the nations around them (I Sam. 8:5). Rather than being designed to please God, it is adopted by churches in order to attract and please men (Gal. 1:10). They often call it "seeker-friendly worship." Those who have opted for the above described contemporary worship have gone onward and are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ. Thus they have neither the Father nor the Son with them (II John 9-10). When people come to us bringing something contrary to the teaching of the Apostles we are to take note of them and reject them (Rom. 16:17).

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86.

## WORSHIP AND ENTERTAINMENT

Mr. Waddey: Your words about worship not being entertainment lack definition. Is it wrong to "enjoy" worship? If worship brings us joy and we leave in a positive spirit of love and fellowship have we been "entertained?" How do I know when I have crossed the line? Gregg

Dear Gregg: If you cannot tell the difference between worship and entertainment I doubt that I can help you. I go to church to worship my Creator and Savior, I go to the circus to be entertained.

It is true that God does not need our worship, but you err when you say, "Therefore Worship Must be For Us!" Jesus did not so understand things. He said that God seeks worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23) While we should always be edified, that is built up from our worship experience (I Cor. 14:26), and we surely should have learned something useful for our daily lives when we have worshiped (I Cor. 14:8-16), our worship is not just for our entertainment and enjoyment. If it is just "for us," as you say, then it is not to God and for his honor and glory (I Cor. 10:31). The Psalmist understood that when men praise Jehovah, "Jehovah taketh pleasure in his people" (Ps. 149:4).

No one calls for boring or morbid worship assemblies. We should rejoice in the Lord when we worship (Phil. 4:4). But if you wish to be entertained, you should go to a theatrical show or a concert. Tragically, some of our misguided preachers seem determined to turn the worship of God into such shows. If you really must clap your hands, shout and expend high energy in your worship perhaps you should go and worship with your nearest Pentecostal church. They offer just what you want.

Does your exhortation to "less evaluation of others" also apply to your fellow change agents who delight in evaluating and criticizing those brethren who do not wish to follow them down the broad way?

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87.

## WHENCE CAME THE WORSHIP TEAM?

In churches committed to the change agenda, you will usually find a "worship team." Our wandering brethren sometimes called these "praise teams". Perhaps you, like me, have wondered, where did such ideas originate? In reading the book, **Pagan Christianity** by Frank Viola and George Barna, I found the following information regarding the origins of the worship team. He opens his discussion by noting

- \* "In many contemporary churches...the choir has been replaced by the worship team" (p. 164).
- \* He continues, "The standard worship team includes an amplified guitar, drums, keyboard, possibly a bass guitar and some special vocalists" (Ibid).
- \* "Words are usually projected onto a screen... There are rarely songbooks or hymnals" (Ibid.).
- \* "The worship team will ...lead a lively, hand-clapping, body-swaying, hand-raising, (sometimes dancing) congregation... Typically the focus of the songs is on individual spiritual experience. First person singular pronouns –I, me, my–dominate a good number of the songs" (p. 164-165).
- \* "The revolution (in Christian music) came when rock and roll was adapted into Christian music with the coming of the Jesus movement. This reform set the stage for the revolutionary musical changes to take root in the Christian church..."

(Ibid.).

\* “The origin of the worship team goes back to the founding of Calvary Chapel in 1965. Chuck Smith, the founder of the denomination, started a ministry for hippies and surfers. Smith welcomed the newly converted hippies to re-tune their guitars and play their now redeemed music in church” (Ibid.).

\* “Since the advent of contemporary Christian music, the ‘worship wars’ have begun constituting a divisive force that has balkanized the Christian church into ‘old styled-traditional-music’ lovers vs ‘new-styled-contemporary’ music lovers. Not a few churches have been splintered right down the middle over what form of music is to be used during the church service” (Ibid. ft. note)

\* “The Vineyard (a contemporary charismatic denomination)....followed suit with the worship team....Since that time, the Vineyard has probably had more influence on establishing worship teams and worship music...”

\* “In due time the guitar replaced the organ as the central instrument that led worship in the Protestant church. Although patterned after the rock concert of secular culture, the worship team has become as common as the pulpit” (p. 166).

We recognize that not all congregations that have introduced praise teams have the instrumental band. Some however do. You should understand that those preachers and elders who have introduced worship teams into their worship did not discover them “after a long and prayerful study of the Bible.” They have borrowed them from various denominational sources, hoping to have the same kind of enthusiasm and growth they have observed in their mega churches. The wish to have something new and different preceded the implementation of worship teams and other new aspects of the progressive churches. Concern about the scripturalness of such things or the harm they might cause the church are of little concern.

We understand that the problem is not in having a committee or group of brethren to plan the worship service, nor is it in having more than one song leader before the congregation. The problem arises when such innovations are used as wedges to open the door for the use of instruments of music in worship (Eph. 5:19), to put Christian women in leadership roles in the worship (I Tim. 2:11-12), or other changes that do violate the sacred standard of Scripture (II John 9-11). The danger is seen when confusion and division occur (Rom. 16:18). By then the damage is done and the church has suffered great harm. Think of it this way. Say for 10 years you had taken the same medicine for your high blood pressure and it had worked fine. You go to a new young doctor and he insists that you need to change to a new kind of medicine. Against your better judgment, you take the medicine and become desperately ill. Thankfully you survive, although some did not. The young doctor was sure his prescription for a new medication would work wonders. In fact your old medicine was fully adequate for your needs. The new was a near disaster. So it is proving to be where the change agents insist on implementing their agenda in congregations that had done well prior to their coming.

\* **Pagan Christianity** is a 2008 publication of Tyndale House Pub. Inc.

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## 88.

### WHAT ABOUT HAND-CLAPPING IN WORSHIP?

Dear Mr. Waddey: When our young people applauded at one of their friends baptism, some of our older members including me found it very distracting from the occasion. Were we wrong in felling this way? Bobby

Dear Bobby: Thanks for your question regarding clapping at a baptismal service. This is a new practice that has only emerged among us in recent years. For some 200 years, here in America, our brethren have not done so. There is no mention in the New Testament of the early Christians doing so. Whence then did the practice arise? It can be found mentioned in the Old Testament. Psalm 47:1 reads “O clap your hands, all ye peoples; Shout unto God with the voice of triumph.” Of course the fact that something was done under the Mosaic system does not authorize it for Christian worship. Under that system we find instrumental music, a separate priesthood, priestly garments, incense, animal

sacrifices, Sabbath Day worship and numerous other things Christ did not choose to incorporate into his new system. I suspect that the practice had its genesis among us from those who watch and admire the theatrical type of preachers and services on the religious broadcast networks. Perhaps some of them have visited Pentecostal and emotional type Protestant services and observed first hand such emotional response to religious impulses. Such is not a very worthy foundation on which to base one's religious practice.

Having attended the Lord's church all of my life, and having been a preacher some 54 years, I find clapping at a service of worship to be distracting, disconcerting and offensive. True, that alone does not make it wrong. But those who wish to make changes in the way we worship must exhibit some maturity and responsibility beyond what feels good and is exciting to them. If clapping is, as they think, neither right or wrong, then they should abstain from doing so if it is offense to their fellow-worshippers (I Cor. 10:23-24). This practice can easily slip into other forms of emotional expression that result in confusion and disorderly conduct. This Paul shows us is unacceptable (I Cor. 14:33,40). We are under obligation to do everything in our power to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace (Eph. 4:3). If such unauthorized practices cause unhappiness and discord among brethren, those who introduce them are failing to maintain that unity. Since our commitment is to worship and serve as did the earliest Christians, those who want the excitement of clapping must acknowledge that such is not mentioned in the New Testament. There, outward expressions of approval in worship were with a vocal "Amen" (I Cor. 14:15-16).

I prefer to think that those who clap at a service do not do so for malicious reasons or to harm the church. It is primarily because they don't know any better. Likely they have not been taught better. Perhaps a kindly word of concern spoken to your elders or preacher would be sufficient to stop this practice. I see this as part of a trend away from simple Bible based worship toward an emotion-based and sensational type of service. That we don't need and Scripture certainly does not approve of.

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## 89.

### **ARE ANOINTING CEREMONIES AUTHORIZED FOR TODAY?**

Dear Bro. Waddey: Is it OK for a preacher to anoint another preacher and his wife during church services? Should we be doing this at all? Janice

Dear Janice: Under the Mosaic system God ordained that kings, priests and prophets be anointed when assuming their office. Thus David was anointed to be king by Samuel (I Sam. 16:2,13). Aaron and his sons were anointed to the priesthood (Ex 28:41). Elijah anointed Elisha for the prophetic office (I Kings 19:16).

Christ was symbolically anointed to his office as Messiah and the High Priest of God's people when the Holy Spirit publicly descended upon him (Heb. 1:9; Matt. 3:16-17). All who become Christians are likewise symbolically anointed with the Holy Spirit (I John 2:27). This they experience when upon their baptism, they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

In the early days of Christianity, when some Christians were blessed with supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:4-10), elders could pray for the sick and anoint them with oil and the Lord would heal them (Jas. 5:15-16).

The term anointing was also used to describe the rubbing of refreshing oils into the feet, or hair as a part of one's grooming or as an act of hospitality (Luke 7:46).

As to publicly anointing of a person, be he preacher or any other Christian, as a ceremonial connected to the church, we find the New Testament is absolutely silent. We Christians are not under the Mosaic system so one cannot look to the

Old Testament for such authority. We cannot impart the gift of the Holy Spirit to anyone, only God does that. We have no supernatural gifts and cannot heal the sick. Thus to have any kind of public anointing in an assembly of God's people is without Scriptural authority and violates Christ's instruction that we teach and "obey all things whatsoever he commanded" (Matt. 28:20). It violates I Corinthians 4:6 (ASV) which says we are not to go beyond what is written. Those so doing are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ and thus have not the blessings of the Father and the Son (II John 9). The parties participating in an anointing ceremony have not learned it from the New Testament of Christ. Such is a doctrine and practice of men (Matt. 15:9). It is borrowed from the denominational world, most likely from the Pentecostal type churches.

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90.

## **CAN INTERPRETATIVE DANCE BE OFFERED TO GOD AS ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP?**

Dear Mr. Waddey: I have been involved in interpretive dance for almost seven years. To me it is a form of worship and praise to God. I do not feel as if it is inappropriate to dance for God, as long as it is to give him honor and glory. Nikki

Dear Nikki: God wants you to worship him. Jesus says that the Father seeks for true worshipers. Then he tells us that "God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). For your worship to be acceptable to him it must be in spirit, i.e., sincerely and from the depths of your soul and "in truth." It is the last phrase that you must consider. I do not question or doubt that you are sincere in your worship. We must determine what it means to worship God "in truth." Jesus tells us that God's "word is truth" (John 17:17). Thus we conclude that to worship God in truth means according to his Word, which of course is the Bible. Hence if we hope to have our worship accepted by God, we must base it on what the Bible tells us to do.

Another way to look at the question is as follows:

Paul tells us that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23)

He also tells us that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

Thus anything offered as worship to God that is not authorized in his Word is sinful.

The question then is, does God teach us to offer dancing to him as an act of worship?

In days past when the Hebrew people served God under the law of Moses (our Old Testament), they sometimes danced "Let them praise him in the dance" (Ps. 149:3). Today, we who are Christians serve God under the New Testament of God's Son. When Jesus was transfigured, Moses the Law-giver and Elijah the prophet appeared with him. Peter would have built houses of worship to honor each of them, but God spoke saying, "This is my beloved Son...hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5). After his resurrection, Jesus declared, "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth." He instructed his Apostles to teach their converts to "observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). Thus as Christians we must look to Jesus for instructions as to what we believe and do in our worship and service to God.

Looking in the New Testament of Christ we find no mention of dancing as a way to worship God. Had he wanted us to do so surely he would have told us. Instead we find that we are to sing hymns (Eph. 5:19, pray (Acts 12:12), commune in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 11:23-29), bring our offerings (I Cor. 16:1-2) and hear a lesson from God's Word (Acts 20: 7). When we do these things we do them in faith that is based on the Word of God. If we dance or offer some other kind of activity, it is not of faith and is not acceptable to God.

While interpretative dancing is an impressive art form and not wrong in itself, you should not offer it as worship since Jesus our King has not told us to do so. John tells us that those who go onward and abide not in the teaching of Christ have not God (II John 9). Remember that Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him (Heb. 5:9). We must always be content to willingly obey his expressed instructions and not be tempted to add things he has not authorized.

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## 91.

### **DID CHRIST GIVE US A CEREMONY FOR DEDICATING BABIES?**

Dear Bro. John: When my children were small I was attending the Disciples of Christ Church. My children were all dedicated at the age of one year. Can you tell me what it really was and why they pushed to have it done? Sandra

Dear Sandra: The New Testament of Christ says nothing about the church having a dedication ceremony for infants. Under Moses' Law the first born male child was consecrated to God as was every first born animal in a family's possession (Ex. 13:2; 34:19). This was based on the fact that God was the giver of all life and that he had saved the firstborn of Israel when the first born of Egypt were destroyed at the time of the Exodus (Ex. 12:12-13,23). In the ritual, the animal was given to the Lord for sacrificial service. The child was dedicated to God and then in a ceremony, redeemed and given back to their family. The tribe of Levi, the priestly tribe, stood as substitutes for all the firstborn children returned to their parents. The tithes of the Hebrews supported the Levites. The parents of Jesus thus dedicated him, their firstborn son (Luke 2:22-24). This practice along with all the other ceremonial prescriptions of the Law of Moses was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross of Christ (Col. 2:14).

From Catholicism, many Protestant churches borrowed infant christening, with baptism, naming, godparents, etc. Those churches which believe in baptism by immersion for those old enough to make their own choice, have borrowed the dedication part while omitting the baptism of the baby. For the 200 years of our existence in America, brethren have not practiced such ceremonies. In recent years a few who are tired of walking in the old paths of Bible Christianity have started this practice. Since Scripture knows nothing of this practice, their authority can only be that mentioned above.

Today, while every parent should dedicate each of their children to the Lord and bring them up to serve Him (Eph. 6:4), there is no ritual or ceremony prescribed for the church. As in dozens of other areas, people have not been content to practice the religion of Christ in its simplicity. They desire to have ritual and ceremonies like those of the Jews and even other pagan religions. As a consequence the various churches have all sorts of activities that have no basis in the teaching of Christ. Remember, He has all authority in heaven and on earth and we are to teach men to observe all things that he has commanded us (Matt. 28:18,20). We are not to add to nor take from his revealed will (Rev. 22:18-19).

That said, I must say it is never wrong to pray for others. We pray for young couples who are getting married, for couples having difficulties, for old Christians who are weak and infirm, for the safety of those serving in the military or law enforcement and rightly so. Thus it would not be wrong to have a prayer for a newborn child and for their parents. Such would be commendable. The thing we must guard against is that having taken one harmless step we taken others which are obviously away from God's will. To have a prayer for a new born confers no special privileges on him or his parents. It in no way makes him a member of the church. Only those old enough to believe in and obey Christ can be born of water and Spirit and enter the kingdom of heaven (John 3:3-5). A prayer for a child has nothing to do with forgiveness of sins since babies are innocent of wrong doing (Jas. 4:17). They do not inherit sin as our religious neighbors teach (Ezek. 18:20). While it is always right for us to pray for God's blessings on new parents and their babies, we have no authority for a dedication ceremony. To speak of a "dedication ceremony" suggests something formal that is a stated matter of the Christian religion. Since Lord said nothing about such a ceremony, better to say we will have

a prayer asking God's blessing on this child.

While no harm is done to the child in a dedication ceremony, it is an unnecessary action for the parent. The preacher who should be leading his people to follow Christ's will has encouraged and practiced, in the church, that for which he has no authority.

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92.

## INCIDENTALS AND AIDS IN WORSHIP?

Bro. Waddey: A question often comes up when I have discussions with others, trying to explain how we (the Church of Christ) are trying to worship as the disciples did, or as you called it the by "blue-print." Some have said, Well, by the mere fact that we use song books and sit in pews eliminates our worship being identical to the early church. So does that mean the details do not matter, as long as we are worshipping God? How would you respond? Pat

Dear Pat: The person who cites song books and pews to prove that we are not worshipping as the first Christians reveals a serious lack of understanding of Scripture precedent and common sense.

Acceptable worship is not determined by where it is conducted, whether in a forest glade, a home or an auditorium. Jesus said that in John 4:21-24. Neither does singing cease to be singing when we use a book with the words printed in it.

The church does not consist of material things, it is a spiritual body, a spiritual kingdom, a spiritual temple. We offer up spiritual sacrifices (I Pet. 2:5). True worship consists of three basic components. It must be devoted to God. It must be according to his revealed will and it must be sincerely offered. Jesus instructed us to remember his death in the Lord's Supper. He provided the elements, the day and the purposes for so doing. The details of implementing that ordinance are left to our judgement....so long as they do not conflict with other Scripture teaching. He tells us to sing and make melody to God in our hearts. The purposes of our singing are three fold, it teaches others, it praises God, it edifies the singer. He tells us the kind of songs to sing: Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The details of implementing our singing are left to us. Where he specifies an act or a detail we have no option, we must obey him. Where no details are specified we are free to use our good judgement in fulfilling the requirement. We describe that difference as generic and specific commands.

We could sit or stand and worship acceptably. We could worship in a house, a rented hall, a forest glen, a cave or a church building and please God. We could sing from memory or from a book. We could commune from a drinking cup and with a piece of home baked unleavened bread passed from hand to hand or from modern communion service ware. As long as we are doing what God said, for the purpose he said to do it, and with a pure heart, we are acceptable to Him.

Folks who bring up such things as hymnals, pitch pipes and church buildings are usually trying to avoid being amenable to the pattern provided in the New Testament (II Tim. 1:13). They are seeking some way to justify the use of musical instruments, women preachers, and other extra-biblical practices. I am sure you have seen this in some of your peers.

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## SHOULD WE CELEBRATE CHRIST'S BIRTH AT CHRISTMAS?

As the year draws to a close, we see folks are busily preparing for Christmas. Most churches devote one day per year to celebrate Christ's birth. That is done with an array of human traditions unknown to Scripture. "The day of Christ's birth cannot be ascertained from the New Testament, or indeed from any other source. "The fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity..." (McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, Vol. 3, p. 276). "Chrysostom, in 386, states that the celebration of the birth of Christ's according to the flesh 'was not inaugurated in Antioch until ten years before that date'" (Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Vol. 3, p.46). December 25<sup>th</sup> was determined by the decree of Liberious, bishop of the church in Rome, in 354 A.D. The date was widely disputed by others. "The Western Church ordered the feast to be celebrated on the day of the Mithraic rites of the birth of the sun (*Americana*). "The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence. The pagan festival with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad for an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner. (Schaff-Herzog, Vol 3, p. 48)

Since Churches of Christ are committed to practicing Christianity as it was in the beginning, we do not observe Christmas as a special holy day. God gave his church only one special day, the first day of the week. This is the day of Christ's resurrection and the day of the church's beginning (Mark 16:1-2; Acts 2). Jesus tells us to "observe all things whatsoever (he) commanded" (Matt. 28:20). But he did not command a Christmas observance. Paul warns us "not to go beyond the things which are written" (I Cor. 4:6 ASV). While we enjoy the fellowship, and festivities of the season, we believe that we should remember and be grateful for Christ's birth every day and that our charity and generosity should extend through out the year.

There are many great lessons for daily life in the story of Christ's birth.

- \* We see God's marvelous love. He so loved the us that he gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16).
- \* That Christ came into the world as "a child born" demonstrates God's love and respect for the innocence of infancy. Children are not born totally depraved with sin. Rather, we must become as little children if we would enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:3). This implies their innocence. In a society where one of three children conceived is legally aborted, we are reminded of the sacredness of innocent human life.
- \* Christ's birth of Mary reminds us of God's concern for woman. Through woman came sin and the fall. God redeemed womanhood by allowing Mary to bring the savior into the world. In that unique sense, the world is saved through "her child-bearing" (I Tim. 2:13-15). Through Christ, woman was saved from the degradation of the pagan world. Before he came, they were little more than the chattel and amusement of men. Now there is no male or female in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28). Now we honor them as "joint heirs of the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:27). We also see God's respect for purity in that he chose a virgin to be the mother of his Son (Lk. 1:34).
- \* This story teaches us respect for manhood and fatherhood. God gave Joseph the privilege and responsibility of providing for and protecting the infant Savior. We need fathers like him who will nurture their children "in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).
- \* The birth of Jesus demonstrates God's respect for and interest in the family. His son was placed in a loving, caring, devout family with a mother, father, and siblings. This sacred concept of family has been seriously eroded in our day, but it is the strength of the church and society and the hope for the future well-being of the race.
- \* We see in this record, God's respect for the poor of the earth. He could have sent his Son into the home of a rich and noble family, but he chose a poor one in a poor community to receive the blessing. The poor were not neglected in the ministry of Christ (Matt. 11:5).
- \* God's appreciation for labor and hard work are reflected in his allowing Jesus to grow up as a carpenter with Joseph (Mk. 6:3). There is dignity in labor. Working with one's hands is not shameful (Eph. 4:28), but there is shame in

laziness (Prov. 6:6-11).

\* The story tells us there is a place for people of all stations in the kingdom, be they lowly shepherds or wise kings. The gospel is for every social and ethnic group (Matt. 28:19). With God's people there can be no respect of persons (Acts 10:35).

\* This timeless story reminds us of our desperate plight as sinners before a just God. If we were to be saved, Christ had to come and "die for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6).

Our commitment to Christ demands all of our love and service 365 days each year.

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## 94.

### **DOES ROMANS 14 ALLOW US TO CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?**

Dear Bro. John: Regarding Christmas, would you comment on Rom 14:1-12. It appears that if a Christian wants to make a specific day holy to the Lord to honor Him, that Scripture finds no fault with it (Rom 14:5-6). It appears such a decision is in the realm of a personal decision, not the decision of a church. Vergil

Dear Bro. Virgil: The holy days of which Paul wrote in Rom. 14, like the foods mentioned, were almost certainly those of Judaism which had been ordained by God for the Hebrews, prior to Christ's kingdom. Such holy days as Christmas and Easter, seem to me to be of a different genera. They were never ordained by God. They are the creations of sinful men and a corrupt church. They are traditions of men such as Jesus condemned (Matt. 15:6-9).

An individual Christian might make a plausible case based on the passages in Romans 14, but for a congregation to conduct a special religious service borrowed from Catholicism and offer it to God as worship would be in a different category.

You might ponder what your reaction would be if a congregation familiar to you should begin to observe Passover, Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. Would you consider this as a matter of freedom based on the Romans instruction? What if they began to teach that Christians should not eat pork?

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## 95.

### **SHOULD WE CELEBRATE EASTER AS A HOLY DAY?**

Each year most Americans will attend the worship services of their favorite church, to observe the Easter Holy Day service that commemorates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Two days in the year command the respect of all who have any degree of faith in the Christian Religion. These are Christmas and Easter. For many, these constitute the only times they are in a church, except for marriages and funerals. These holy days are the most revered and considered the most sacred of all by Protestant and Catholic communicants.

Should we pose the questions, when and where did Easter originate? and, whence comes the authority for its observance? I am certain that practically everyone would respond, "It began with the resurrection of Jesus and it is taught in the Bible." Are you sure of your facts? Have you taken time to search the scriptures concerning this topic?

It will come as a shocking surprise to many learn that Easter is a religious observance wholly of human origin; that its practice and observance is nowhere taught nor authorized in the Scriptures. You may well doubt my word and demand proof for this bold assertion. Therefore we set ourselves to the task.

**The origin of the Easter tradition.** “It is at once the oldest and greatest festival of the Christian church, having been observed from very early times” (*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, p. 175.) Early, yes. **But not from the beginning:** Concerning **Lent**, the same reference says, “Not until much later (the seventh century) did the forty days’ period come to be recognized in honor of our Lord’s fast in the wilderness” (*Ibid.*, page 321)

“There is no trace of Easter Celebration in the New Testament...” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* Vol. II, p. 889).

“In any case it must be admitted that while in the New Testament we have definite mention of the observance of the Sunday, or “Lord’s Day” **there is no conclusive evidence in the first century** or more of the keeping of the Pasch (Easter) as a festival” (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol., V, Page 229).

“The Apostolic Fathers do not mention it” (Easter) (*Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 224).

“In fact, the Jewish Feast was taken over into the Christian Easter Celebration: (*Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 225).

“At the **end of the second century**, the celebration of Easter as the feast of the resurrection of Christ was general among the Christians” (*An Encyclopedia of Religion* by V. Ferm, page 239).

“**Pagan practices** were introduced into the Christian observance of Easter at an early age... (Ferm, p. 240).

“Easter a convergence of three traditions;

(1) **Pagan.** The word Easter is derived from the Anglo Saxson, Eostre, meaning the festival of spring at the vernal equinox when nature is in resurrection after winter. Hence the rabbits, notable for their fecundity and the eggs colored like rays of the returning sun and the northern lights...”

(2) **Hebrew.** The Jewish Passover celebrated from the day the destroyer of God smote the first-born of Egypt but passed-over the Hebrew children. The Passover is still celebrated at approximately the same season as Easter. It was at the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem that Jesus, was crucified and rose from the dead. A name for Easter is Pasch—derived from the Paschel Lamb of the Passover...

(3) **Christian.** The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. (*Americana*, Vol., 9, p. 506).

“From the same point of view originated the first yearly festivals among the Christians... The Jewish converts retained, with the whole Jewish ceremonial law all the Jewish festivals, although gradually they ascribed to them such Christian import as might naturally present itself. On the contrary, among Gentile Christians, there were, probably, from the first, **no yearly festivals** whatever, as may be inferred from the epistles of Paul” (*Neander’s History of the Christian Religion and Church*, Vol. 1, p. 297).

Those who take the time to read their New Testament through, are struck by the utter silence of it concerning the Easter Festival, the Lenten Season or any of the many things generally practiced in this special observance.

The word **Easter** is found in our King James Version of the Bible, in Acts 12:4, **but it is the same Greek word pascha** that is translated throughout the Bible as “**passover**,” and is so rendered in all other translations.

We do read of Jesus being resurrected and that ample proof was given by his appearance to his disciples, **but** rather than a yearly remembrance of his resurrection we find the disciples from that day forward met to worship and commune on the **first day of the week** (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1-2), the day of Christ’s Resurrection.

The heart of the Gospel message is that, Christ died for our sins, was buried and raised on the third day (I Cor. 15:3-4) which was the first day of the week.

Every convert, believing, repenting and confessing Christ was immersed in water and raised a new creature in the likeness of Christ’s resurrection (Rom. 6:3-4). But no mention is made of the yearly festival of Easter. It just was not authorized, it had not originated while the Apostles were still here.

Let Us Summarize:

1. The Bible is silent on the yearly celebration of Easter.
2. The Easter celebration arose no earlier than the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.
3. That the Easter celebration is a mixture of three traditions, Jewish, pagan and post-apostolic Christian.
4. It's highest source of authority is tradition, being an observance created by men without divine instruction.

#### **Does it displease God to celebrate the Easter Holidays?**

If we are to be guided by the Bible only, we will not attempt to offer to God what He has not authorized. The Scripture thoroughly furnishes us unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17). God has given us "all things that pertain to life and Godliness" (II Pet. 1:3).

We should respect the silence of the Bible.

We dare not add to what is written (Rev. 22:18-19)

Jesus said, teach them to observe all things I **have commanded** (Matt. 28:19-20).

Remember that Jesus said, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:19).

The Apostle Paul wrote, if any man, preach any other gospel "let him be anathema," i.e., accursed, (Gal. 1:8).

We are taught in Colossians 2:16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a **feast day**...Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in **will-worship**...but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh" (v. 23).

In Galatians 4:11, to those observing unscriptural holy days, Paul said, "I am afraid of you."

We cannot observe Easter by the authority of God. To do so is to offer God the inventions of men. He will not accept such. We dare not risk his displeasure.

We of the Church of Christ believe that God knows what he wants in his religion. We believe God has told us what he desires and that his Will for the Christian age is plainly revealed in the New Testament. We believe no man or group of men is wise enough to improve upon, add to or correct or in any way deviate from the teaching of the Bible! Thus we have no special Lenten and Easter holy season. Rather we urge disciples to **daily** live for Jesus (Rom. 12:1-2) and to worship him every first day of the week!

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## **96.**

### **DID JESUS ORDAIN FOOT WASHING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP?**

The night of his betrayal Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Some churches teach that foot-washing is an act of worship. Does the Bible teach us to practice this as worship?

From earliest times, people in oriental lands practiced foot-washing. It was a dry, dusty land. Most travelers walked on dirt roads. Sandals with no hose were the usual foot attire. The accepted rule of hospitality was to provide water and towels to your guests that they might wash their feet. To show a higher degree of hospitality one would have his servant wash the feet of the guest. Examples of this can be seen in the case of Abraham giving his guests water for their feet (Gen. 18:4) and Abigail washing David's feet (I Sam. 25:41).

In John 13:1-11, we read of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. When finished, he posed a question. "Know ye what I have done?" (vs. 12). Of course they knew he had washed their feet. But what had he really done? He continued, "If I, the Lord, and the Teacher have washed your feet (a servant's job) ye ought to wash one another's feet" (vs. 14).

Shortly before this incident there had been words of friction between the Apostles as to who would be first in the kingdom (Luke 22:24-26). Jesus gave them an object lesson, "Whosoever would be first among you, shall be your servant (Matt. 20:27). Jesus washing the disciples feet was a lesson in humility. To be his disciple we must be humble, willing to serve our fellow man.

The same lesson is repeated over again in many verses. We are to do nothing through vain glory "but in lowliness of mind...each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Christianity is a life of service to God and our fellow-man. Our destiny will depend on how we helped our neighbors (Matt. 25:31-41).

Washing hands for cleanliness is fine. When imposed as an act of worship, Jesus marked it as sin (Matt. 15:1-9). The same is true of foot-washing.

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97.

## **ARE WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS WORSHIP SERVICES?**

Dear Bro. John: Are weddings and funerals worship services of the church? Are they under the same guidelines and restrictions as our Lord's Day worship? Where is the Bible authority for cremation? Darryl

Dear Darryl: Regarding salvation, doctrine, the church and worship God has given us instructions in his Word. He calls the New Testament a pattern of sound words (II Tim. 1:13). In the worship of Christ's church we are regulated by the instructions of Christ, the founder and head of the church (Matt. 28:20). For our personal and private lives he has given us a few commands and prohibitions (for example, Rom. 13:8-9) and several general principles by which to make our decisions (for example, Matt. 7:12). There is a vast area of decisions about our daily life that he leaves to our common sense and good judgment.

God does not tell us which career to choose. Nor does he tell us in which city we should live, or in which neighborhood we should purchase or rent a home. He has nothing to say about the kinds of food we eat, our choices of recreation, vacations etc. Each of us is part of a particular culture. Culture is determined by the nation in which we live, the section of the country in which we live, our ethnicity, our educational, economic and social surrounding, our religious traditions and the age or generation of which we are part.

Marriage customs and ceremonies, and those of funerals and burials fall into the realm of social, cultural matters. God's Word sets forth His basic expectation for marriage such as monogamy (Matt. 19:5), and life-time commitment to one's mate (Matt. 19:6). It says nothing about dating, courtship, engagement and marriage ceremonies. Although such is not mandated by God, Christians generally want to be married in a "church" setting to declare to others that they seek God's blessing and approval in life. They want their marriage and home to be God-centered. At a marriage ceremony we can have many things that we would not have at a worship service: flowers, wedding clothing, processions, secular songs, special music, receptions, etc.

The same is true of funerals. Every one must die (Heb. 9:26). Every living thing will eventually return to the dust (Gen. 1:19). In virtually every society there is some sort of service for the deceased and his family. God gives no instructions about preparation of the corpse, the funeral service, burial, cemeteries and grave markers. Although we read that the Hebrews buried their dead, often in caves or tombs caved in rocks, no commands are given saying that is commanded

by God. We do read that he condemned those who desecrated the graves of the dead.

Funeral customs vary in different nations and cultures. Some have parades, some celebrations, some have wakes, some have elaborate, costly funerals, others simple burials. Some have expensive coffins, others are wrapped in a blanket and placed in the ground. Some are buried at sea, some in the earth. Some are cremated. In burial the process of returning to dust takes years. With embalming it takes even longer. In cremation the body is reduced to dust in a matter of a few hours. In either case the dust is returned to the earth. When Hindus have funerals they reflect their Hindu faith. When Christians have funerals they reflect their faith. Some will have a sermon, prayers and hymns of faith. Some may only have a few words of committal to God. Some will have flowers and testimonials, others will not. All such matters are a matter of personal choice since God has given no directions regarding funerals. In our society funeral homes generally have recorded "sacred" music as part of their atmosphere or background. Such music is often instrumental. Some Christians ask that it not be played others may abide it without comment. Since the occasion is not a worship service of Christ's church, it is not regulated by rules of the church (i.e. the bible). It may be that the wife or daughters or a sister of the deceased will want to say a few words at the funeral. Such is not a violation of the scripture that forbids women to preach or teach over men in the assembly of the church (I Tim. 2:11-12).

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98.

## **SHOULD WE USE INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS?**

Dear John: I would like to get your view on something. When weddings and funerals are held in the church building, is it right to use recorded music with instruments? Benjamin

Dear Benjamin: To get a proper perspective for answering this question, we first need to establish two points:

1. The church building is not the church. Hence that which would be forbidden in a worship assembly of the body of Christ might not be wrong for other gatherings, even though they are conducted in the building used by the congregation for worship at other times. What would your answer be if the congregation met in a rented building that was used for a wedding chapel or a funeral home?

2. Weddings and funerals are not worship services of the church. God has given us no instructions on how we should conduct such activities. To have an instrument or recorded instrumental music for a wedding or funeral is not the same as have them for the worship of God. He has told us how he wishes to be worshiped. He wants us to "sing and make melody with our hearts" (Eph. 5:19). But

to use an instrument or recorded music in a wedding or a funeral does not violate God's standards for our worship.

That said, we must add one additional point. A thing may not be sinful in and of itself, yet it could be inexpedient and unwise to do it. Since in the past we have had serious problems with those who insisted on using instrumental music in the worship, and since they often slipped the instrument into the assembly by first using it for other occasions, our fathers generally preferred not to have it in the building at all. We currently have a resurgence of that same spirit of apostasy, thus elders would have every right to decline any request to bring an instrument into the meeting place for any occasion.

Also there are often in the congregation, folks who are young or immature in the faith who might not be able to make a distinction between music for a wedding and music for the worship of God. Lest they be caused to stumble, an eldership might decide not to allow the use of such music.

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## HOW SHOULD WE DRESS FOR WORSHIP?

Dear Mr. Waddey: What should we wear to church? Mike.

Dear Mike: The Bible does not specify the type of clothing we should wear when worshiping God. A few general principals are given that will help us in deciding how to dress for worship. First Timothy 2:9-10 tells us that Christians should be adorned in "modest apparel" and not to imitate the world by placing all our emphasis on costly hair styles and jewelry. See also I Peter 3:3-5. First Corinthians 10:31 says that whatsoever we do should be to the glory of God. So our apparel should be such that when people see us that would be favorably impressed and led to think well of the God we worship, rather than to be impressed that we are flippant and irreverent in our worship. We should "fear God" (Eccle. 12:13). The word "fear" means to reverence. We show our reverence and respect for others in the way we adorn ourselves in their presence. When we go to a funeral most of use dress more formally because it is a serious occasion and to show respect for the deceased and his family. Should you be invited to meet with the president or governor, chances are you would dress differently than you would for a ball game. We should show that same reverence for God when worshipping.

Different cultures have different standards for formal dress occasions. Even in our country different regions have different standards for acceptable dress. Here in Arizona, the culture does not place as much emphasis on suits and ties as in the South. But there are styles of dress that folks would consider inappropriate for church. We should dress in compliance with the standards of the community in which we live.

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## WHAT ABOUT USING PROJECTORS IN WORSHIP?

Mr. Waddey: I am curious about your understanding of scripture on something that most congregations are doing these days; which is using a large projection system in the worship. It is used to show the lyrics to songs and make announcements and sermon outlines. B. Ridgeway

Dear Bro. Ridgeway: As we face the challenge of those who wish to remodel the church and create for themselves a new kind of denominational church that pleases them, we must be careful to discern that which is a harmless change of no consequence and those changes that would be contrary to the will of the Master.

The use of a projector to place the words of hymns before a congregation is in the first category. While the Bible instructs us to sing and make melody in our hearts, it says nothing about song-leaders, songbooks, harmony and how we determine the correct pitch for a given melody. These are all in the area of human judgement and expediency. If we are to sing together, we need someone to lead us in so doing. If we are to sing with any degree of pleasure and beauty we must sing in a key that is suitable. If we are to sing as a group we all need access to the words of the hymn. Early Christians had no hymnals such as we are accustomed to. Even our early brethren here in America did not have hymn books with the musical notations. Early song books had only the words of the songs. Projecting the words is a relatively new practice but it violates no principle of Scripture. While a person may not personally care for this method, he should not condemn those who use it since they are doing essentially the same thing as we do with our hymn books. \*\*\*

## **RESPONSIVE READINGS IN WORSHIP**

Dear Sir: Is it unscriptural to have responsive readings during the worship services, where both the men and the women read aloud from the songbooks? Jerry

Dear. Jerry: Although it has not been a common practice in the past among our churches, I see nothing scripturally wrong in participating in a responsive reading of Scripture. It is of the same nature as a song where the entire congregation join their voices together in worship. This is an ancient practice dating back to the worship of the Jewish synagogues. In Acts 4:24 the congregation in Jerusalem celebrated the release of Peter and John by lifting "up their voices together to God and said..." (RSV), Their joint prayer was a paraphrase of Psalm 2. (This same thought is seen in the New English Bible, the Jerusalem Bible and J. B. Phillips' New Testament).

In a day of many different translations it is a challenge to have each participant express the same words. But if a congregation has pew bibles all of the same translation, or if a sheet of paper is provided with the assigned verses for reading it can be done.

This is a case of something that is new to some, but not wrong in and of itself. If the introduction of responsive reading should create disruption in the congregation that is another matter.

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**END**