

Worship

- There have been many times when I have heard brethren who refer to going to take part in worship as “going to services”. According to Webster, the definition of service in this case is “any religious ceremony”. But is our worship to **the God** of all grace and mercy to be referenced in such a way, as though it was “any” religious ceremony? Do we consider it just an empty formality that we **Christians** go through **every Sunday** of **every** week and do we even ponder what we’re doing when performing the acts associated with worship? We all need to ask ourselves where our focus is for the hour plus that we meet to return to **God** what **He** rightly deserves; our worship! After all, **He** is our audience and don’t we want to please the audience? In this study I would like to deal with each of the five acts of worship with reference to their importance in our worship to **God** and the benefits we hope receive in return, and even how they affect the very strength of the congregation.

1.) Singing (*a Capella*)

2Ch 29:25 And he stationed the **Levites** (*priests*) in the house of the **LORD** with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of **David** and of **Gad** the king’s seer and of **Nathan** the prophet, for the commandment was from the LORD through His prophets.

- Specifics were given in both covenants for the type of music required under each. Since we wouldn’t mix the two testaments when we offer up sacrifices of praise with animal sacrifices today, why would we want to do what is not authorized when it comes to acceptable music? Why would we want to mix mechanical instruments of the **Old Testament** with what we’ve been commanded, the use of only our voices, in the **New**?

Heb 13:15 Through **Him** then let us continually offer up a **sacrifice of praise** to **God**, that is, the **fruit of lips** that acknowledge **His** name (*authority*).

- Some may say they can’t carry a tune in a bucket and others in their immediate area may concur. But isn’t it great that **God** sees things differently than we do? **God**, in our minds, must be tone deaf if **He** can accept such out-of-tune renderings we so often bellow out to **Him**. But if such was the case then only the voices of gifted musicians would suffice to please **Him**. True, **God** hears our voices, but **He** is even more in tuned to what comes from our hearts.

Col 3:16 Let the word of **Christ** dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts (*Gk.2588- thoughts or feelings [mind]*) to **God**.

Literally: Sing with favor using our thoughts with feeling to the Lord.

- Do we praise **Him** in our singing in awe with such thankfulness and gratitude for the grace **He** has bestowed on us? Or is it seen as a competition, as some of us have witnessed in different congregations, where a more gifted member’s voice is heard above all others to the point of showing off? Do they feel they are closer to **God** by making it known they have such a talent? As **Peter** said to **Cornelius** how “anyone who fears **Him** and does what is right is acceptable to **Him**” (*Act 10:35*). So, if our voices are raised in both awe and humility, according to truth **He** hears us. I would next like to deal with at least four aspects that pertain to our singing.

1.a.) The word of Christ.

- Words are used to communicate things better than pretty much anything, although, if a picture speaks a thousand words I would think the eye contact between spouses can often say a thousand things by a simple glance. Positively or negatively. Put together, words communicate, whether verbally or in written form. Here, “the word of Christ” has a deeper meaning than just something we follow on a sheet of music or in a song book. His word is to inhabit our very being with such abundance that we cannot but burst with praise to His name. How often have you heard me quote **2 Pet 3:18**.

2Pe 3:18 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.

1.b.) Teaching in wisdom.

- How can we teach if we have no knowledge of what we are supposed to be teaching. We are commanded to grow in knowledge and our singing is one way to test that knowledge. Ask any teacher; “Who learns the most in the class?” They’ll tell you “hands down, it is the one doing the teaching” because of the preparation it takes to know in detail what they are communicating to their students. Therefore everyone learns. And anyone who has been in the faith for very long will know which songs are scriptural and which ones are not, through our knowledge of the **Bible**. Our songbooks are not inspired by **God** so we need to be aware of the fact that some hymns might well be tools of the devil. Now we are all at different stages in our **Christian** walks and those among us “who are spiritual” (**Gal 6:1**) are responsible to decipher the truth in our singing. And along with teaching through singing we are to caution and reprove each other according to truth.

1.c.) Admonishing in wisdom.

- Sometimes certain songs can work on our consciences either by the mood of the hymn or by its wording. Such songs as number **298**- “I’m Not Ashamed to Own My Lord” can convict our hearts when thinking back over the previous week of an incident where we might have had the opportunity to share the gospel had we been a little more prepared.

1Pe 3:15 but in your hearts honor **Christ** the **Lord** as holy, **always being prepared** to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, (*Do others even see such hope emanating from us?*)

- Or when we sing number **297**- “I Want To Be a Worker For the Lord”. Do I really want to be a worker or is my heart just “lip-syncing” since I’m not really paying attention to the words? See how the songs we sing can admonish us? Finally, our songs are to show our gratitude to **God** for all the blessings we’ve received and will receive from **His** hand.

1.d.) With thanksgiving.

When in worship especially, our hearts need to focus on why we are here and our singing is an outward expression where all can demonstrate it. And in singing we all are to lift up our voices, in or out of tune matters not, with gratitude for **God’s** unspeakable gift so that **God** hears our hearts, we are all edified and everyone learns.

2. Prayer.

- Prayer has been around since man's expulsion from Eden before which Adam and Eve could speak to God face to face in their, then, pure state. But once they fell from His grace they were no longer able to have that face to face relationship with Him. It became necessary to approach Him in a less personal way. And God will only hear certain prayers.

Joh 9:31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, God listens to him.

- Now this might seem to be right but in the context, concerning the one speaking it was a Pharisee, it was spoken in ignorance. Remember, not every statement recorded in the Bible was an inspired statement spoken in truth. God will always hear a sinner that comes to Him with the desire to be right in His sight. All other sinners He won't hear. Especially the prayers of such pompous people who only pray to Him in ignorance, asking for things out of want and not out of need.

Jas 4:2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

- Therefore, before we need expect anything from God, we first need to get our consciences clear with Him. Only then can we be considered "a righteous person".

Jas 5:16 ... The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

- Prayers during worship are to be in praise to God for His unlimited grace, for each other's needs and for strength in time of trouble, humbly thanking Him for every blessing we receive every day of our lives, asking Him for forgiveness and wisdom as we live among a lost society.

Jas 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, Who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

3. Giving.

- One of the aspects of God ordained worship that many in churches of Christ purposely avoid from the pulpit is the blessing we've been given to give. If we preach that our worship must include singing, prayer, the Lord's supper and preaching as though they're essential, then we need to preach our giving as equally important. We are blessed when we give. And don't we all want to be blessed?

Act 20:33 I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. 34 You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. 35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

- Under the O.T. system of tithing the Jews actually gave more than ten percent when they considered everything else they were commanded to give. And God challenged them by asking them to test Him to see if He wouldn't bless them more abundantly if they were to lavish His storehouse with their gifts.

Mal 3:10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in **My** house. And thereby put **Me** to the test, says the **LORD** of hosts, if **I** will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.

- So what we give is to be given in faith that **God** will then pour out a blessing, as **He** has already done, so that this congregation will grow and **His** name be magnified in this area. And what we give should be what we've **decided** to give from our hearts long before the collection baskets are passed. It should **never** be from what we have in our pockets at the time or from whatever we have left once we pay our bills. Our contribution should be included as an item listed in our regular budgets. If we make it the most important bill we pay each time we receive our paychecks as a "first fruit" of our income, **God** will surely be pleased with us and will bless us in the same manner in return. I can truthfully say that I have never gone without since the time I made this my rule for giving. **God** gave of **His** best as a sacrifice to save what is most precious to us, our souls, so we need to think about how much we give and to do so with a "cheerful heart".

2Co 9:6 The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for **God** loves a cheerful giver. **8** And **God** is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having **all sufficiency** in **all things** at **all times**, you may **abound** in **every** good work.

- It is so sad that the moment **God** blesses certain **Christians** with good jobs they think only of how they'll spend it on themselves and not even think of how they can further the work of the church in helping save the lost. Do they not understand how it took a certain amount of funding for them to find or to be introduced to the truth? Sad to say everything takes money. It takes money to support missionaries, it takes money to help certain members when they're down on their luck and just need a boost to get them through to the next paycheck, it takes money to keep the lights on and the heat and air conditioning bills paid to keep things comfortable here, it takes money to support preachers because we should never think that their work is to be done for free since preachers also have relatively the same bills and overhead that every other **Christian** has.

1Ti 5:18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "**The laborer deserves his wages.**"

- And the one thing about churches of **Christ**; we go to the **Bible** for answers, even when it comes to our giving. We don't have camel washes or bake sales. All funding comes directly from the membership. And neither do we give, as they do in denominations, on Wednesdays or in "Sunday school" classes where they ask even the children to contribute. What income did they receive during the week? Our giving is to be done on each Sunday in the combined assembly and is only expected to be collected **from the brethren within the congregation.**

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of **Galatia**, so you also are to do. **2** **On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

- We pattern our way of giving as the early church did according to inspiration. In this case where **Paul** was addressing the **Corinthian** brethren, he understood the way people received their pay was according to **O.T.** law. Each laborer received his daily income at the end of each

day. One reason was so that the greedy employers didn't hold it to collect interest on it and another was because they may have been poor and depended on their daily paycheck to get by.

Lev 19:13 ... The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you (*his employer*) all night until the morning.

Deu 24:15 You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the LORD, and you be guilty of sin.

- Paul was directing them to put a portion of their daily income aside in storage so that when he came there wouldn't be the confusion of collecting it. Which answers the argument of why we don't collect funds throughout the week. Before I became a N.T. Christian I once visited a denomination where they collected in the Sunday school classes of all ages, in the general assembly, another collection in the same assembly for a building fund and another one for something else. They also collected Sunday evenings from the **same** members and **anytime** they were together, which included a collection during midweek Bible class. There was no putting aside of anything and gathering it all at once. Even the denomination I grew up in had collections in Sunday morning kids classes, during worship, Sunday evenings and Wednesdays. They even collected from the ones who had birthdays. As kids we couldn't wait until it was our turn at dropping the pennies in the lighthouse bank, one for each year. We even sang a song during the ceremony. "Dropping, dropping, dropping, dropping. Hear those pennies fall. Every one for Jesus, He shall have them all." It was especially geared toward young children but they made their most money on the seniors there. On the other hand in the churches of Christ, our growth comes from our faith in doing this act of worship according to the God inspired, apostle delivered words of truth.

4. Preaching.

- On the first day of the week, one way we communicate comes from the pulpit through preaching. From proclaiming the gospel's message to warning us of those habits or things we might be doing that would separate us from God's grace. To preach means (*Gk.2784*) to herald or proclaim the divine truth, especially as it pertains to the gospel. Jesus told His disciples to deliver the same message He gave to them in this way.

Mat 10:27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim (*Gk.2784- preach [KJV]*) on the housetops.

- He also told them that they didn't need to prepare beforehand what they would say when they were in the precarious positions they were about to be in.

Mat 10:19 When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. 20 For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

- Obviously, they lived in the time of miracles when Holy Spirit was active in verifying the message, that it came from God. But today He speaks through the written word as our "Mouthpiece". If we aren't speaking from the word of God we aren't speaking the truth as it would pertain to the faith. Any and everything we preach must be spoken with a "what saith the Lord" on any given subject.

1Pe 4:10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles (*Gk.3051- utterance*) of God;... (*...as though God Himself is saying it.*)

- Preaching is done to proclaim the message of salvation, to educate, to edify, to admonish and to encourage. Sometimes it steps on toes through convicting a person's heart of sin.

Act 2:37 Now when they **heard** this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

- Once the spoken word convicts the heart it then, hopefully, leads to obedience.

Act 8:12 But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name (*authority*) of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

- It has been said that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop". If that's true then "an unfocused mind is his playground". Preaching is never to be done to entertain. When we come together for worship we should always remember, we are here for a short time on Sunday where the rest of the world needs to be left outside the doors before coming in. Preachers may be dull, humdrum, boring, monotone and whose taped sermons may be good to listen to if you can't get to sleep at night. Even Paul said his sermons weren't meant to entertain. But it was his Holy Spirit backed message that introduced the gospel which was what was important.

1Co 2:4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible (*convincing*) words of (*man's*) wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

- Paul even at one point put a very tired young man to sleep so that he had an accident.

Act 20:9 And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. 10 But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." 11 And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. 12 And they took the youth away alive, and were not a little comforted.

- We aren't in worship but for the most of an hour and a half. If our attitude toward hearing the message was more like those of Troas (*Act 20:6*) who couldn't wait to hear Paul deliver more about their newfound faith, it shouldn't matter how dull or how inanimate the speaker might be today. If we're focused on learning from the message more than the messenger we might just well learn something. If not and "the word of the cross is folly" to those not interested they may well join those who are to perish.

1Co 1:18 For the word of the cross (*the gospel*) is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

- "The word of the cross" has such a powerful message that it is one of hope of a life beyond the grave.

1Co 15:12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not

even **Christ** has been raised. **14** And if **Christ** has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. **15** We are even found to be misrepresenting **God**, because we testified about **God** that **He raised Christ, Whom He** did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, not even **Christ** has been raised. **17** And if **Christ** has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in **Christ** have perished. **19** If in **Christ** we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. **20** But in fact **Christ has** been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

- **Paul** summed up his personal understanding in preaching the resurrection.

1Co 2:2 For I decided to know nothing among you except **Jesus Christ** and **Him** crucified.

5. The Lord's communion.

- No one of the five acts of our worship is to be considered more important than the others. The church wouldn't exist were it not for preaching, or giving, or without our praying together for certain needs to **Him Who** answers them or lifting up our voices in praiseful song. And how would we ever remember the sacrifice **God** gave in sending **Jesus** to die for the sins of the world without being reminded through the act of communion?

Luk 22:19 ... **Do (command) this (communion) in remembrance of Me."**

- But there is one thing that many of us might already know when it comes to **how** we are to partake of the **Lord's** supper. First, none of us are to be considered worthy outside of being in **Christ**. Our own self-worth is only of value once we have been clothed in **Him** through obedience in baptism. So when we don't quite understand **why** we are partaking of the bread and cup we are then in danger of judgment.

1Co 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the **Lord's** death until **He** comes. **27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the **Lord** in an unworthy (*Gk.371- irreverently*) manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the **Lord**. **28** Let a person examine (*Gk.1381- test*) himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning (*Gk.1252- to separate thoroughly*) the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

- **Paul** was admonishing the **Corinthian** congregation for coming together for a meal where some had and others didn't and just having communion in the midst of it all, making the **Lord's** supper no more important than a common meal. They weren't showing it the reverence it was due by making it a totally separate act. So what does it mean that we should test ourselves? And can a child test themselves before partaking of the emblems?

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that **Jesus Christ** is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

- Whoever doesn't understand then shouldn't partake. Our communion today is modeled after the pattern given to **Moses** to only be eaten by the **O.T.** priesthood in the **Holy Place**.

Lev 24:8 Every **Sabbath** day **Aaron** shall arrange it (*the bread on the table of shewbread*) before the **LORD** regularly; it is from the people of **Israel** as a covenant forever. (*O.T. partaking of*

the unleavened bread continues through the N.T. priesthood in communion, thus the covenant to spiritual Israel's priesthood is still in affect and will be until the Lord returns.) 9 And it shall be for Aaron and his sons (*priests*), and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due."

- Aaron as high priest under the O.T. partook with fellow priests on every Sabbath day just as Jesus, our High Priest (*Heb 5:10*) under the N.T., partakes with His priesthood, the church (*a.k.a., the N.T. holy place*) every first day of the week (*Sunday*).

1Pe 2:9 But you are a chosen race (*speaking to Christians*), a royal **priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may **proclaim** the excellencies of Him Who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

- Therefore, Christians are commanded to partake of the emblems. As the O.T. priesthood did on the Sabbath day, so we do likewise on the first day of every week. But what about non-members? Do they understand that we do this to remember Christ's sacrifice, how He gave His body to be hung on a Roman cross and how He allowed His executioners to spill His innocent blood, all for the salvation of every person who ever existed on earth, should they so accept His gracious gift? If you don't understand these things as they were explained we exhort you let us help you know for sure why we worship as we do. The true churches of Christ everywhere pursue Bible things in Bible ways and that includes the Biblical manner and unchanging way in which we worship. And if you're not sure whether you are a Christian, please consider the words of the apostle John.

1Jn 5:11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name (*authority*) of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

- How then can we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have eternal life? Where do we find that life? According to John, eternal life can only be found in Jesus Christ! So if you don't have Christ you're not in Christ and you don't have eternal life! How do you get in Christ?

Gal 3:26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

- If you wish to enjoy worship in a covenant relationship with Christ you need to be in Him. You need to hear the gospel plan to save you, you need to believe in the God Who gave that plan, you need to repent of past sins acknowledging Jesus as the Christ and Son of God and then you need to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of those sins that you have repented of. And as long as you "walk in the light, as He is in the light" you will "have fellowship with [fellow saints], and the blood of Jesus His Son" will continue to cleanse you "from all sin" (*1 Jn.1:7*).

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September 21, 2014

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