

The Worship of the Church

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Introduction

Man is a worshipful creature. In other words, he will inevitably worship someone or something. Unfortunately, worship is so often misdirected (Acts 17:22-23). Yet, this situation is totally unnecessary because God has clearly revealed Himself in the Bible (John 8:31-32). The Holy Scriptures teach that Jehovah is the only Being who is worthy of our adoration, reverence and praise (Psa. 29:1-2; Matt. 4:10). Furthermore, the One True God of Scripture has indicated the kind of worship that He desires to receive. Therefore, let us turn to His Word for instruction and guidance in this area.

Acts 17:22-23 ... 22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. (NASB95)

John 8:31-32 ... 31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (NASB95)

Psalms 29:1-2 ... 1 The Voice of the LORD in the Storm. A Psalm of David. Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in holy array. (NASB95)

Matthew 4:10 ... 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, "YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY." (NASB95)

The Day Of Christian Worship

The Sabbath was sacred under the Mosaic system, but the first day of the week carries special significance in the Christian era. On this day our Lord was raised (Luke 24:1-7; John 20:1, 19). The church of Christ was established on Pentecost, which always fell on the first day of the week (Lev. 23:15-16; Acts 2:1-4). On this day, Christians assembled to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7), to give of their means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and to worship the God of heaven (Rev. 1:10-11).

Luke 24:1-7 ... 1 The Resurrection But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. 2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of

the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; 5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, “Why do you seek the living One among the dead? 6 “He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee, 7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.” (NASB95)

John 20:1 ... 1 The Empty Tomb Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb. (NASB95)

John 20:19 ... 19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” (NASB95)

Leviticus 23:15-16 ... 15 “You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 “You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. (NASB95)

Acts 2:1-4 ... 1 The Day of Pentecost When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (NASB95)

Acts 20:7 ... 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ... 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (NASB95)

Revelation 1:10-11 ... 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet, 11 saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.” (NASB95)

The Acts Of Christian Worship

In the Old Testament period, worship was expressed through animal sacrifices, grain offerings, the burning of incense, temple service and rituals, etc. What does God require of his people in this Christian age? A study of the New Testament reveals the church engaged in five distinct acts of worship: observance of the Lord’s supper, singing songs of praise, adoration and edification,

offering up prayer and supplication unto God, the giving of free-will offerings, and the earnest proclamation of God's Word.

The Lord's Supper

A central part of Christian worship is the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7). This spiritual feast must be observed properly and with the right attitude (1 Cor. 11:23-30). It is a communion, a commemoration, a memorial and a declaration of our faith. Through partaking of the Lord's Supper, we call to remembrance our suffering Savior. This act not only celebrates the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, it also looks forward to His second coming. Moreover, it is an occasion for disciples to examine themselves. Wonderful blessings come from a proper observance of the Lord's Supper, but those who take it lightly stand on the brink of condemnation.

Acts 2:42 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (NASB95)

Acts 20:7 ... 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 11:23-30 ... 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. (NASB95)

Singing

God has chosen singing as the type music that He desires today. This is clearly evident from so many New Testament passages (Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:18-19; Col. 3:16). In this way Christians can encourage one another and also offer up praise and adoration to God. In order for this act of worship to be acceptable, it must be done according to the proper form (i.e., in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs), and with the proper spirit (i.e., by making melody and grace in the heart). Every disciple must participate. We should not focus on the mechanics of singing so much that we forget its purpose. Neither should we view it as simply a form of entertainment. The faithful child of God does not mindlessly mouth the words of a song; rather, he meditates on its meaning and message.

Matthew 26:30 ... 30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (NASB95)

Acts 16:25 ... 25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; (NASB95)

1 Corinthians 14:15 ... 15 What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. (NASB95)

Ephesians 5:18-19 ... 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (NASB95)

Colossians 3:16 ... 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (NASB95)

The question also arises, may we worship God with mechanical instruments of music? This issue has been dealt with in detail in other lessons. However, here it is sufficient to say that our answer will depend upon our basic intent in worship. Are we trying to please God or ourselves? If we want to please God, then let us be content to worship Him as He has directed. The New Testament specifies singing as the kind of music that God desires today. Those who walk by faith will be content with that divine decree.

Prayer

The early church was a praying church (Acts 2:42; 12:5, 12; Eph. 6:18-19; Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Thess. 5:17-18). Prayer is a fervent expression of our heart's desire and longing. It is an act of faith that expresses our dependence upon God. The skeptic views prayer as nothing more than wishful thinking, but children of God recognize it as an avenue of communication with their heavenly Father. The prayer of a righteous man is both powerful and effective (James 5:16).

Acts 2:42 ... 42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (NASB95)

Acts 12:5 ... 5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God. (NASB95)

Acts 12:12 ... 12 And when he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. (NASB95)

Ephesians 6:18-19 ... 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, (NASB95)

Philippians 4:6-7 ... 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 ... 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (NASB95)

James 5:16 ... 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (NASB95)

Giving

Sacrifice has always been an important part of worship. From the beginning, God has expected man to give back unto Him a portion of those blessings that he has received. Ultimately we are only stewards because God is the possessor of all things. Proper stewardship involves appropriate sacrifice unto God.

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul spelled out certain obligations we have in giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2). To begin with, our giving should be regular and periodic. New Testament churches were commanded to give “upon the first day of the week.” When he said, “let each one of you,” Paul was emphasizing the personal responsibility of every member to give to the Lord. The statement, “lay by him in store” indicated that our giving should be with purpose and planning. Christian giving should also be proportionate. God expects a man to give “as he may prosper.” The amount we give should be in proportion to the blessings that we have received. Moreover, the people of God are instructed to give liberality and cheerfully (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 9:6-7).

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 ... 1 Instructions and Greetings Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. (NASB95)

Romans 12:8 ... 8 or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 9:6-7 ... 6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (NASB95)

Paul instructed the early church to follow this pattern so that “there be no gatherings when I come.” This passage deals specifically with his efforts to help the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. Jewish Christians were suffering and the Gentile brethren had an obligation to help them. Paul would soon be coming, and their collection must be ready. There was no time to waste. There is, however, an enduring principle here revealed. The work of the church is on-

going. There is work that always needs to be done, and we never know when special situations may arise. Regular giving is necessary so that the church might be ready to fulfill her God-given mission. We should give so that there will be no deficit or lack, and so that no work would be left undone. Let's also remember to make up our contribution whenever we are out of town.

Preaching And Bible Study

Each Christian should seek to grow in knowledge (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Pet. 3:18). It is through a study of God's word that we are edified or built up in the most holy faith (Eph. 4:11-16). Let us never drift away from a worship that is Bible centered.

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Acts 20:7 ... 7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (NASB95)

2 Peter 3:18 ... 18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (NASB95)

Ephesians 4:11-16 ... 11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. (NASB95)

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us recognize that worship must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). In other words, it must be offered with the proper attitude and according to the proper form. True worship demands presence, participation and purity. The purpose of worship is not to entertain men, but to please God. Therefore it is imperative that our worship follow the New Testament pattern (Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

John 4:23-24 ... 23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NASB95)

Colossians 3:17 ... 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (NASB95)

1 Peter 4:11 ... 11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (NASB95)