

Basic Truths for Young Believers

Stark Road Gospel Hall

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Topic 1. Worship and the Priesthood of Believers

Readings: Psalm 29:1-2; 45:1; 115:1; Isaiah 44:6; John 4:19-24; Hebrews 13:15-16.

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Ps 29:1-2).

I. What is Worship? Ascribing to God the Glory Rightfully Due Him.

Basic Principle: God must come first. God, the Creator, takes absolute priority in His universe (Isaiah 44:6). He created us solely for His pleasure (Revelation 4:11), and thus our highest calling in life is to ascribe to Him “the glory due unto His name” (Psalm 29:1-2). Our supreme blessing is to know God (John 17:3), and our supreme privilege is to worship Him—to minister to His heart (John 4:23). We “...worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

Worship is simply honor and adoration directed to God. It springs from loving the Lord “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30). Such devotion should cause the heart to overflow with words ascribing glory to God (Psalm 45:1; 29:1-2; Hebrews 13:15-16), and should lead us to yield our lives in service to Him (Romans 12:1-2).

How wonderful and staggering that God permits us to worship Him! He actually bids us to come into the very sanctuary of heaven with words that bring pleasure and joy to His heart. He makes us at home in the blazes of His glory allows us to minister to His heart. We thrill the God of eternity by reverently presenting to Him what delights His heart—chiefly the value of His beloved Son (Luke 3:22).

There are two principal NT words for worship. The first is προσκυνεω, which means “to kiss toward, to kiss the hand, to bow before.” This expresses humble adoration. The second is λατρευω, which means “rendering honor, paying homage.” This portrays humble service.

OT Pictures of the Priority of Worship. The LORD called Israel out of Egypt so that they could worship Him (Exodus 3:18; 5:1-3). He inaugurated a priesthood and sacrifices and a tabernacle for their worship. And He instructed that the sweet smell of the perpetual burnt offering should ascend from the bronze altar both day and night (Exodus 29:38-42). Later, when Ezra led the Jewish remnant back from their captivity in Babylon, He put the worship of God first. Ezra’s first priority was the rebuilding of the altar (Ezra 3:3). After finishing the altar, Ezra’s next step of obedience was to construct a new temple (Ezra 5:16). Only later did Nehemiah oversee the rebuilding of the city walls. This historical order illustrates God’s spiritual priorities: God is first, the house of God second, and the world third. In order to honor this pattern today, we must place the worship of God first, service to the assembly second, and the needs of the world last.

In a day when Christian teaching centers on man, and when therapy for our problems has overtaken reverence for God’s holiness, we must reaffirm the words of the psalmist: “Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory...” (115:1). As believer-priests, we are to minister to the needs of the lost and for the blessing of God’s people. But above all else, we are to minister to the heart of God Himself. This is the privilege of worship—and it is ours forever. We will not preach the gospel to the lost in heaven, nor will we hold meetings to teach and encourage the saints. But our priestly privilege of worship will never cease. The Lord hinted at this when He said to Martha, “Mary hath chosen that good part, and it shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). Worship is forever.

The Biblical Pattern of Worship Preceding Service. When God calls men to His work in the Bible, He begins by giving them a clear vision of Himself. Because of these visions, the men of God retain a burning desire to know God from then on—a desire that motivates them for all other work. E.g. Stephen tells us that “the God of glory appeared unto Abraham” when he was an idolater in Ur of the Chaldees (Acts 7:2). After that vision, Abraham obeyed God and went to Canaan, and for the rest of his life he kept building altars for the Lord.

Stephen then speaks of Moses, a man “mighty in word and deed.” At each milestone in his life, Moses began with worship. As the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses likely trained and studied at the temple of the sun in Heliopolis, the highest place of learning in the world at that time. Before God could use him, however, Moses would need to spend forty years in the backside of the desert, learning to be a shepherd and a father. Near the end of that period, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and called for worship. “Holy ground” is the first mention of “holy” in Scripture. Moses acquired an insatiable thirst for God, later saying, “Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee...” (Exodus 33:13).

David had the same hunger for God: “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1). And David advised his wise son Solomon, “Know thou the God of thy Father...” (1 Chronicles 28:9). And before God launched Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, which centered so wonderfully on Christ, He gave Isaiah a vision of Christ’s preincarnate glory and majesty (Isaiah 6).

In the NT, Saul received a sudden vision of the Lord’s glory. Saul’s initial response to the blinding light and the heavenly voice was not “What wilt Thou have me to do” (that came later). Saul first exclaimed, “Lord, who art Thou?” (Acts 9:5). From then on, the apostle Paul’s great obsession was to “know Him” (Philippians 3:10). Paul said, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). And Paul desired the same for every Christian: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Ephesians 1:17).

To summarize, we see the proper order in Hebrews 11: Abel (worship), Enoch (walk), Noah (work). Worship is first. And when we put worship first, everything else falls into its proper place.

II. Who May Worship? God’s Priests.

Basic Principle: Priesthood is essential for worship.

The function of priests. A priest is a man (or, in this age, a woman) who acts for God. The first priest mentioned in the Bible was Melchizedek, who blessed Abram and “God Most High” (Genesis 14:18-20). Melchizedek worshiped God and provided Abram with both physical and spiritual blessing—a hospitality meal of bread and wine and a benediction. Later, we meet Aaron, the first levitical priest, whom God “set apart...to consecrate the most holy things, to offer sacrifices before the Lord, to minister before Him and to pronounce blessings in His name forever” (1 Chronicles 23:13). Again, we see two directions of service—a primary God-ward direction, and a secondary man-ward direction. And we see that offering sacrifice is a priority of priestly activity.

C. God desires collective worship. God saved us as individuals, and He delights in our private worship and service. He makes every believer a priest, and grants each of us unlimited access to His presence—a private audience whenever we choose. Yet God never intends any believer to be isolated, and thus He gathers us together in local assemblies (Mat 18:20). As members of an assembly, God blesses us with certain privileges that are *collective*. The Lord’s Supper is chief among these collective privileges. We should notice that whenever the NT discusses the worship of believers, it always views them as a group—not as individuals. The descriptions of our priesthood, e.g., are all collective or plural (1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), and the passages that describe the Lord’s Supper clearly imply collective praise (e.g. 1 Cor 11:23-26). Similarly, Hebrews 13:15 says, “By Him [the Lord Jesus] let *us* offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks unto His name.” This passage again portrays worship as a singular sacrifice offered by a united group of priests.

God is seeking the worship of *assemblies* as much as the worship of individual Christians. This concept explains the centrality of the Lord’s Supper. God is calling His people to gather together as a *company* to offer Him praise collectively. When a brother leads the congregation in praise to God, he is therefore speaking on behalf of the entire group of priests, and His worship is accepted from every priest. The congregation affirms their participation in the prayer of the leading brother by saying, “Amen” (note: “...how shall he...say ‘Amen’ at thy [singular] giving of

thanks...?" 1 Cor 14:16-17). Just as "we [plural] break" the loaf, so "we [plural] bless" the cup (1 Cor 10:16)--even though only one brother speaks, all are worshipping. The sisters do not lead publicly, but they nonetheless are offering praise through the brother who leads. Ultimately, it is the Lord Jesus Himself who leads the praise which we direct to the Father (Heb 2:11-12).

The progression of priesthood in Scripture. In the earliest days, the head of each household served as family priest (e.g. Genesis 15:9-10; Job 1:5). Later, Melchizedek filled a larger role as the king-priest of Salem (Genesis 14:18-20). Then in Exodus 19:6, we learn that God intended to make the entire nation of Israel a kingdom of priests. Because of their failure in worshipping the golden calf, however, God restricted the priesthood to the tribe of Levi and the family of Aaron (Exodus 32:29; Numbers 1:47-53; 3:5-9,12,41, 45; 4:2-3). Later, God further restricted the priesthood in Aaron's family to the sons of Zadok. God's intention ultimately is to exalt Christ as the King-Priest of His people (Psalm 110; Zechariah 3).

The priesthood of all believers. Clearly we became priests at conversion, as soon as we were loosed from our sins. In fact, we received everything at conversion--every blessing is in Christ [Jack Hunter]. The NT never tells us to go through a process or to seek an experience to gain *anything*. There is no "second blessing." We received every spiritual blessing when we received Christ (Ep 1:3). This is the era of grace, and God's grace is never contingent on our performance. Though still undeveloped, all of our spiritual gifts were imparted at conversion. And we may not have known we were priests the moment we were saved, but we were. God exhorts us in our Christian life to become what He has already made us. He has made us priests, and now urges us to function in the light and dignity of that.

Everything that we perform for God in our Christian lives is based on priesthood.

A Kingdom of Priests. In the present dispensation, God has returned to the original intention that His people should be a kingdom of priests: To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests [εποιησεν ημας βασιλειαν ιερεις τω θεω και πατρι αυτου] to serve His God and Father--to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! [Rv 1:6; cf 5:10; 0:6.] The three Revelation passages teach us that Christ has loved a people and loosed them from their sins, and then melded them together into a kingdom. In that kingdom, they function as priests.

The believer also partakes of the Melchizedek priesthood, for each of the four NT passages dealing with the priesthood of believers calls us royal (1 Pt 2) or links our priesthood with a kingdom (3 times in Rv) [T. E. Wilson]. We are no more Levites than Christ was, yet some phases of our priesthood are also patterned after the Aaronic order. We now have a heavenly sanctuary "within the veil," and the Minister of that sanctuary in Christ Himself. Christ is the only sacrificing priest in the NT. Believers do not *sacrifice* Christ in sacrifice--this is the travesty of the mass. But we do *present* Christ in His beauty--we offer the "calves" of our lips to God the Father, which means verbal adoration of the Father and the Son. Christ is the only sacrificing priest in the NT, although the metaphor of sacrifice is used of believer-priests.

The four NT passages that teach us about our priesthood speak of it in the plural--priests. This is important, but should not be taken to mean that individuals cannot function as priests. In fact, the Reformation debate over the priesthood of all believers focused on individual priesthood. Those who attempt to limit priesthood to corporate activity lose sight of this vital truth. Nevertheless, it is true that "priest" in the singular always refers to Christ in the NT. Believer-priests are in the plural--the plurality simply tells us that *every* believer is in the priesthood. Note that if a comma is placed after βασιλειαν in 1:6, then the translation "a kingdom and priests" [NIV] is possible. Rv 5:10 says this explicitly: εποιεσας αυτους τω θεω ημων βασιλειαν και ιερεις. Rv 20:6 does not mention "kingdom" explicitly: εσονται ιερεις του θεου και του χριστου. The idea of a kingdom is prominent in these passages, but the phrase "kingdom of priests" does not support the idea that priesthood is exclusively collective. This would exclude from priesthood all believers who cannot gather with others. We are not only priests when we gather together. We come together *as* a priesthood, not to *form* a priesthood.

Note that from the time of David, the Levitical priests were divided into 24 courses, which served in turn. The men were still priests, however, even when their course was not active publicly. And even public priests offered private offerings for their families and for themselves. So priesthood functions at all times--we could not approach God apart from priesthood. The public, collective priesthood is simply one expression of our universal priesthood.

The Two Directions of Priesthood. 3. 1 Peter 2 identifies believers as a priesthood, a people set apart for God's service. The apostle shows that we are first a "holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). Later, Peter adds that we are also "a royal priesthood...that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). Again, our priority is first to minister to the *heart* of God, and only then to minister to the *house* of God and to the world. Worship is a big concept that embraces the whole life. It has an outward dimension, for any work done to honor God is worship. This includes preaching the gospel (Rm 15:16), being sensitive to a weaker brother (Rm 14:18), and giving money to God (Ph 4:18). All of these are loving acts of giving, done unto the Lord for the benefit of others. But worship has an upward dimension as well, and this must have first priority. It is offering "a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Hb 13:15-6). This is the basis for outward service: "And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:16). [It is useful to distinguish priestly service from levitical service when discussing λατρευω.]

1 PETER 2: THE HOLY PRIESTHOOD AND THE ROYAL PRIESTHOOD. Ez 44 tells of God restoring true worship in Israel after a time of idolatry. In v10 God calls the Levites to minister to His house. But He states in v13 that the Levites cannot "come near to Me or to My things." God reserved that privilege for the sons of Zadok, for only the sons of Zadok remained faithful to the Lord by not committing idolatry. In v15, God says, "They shall minister unto Me." So again we see two directions of priestly service, two kinds of ministry. One has priority over the other, and is a greater privilege than the other. Higher than our ministry to the *house* of God is our ministry to the *heart* of God.

1 Pt 2 teaches this distinction. First of all, we are a *holy* priesthood that ministers to the heart of God. We offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable by Jesus Christ. Second, we are a *royal* priesthood that ministers to the house of God. We declare the virtues of Christ to the people of God and to the world. But don't confuse these. When we come to God in worship, we are engaged in the very highest and sweetest service imaginable. We come to God to bring Him joy by extolling His Son, in whom is all His delight.

Peter's "ye" (v5) means all believers (1:23; 2:7). As priests, our duty is to offer sacrifices. We do not actually sacrifice Christ, as the Catholic mass maintains. But we offer to God a metaphorical sacrifice, "the fruit of our lips" (Hb 12:15). We are remembering Christ. V4 tells us that the living Stone is "chosen by God and precious to Him." V7 says that "to you who believe, this stone is precious." The context is full of Christ, and suggests that the "spiritual sacrifices" are indeed the fruit of lips occupied with Christ.

The NT teaches that believer-priests can offer other sacrifices as well, which though still given first to God, yet also intend to bless men. These are the functions of the "royal priesthood," which shows forth the virtues of Christ to others. The darkness-to-light metaphor and the content of vv10-2 suggest that Peter is especially thinking about the gospel.

The following passages use the key formula of priesthood: "offer sacrifice" [J. Hunter].

HEBREWS 12:15-6. The Hebrew Christians were in a plight. They were suffering, and their nationals were coming to them and saying, "Why have you embraced this new religion? You've lost everything. You have no temple, no altar, no sacrifice, and no priest." The writer carefully rebuts this criticism. Following the Lord's teaching to the Samaritan woman, he shows that the symbolic Jewish system is now obsolete, because the real thing has come. There is a temple and an altar and a sacrifice and a priesthood, and these are only for God's children. Regarding the priesthood, the writer speaks about drawing "near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water" (10:22). In the reverse order, these were the first and last rites in the consecration of the Levitical priesthood (Lv 8:6; Ex 30:19-21; cf Ez 36:25). We *can* enter the holiest, therefore, because we *are* consecrated priests. We could not enter otherwise.

Hb 13:15-6 speaks of our sacrifices, and again, the two directions of priestly service are clear, a God-ward and a man-ward. The first is in the sanctuary, and the second in the street. Note that the ministry to the heart of God is offered continually (not just on Sunday). This is a great challenge. How are you getting on? David said, "I will bless the Lord at all times...." Are we praising God when times are good? We ought to be. But what about when times are bad? Can we bless God in adversity, as Job did? Anybody ought to be able to thank his Maker when things are rosy, but the test of true priestliness is being able to bless God when everything is going wrong and falling apart. How glum we are, how sullen toward heaven, when the slightest thing goes wrong. Cf notes on Job above.

Hb 13:16 moves from the sanctuary into the street. Now we're blessing men. Yet this is still a "sacrifice," and God is "well pleased." The good works may be directed at the house of God, or more widely to the world of lost men. The writer warns that it is easy to forget this work. We have to look for opportunities to do good. If we're doing it right, people should know to turn to us. People in trouble would be knocking at your door and at mine. Whenever a problem arises, we should be right in the middle of it, to give our time and ability and money--whatever is needed. And we should not overlook those with ongoing, chronic needs. As priests, we should be prepared at all times to bless saint and sinner alike. We're ideally suited to help, because we know God. We're God's priests; only we can bring God into the difficulty. "Forget not." We're forgetting, aren't we?

PHILIPPIANS 4:18. One reason Paul had for writing this letter was to thank the believers for the money they sent him by Epaphroditus. It was a large gift, for Paul said that he was "full." In his experience, he knew times of plenty and times of starvation (vv11-3); this was a time of plenty. Paul used this opportunity to teach the Philippians how God viewed their gift. He used the language of the altar, of the burnt offering, for their giving was a priestly act. It is the same language that he used to speak of Christ's death in Ep 5:2, "Christ loved us and gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Christ's work was an atoning sacrifice; theirs was a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise; both were priestly works. As a priesthood, they offered their gift to *God*. And then Paul received it from God. So there are two levels in giving: On the spiritual level, we give everything to God; on the material level, we give to others, like God's servants. But God is interested in the spiritual side. The Philippians thought that they were simply helping Paul, but Paul tells them that the fragrance of their giving wafted through the atmosphere to touch the throne of the Eternal! And God breathed it in--the fragrant offering of Christian priests.

PHILIPPIANS 2:17. Paul wrote that he was being "poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith." In the OT era, a drink offerings were regularly offered with the burnt offerings (Ex 29:38-41). The burnt offering spoke of the offerer's *devotion*, and the drink offering spoke of the offerer's *joy*. The drink offering told of the delight the offerer had in presenting the burnt offering to the Lord. The sacrificial service of the Philippians means the collective activities of that church. Paul viewed it as a burnt offering going up to God. Think of that! God views our contributions to the assembly as a sign of our devotion to Him. Our work in the assembly is priestly work--all of it. And Paul said that he was prepared to pour out his life--even to give it up in death--for such devoted service to God. He was overjoyed to see such commitment, and he said that he would be happy to give his life to further that kind of devotion.

There are men and women today who are giving their lives for the local church. They stand associated with it in all its activities. It is their joy and delight and pleasure to give their lives in this way. They are part of the corporate burnt offering of the company, and they add their lives as a drink offering to that. That is consummate priestly service.

ROMANS 15:16. Paul speaks here in his official status as the apostle to the Gentiles, and he says that proclaiming the gospel to them is a priestly duty. It is God-ward service that overflows to the benefit of everyone around. And what is the sacrifice? It is the lives of men, the lives of the Gentile believers. He ministers as a priest, and his converts are his offering. What a concept of preaching! He acts for God when he preaches. His heart is toward God, he blesses God, and he considers the results for God. And in doing this, he also blesses men. The goal of his preaching is not mere conversion stories, but lives laid on the altar for God. Paul never counted heads. He does not emphasize the salvation of souls here, but rather the consecration of lives. What is the use of professions if lives are not dedicated? *Paul's* kind of preaching resulted in lives dedicated on the altar for God, for that is the passion of the priest. The gospel preacher is called to be a priestly man.

I TIMOTHY 2:1-2. Unlike the other passages discussed, this text does not use the word "sacrifice." It stresses the other role of biblical priesthood, *mediation*. In the prayer meeting, the believers pray for all men. They intercede between God and men, particularly political authorities. The concept of the house of God in I Tm 2 is the concept of the house of God taught by the Lord Jesus: "My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations." There is an aspect of the house of God that looks *out* on the whole world. Paul is not thinking here about our praying for ourselves or even for the church. There are people in the world, notably political leaders, who can't pray for themselves. They need a mediating priesthood. "Supplication" conveys the idea of sudden deep need. An urgent, often new problem that drives you into the presence of God. Something happens on a national or local level that demands that you pray. [Hunter uses mining accidents as an example, with anxious families gathered around the

pithead.] "Prayers" probably refers to general needs that are always with us. Needs like blessing in the gospel, and the maintenance of a stable government. "Intercession" means presenting a petition to a king, and we bring ours to the Sovereign of the universe. "Kings" refers to national leaders; "those in authority" includes local leaders. God wants an intelligent, mediating priesthood to set all of these matters before Him.

ROMANS 12:1. Paul's deliberately calls this sacrifice "living" in order to contrast it with the dead sacrifices of the OT. In this dispensation, God is looking for *living* sacrifices. Your life and mine should be on the altar for God. The aorist may suggest that God wants the body presented once and for all, with no thought of ever taking it back again. Ideally, this occurs at conversion. If we have done this, failure does not mean that we have to repeat it. God knows that our original pledge still stands, once we've made it. Living unreservedly and unconditionally for God. If you haven't presented your body, you can be sure that doing it will revolutionize your life. And you must do it if you are to be anything for God.

The Priesthood of Christ. So we are currently a kingdom of priests, and Christ is our Great High Priest. Some phases of His priesthood are patterned after the Aaronic order, but He is actually of the order of Melchizedek. One feature of Melchizedek priesthood is that it is a royal priesthood. Christ is the King-Priest (cf Ps 110).

III. Where Do We Worship? In the Heavenly Sanctuary.

John 4:19-24 is a key passage on worship ("worship" and "worshippers" are found 10 times in these few verses). Notice that Christ did not give this vital teaching about worship to the theologian Nicodemus in chapter three, despite the fact that Nicodemus was *the* teacher in Israel. (In the Sanhedrin, three men stood out: 1) the High Priest, Caiaphas; 2) the vice president (the name of the man in Christ's day is not known); and 3) the teacher, Nicodemus.) Instead, the Lord chose a sinful woman. After a 40-mile walk, He indeed was "weary with His journey." This was a physical obstacle. Then there were social obstacles: Men didn't speak privately with women, and Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. But Christ moved past all of these. He asked the woman for a favor (good psychology), piqued her interest, then probed her conscience. In His teaching about worship, Christ disclosed 1) the **Place** of worship, 2) the **Person** whom we worship, and (3) the **Principles** of worship.

The Place of worship was neither Gerazim, a place of false worship, nor Jerusalem, a place of obsolete worship. Gerazim was the holy place of the "mongrel" Samaritans. The Samaritans sprang from the intermarriage between Israelites left behind when the Assyrians deported the people of the northern kingdom and imported Gentiles to the region to occupy the land so that it wouldn't be overrun by wild animals (2 Kings 17:24). Samaritan claims about worship at Gerazim were false. On the other hand, the Jewish sanctuary, which Christ called "My Father's house" in John 2, He later called "your house," and left it "desolate." "Ichabod" was written over it, for the glory had departed, and the dispensation had changed. As we learn in Hebrews, Christ replaced the old priesthood and sanctuary and sacrifices.

IV. Whom Do We Worship? The Person Whom We Worship is "the Father."

The person whom we worship is the Father. Prayer is directed to Him by the mediation of the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Son also receives worship in the NT. John 5 teaches that the Father has decreed equal honors for the Son, and many men, like the blind man of John 9, worshiped the Son. Certainly Revelation is full of the worship to the Lamb. However, worshipers of Christ in Scripture only address Him when He is physically present. There are no examples of direct address to the Lord Jesus in *prayer* in Acts or the Epistles. The pattern is always to address the Father. Thus despite the fact that many of our hymns address Christ directly, we have generally avoided it in public prayer.

V. How Do We Worship? The Principles of Worship are “In Spirit and in Truth.”

The principles of true worship are “in spirit and in truth.” Certainly we approach God in the power of the Holy Spirit, and depend on His leading. Yet the true interpretation is likely that the regenerated human spirit is required for true worship. We are tripartite, with world-conscious bodies, self-conscious souls, and God-conscious spirits. Knowledge of God and communion with God are by the spirit. We do worship with our bodies, for Paul said, “I bow the knee,” and Daniel knelt before God. Other postures include prostration, bowed heads, and uplifted holy hands. This seems to suggest that dress and posture are important. Lounging and gum chewing are not in keeping with this. More important, however, is the worship of our souls, the love and affection we have for God. Put at the highest level, we approach God in spirit, the highest part of our beings.

“In truth” means that sin is judged, and the scriptural pattern is followed. We worship “in the beauty of holiness,” as the OT puts it, and this includes preparation of heart and judging of sin. Also, truth means truth about God and Christ. Thomas’s “my Lord and my God” is worship of Christ based on the truth of His dominion and deity.

VI. When Do We Worship? Chiefly, at the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord’s Supper is the meeting most peculiarly suited for worship, for Christ said, “This do in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:24). The NT pattern suggests a time devoted to giving thanks (1 Corinthians 14:16-17), singing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19), and reading Scripture (1 Corinthians 14:26). By choosing bread to represent His body and wine to represent His blood, the Lord Jesus obviously wanted us to remember His death especially (1 Corinthians 11:26). We should, however, interpret “this do in remembrance of Me” as broadly as possible. Thus in the course of the meeting we bring to mind His entire person and work. Thus the worship that precedes the Breaking of Bread reflects on the glory of Christ’s deity, the wonder of His incarnation, the beauty of His life, the accomplishments of His death, and the victory of His ascension and session at the right hand of God. When we partake of the loaf and the cup, we proclaim the death of our Lord to God the Father.

Because the Lord’s Supper centers on worship, Satan has assailed it more than any other meeting. Today, most mainline churches have trivialized it, perverted it, or done away with it altogether. And among so-called assemblies, proponents of “Renewal” have decided to “reinvent” the Supper. They seek a new format that will please modern people and draw larger crowds. They want to eliminate politically incorrect doctrines, like the silence and head coverings of women. They want to incorporate drama and other forms of entertainment.

This is nothing more and nothing less than Satan laying siege to the worship of God. Some proponents of change are well meaning, but they have inexcusably forgotten what worship *is*. Worship was never intended to entertain us. Worship is not for *us* at all. Worship is for *God*. The Breaking of Bread is *His* meeting, not ours! So the question is not whether instrumental bands and drama will make the Lord’s Supper more appealing to us; the question is whether these additions will make the Lord’s Supper more appealing to *God*. We know the answer to this—what pleases God is simple obedience to the plain words of Scripture (1 Samuel 15:22-23). If we drift away from giving the Lord’s Supper its central place, or if we tamper with its biblical pattern, then we are guilty of departing from God’s chief priority and prerogative.

I am persuaded that the biggest reason why worship is boring to many people is that they really haven’t come to know God, and they therefore consider Him irrelevant. *If you are bored, look to yourself before blaming others*. In your heart you will find ingratitude to God and lack of love for Christ. We are built with an irrepressible drive to worship something—if not God then an idol (Psalm 100; 122:1). Those who want entertainment rather than true worship of God have been captivated by the world’s idols. May God instead produce in us a bubbling heart (Psalm 45:1), an overflowing cup (Psalm 23:5), and a pouring out of incense (John 12:3).

To pervert God-centered worship into man-centered entertainment is Satan’s work. If he can’t stop us from observing the Lord’s Supper, he will try to divert us away from its true significance by changing it into another kind of meeting. He doesn’t care what sidetrack we follow, as long as God does not get His due! Make it a meeting for sharing or ministering to one another, or whatever you wish—as long as God is robbed of the worship inspired by the remembrance of the Lord Jesus.

Satan Hates the Worship of God. The devil wants to thwart worship above everything else. He decided to attack Job, because he saw in Job a chance to change a worshiper (Job 1:5) into a blasphemer (1:11). Job was a worshiper, for he offered daily burnt offerings to the Lord. Satan wanted that to stop. He wanted God to be cursed, not blessed. So in reality, Satan was not after Job; he was after Job's *God*. He gave himself away when he exclaimed, "Doth Job fear God for nought? He will *curse* Thee to Thy face." So God removed the hedge and allowed Satan to deprive Job of everything but his life and his wife. Job lost his business and ten family members overnight, and then his body was painfully racked with disease. His life looked ruined. Satan waited for the cursing to start. But what was Job's response to his trials? "Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and *worshiped*" (1:20). "Shall we receive good at the Lord's hand and not evil?" "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

What a great man Job proved to be! God also permits trials and difficulties in our lives. Satan hopes that these will turn us from God. He wants us to lash out at God, to blame God, to speak against Him. He wants to deprive God of our worship. How successful has Satan been in your life and in mine?

VII. Practical Issues Relating to the Lord's Supper.

1. We need to examine ourselves. Paul is absolutely clear about the need for self-examination prior to partaking of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:28). It's not just a Saturday night affair, but the result of ongoing surrender during the entire week. We must learn to bring every relationship of our lives out of the shadows and into the blazing light of God's Word. 1 Corinthians 10:16-22 warns us to separate from the evil of false religion, while 1 Corinthians 11:17-20 emphasizes separating from secret sin, defilement, bitterness, and carelessness. The case of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10) graphically displays God's view of presumptuous, carnal worshipers.

In addition to being victorious over sin, a believer in the habit of self-judgment will be more sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit in worship. We need to allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of our pride, and of all the ways we fall short of God's expectations. We must ask for and accept God's abundant forgiveness, submit ourselves once again to Christ's lordship, and allow His grace and power to flow through us again. God knows our frailty; He simply seeks openness, honesty, and the desire to change. Those who are careless about self-examination are in dangers of being "guilty [liable for legal action] of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27). In Corinth, this resulted in real punishment: many were weak and sickly among them and many had died.

2. We need to prepare for the meeting. Although worship is a joyful, it is also a serious matter, and demands preparation. David spoke of the things he had *composed* about the King (Psalm 45:1). The OT told the people never to appear before the Lord empty handed. So we too are to come to the Lord with our baskets already full (sisters too), and never to appear before the Lord with nothing to give Him.

This means preparation ahead of time. Personal worship throughout the week forms the basis for collective worship at the Lord's Supper. Both sisters and brothers should come prepared to worship. They should have their own material, and they should be ready to respond to the public prayers. ("Dry" meetings may result not only from lack of exercise among brothers, but also from lack of preparedness among sisters.) Consider writing down an outline. The notion that worship must be spontaneous and extemporaneous to be real is wrong—it flies in the face of the Bible's emphasis on preparation for worship.

3. The Holy Spirit presides over the meeting. We worship God "by the Spirit" (Philippians 3:3). The Spirit indwells the believer and the church (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). He forms and guides our prayers and praises (1 Corinthians 12:3; Jude 20). As the Son pointed us to the Father, so the Spirit, like the unnamed servant of Genesis 24:34-6, points us to the Father and the Son. He shows us the riches of the Father, teaches us that the Son is the Heir, and tells us that the eternal purposes of the Father center in the Son. As the Lord Jesus promised, "He will guide you...He will show you...He shall glorify Me" (John 16:13-5).

The leading of the Spirit is not a jolt that hits a brother on Sunday morning when it is His turn to lead in worship. Nor does the leading of the Spirit start only when the meeting starts. Rather, the Spirit leads us individually throughout the week, showing the things of Christ to us as we read and meditate. If we are open to His leading, He will give us a "burden" (Nahum 1:1)—thoughts that are appropriate for worship, and which we feel are meant for the coming meeting. The Lord gives us these "burdens" so that we can lead His peoples' praise. On the other hand, if we have

not allowed the Spirit of God to lead us through the week, it is presumptuous to think that He will guide us during corporate worship.

“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). This is not the liberty of each brother to do his own thing in his own way, but rather the liberty of the Spirit to use whom He will to orchestrate the worship of the Father and the Son. Thus the Spirit will bring thoughts into our minds that suit His purposes, and He will burden brothers to offer their thoughts publicly for the congregation.

4. The public function of priesthood is limited to men. The brother who rises in the meeting to “lead in prayer” speaks on behalf of the assembly. The sisters pray through the brother taking part (as do the other silent brothers). All who are present should listen carefully, and add their “amen.”

5. The theme of the meeting is Christ. Don’t get hung up on figuring out the “theme.” Broadly speaking, the theme is Christ. If you are exalting the Son of God, you are “in” the theme. You have nothing to worry about (unless you’re praying about somebody other than Christ). This is not to say that specific themes do not emerge in meetings. They do. But if you feel that the Lord has given you thoughts for a meeting, don’t hold back just because they don’t fit the “theme” perfectly. Don’t use this as an excuse. And consider praying early in the meeting, thereby leaving the sorting out of themes to others. Experienced men are more flexible—they are sensitive to where the Spirit is heading, and can often amplify and tie together the themes that have emerged.

6. Try to avoid vain repetition. Scripture takes a very dim view of vain repetition, yet it’s easy to fall into it. Freshness of speech and reverence are compatible. Quotations from Scripture are not vain repetition, of course. But we should attempt to discard worn-out phrases and clichés.

Closely related to this is the length of prayers. Many people are critical of long prayers, but the men who pray for a long time do so probably because they believe that long prayers are better than no prayers. Some long prayers are wonderful expositions of divine truth, and very profitable to the meeting. Others are not. I would suggest getting focused in your worship, avoiding vain repetition, and leaving the rest to the Spirit. Don’t cover all the ground from eternity past to the future eternal state, the preincarnate existence of Christ, His role in all seven dispensations, the Christophanies, Bethlehem, Nazareth, the silent years, the public ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, rapture, second coming, millennial reign, and eternal reign. That’s too unfocused, and takes too long.

7. Don’t succumb to “excusitis.” There are many excuses for silence: “I haven’t prayed before, and it’s too late to start now.” “I’m never sure of the theme, and don’t want to spoil it.” “I might forget what I was going to say, and only last a minute.” Etc.

As human beings, three great obstacles stand in the way of worshiping God. The first is that **God is invisible**: “No man hath seen God at any time” (). Second, **God is inscrutable**: “No man knoweth the Father” (). Third, **God is unapproachable**: “No man cometh unto the Father” (). How can we worship One we cannot see with our eyes, cannot understand with our minds, and cannot approach by natural means? Christ provides the answers to these problems. “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father also” (). Viewing Christ becomes the way we “see Him who is invisible,” as Moses did. We see the Father by faith when we consider the only begotten Son, who has fully declared Him. And further, the Son reveals the Father to whomsoever He wills—to babes. Not to academics. He does so by spiritual revelation in response to faith. And Christ also is our approach to God, for “no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (Jh 14:6).

OT ILLUSTRATIONS OF WORSHIP

Israel’s collective worship is highly instructive for NT worshipers, for many abiding principles are illustrated in a concrete way. This is especially true of the tabernacle. Notice that even the three names given to the tabernacle summarize the elements of worship: (1) The Dwelling of the Lord. This was the place where the Lord’s *presence* resided. It showed that God had come down from heaven and made a home

among men. God has chosen to notice this small planet, this speck of stellar dust floating in the middle of one of His smaller galaxies. More than that, God has stated His desire to come to men, to dwell among them, and to show His glory in the midst of His people. (2) The Tent of Witness. This was also a place of *holiness*. Sin had to be judged before a worshiper could approach. The tabernacle bore witness to a perfect standard of righteousness, and only those who had received forgiveness from God were able to participate in worship. (3) The Tent of Meeting. This was also a place where men could *approach* God. God made provision for limited access in the OT, but now, in Christ, we have free access into the very sanctuary of God in heaven itself. We have a private audience with the Almighty whenever we please. We have God's full attention, as if no one else existed. We don't have to stand in line behind the Chinese or the Indian believers. And we know that even before we leave His presence, God sets in motion those powers and circumstances that will bring an answer to our prayers. It's a miracle.

The way Christ provides for our approach is illustrated in the tabernacle. As a priest entered the courtyard, he met the first of three obstacles that stood in his way. He came upon the brazen altar, and that altar cried out, "Without the shedding of blood is no remission." The priest was sinful, like us. But "the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 Jh). Next, the priest had to pass the laver, and the laver cried out, "They that bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean" (). But the Lord Jesus has also provided this cleansing for us, the cleansing of the Word of God. He removes contact defilement (Jh 13). And finally, the priest stood face to face with a thick curtain that debarred Him from the holiest place. It cried out, "Thou shalt not come at all times into the presence of the Lord" (). But Christ tore that veil on Calvary. He paved a new and living way into the holiest. He sheds the blood, He washes with the Word, and He removes the veil!

When we worship, it's important that we not stay at the brazen altar. The brazen altar stands for fundamental gospel truth, and calls forth our adoring worship. But we must move on from the foundation, as the author of Hebrews exhorts us. We must leave the foundation, not by abandoning it, but by rising up from it as a builder moves up from the foundation. We should get to the laver, the Word of God. We must apply the Scripture to our lives, and find personal cleansing there. And we must find Christ there. There is no substitute for getting to know the Book, seriously. "These things God has married, and nothing can them part: Dust on the Bible, and drought in the heart." From the laver we must move on to spiritual service. But of the many kinds of service required at God's house, one stands above the rest. It is to move through the rent veil and to minister to the heart of God. This is the greatest service.

Serious worshipers of God are few in number, it seems. There is a great danger that we might rob God of His rightful portion. "Will a man rob God" (MI 3:8). The people insolently answered, "Wherein have we robbed Thee?" "In tithes and offerings...bring the whole..." (). Isn't that what we want? Take a hard look at your life, and ask if God is getting His due. How often do you minister to the heart of God? The key to every great revival has been an awakening of the true worship of the Lord. When God gets His portion, the people are invariably blessed. Examples abound. In the days of King Asa, a man of God named Azariah delivered a word from God. We know nothing else about that man, but his 45 second oracle came with great power and conviction. Asa was smitten in his heart. He tore down the altars of idols and commanded the nation to return to the God of heaven, which they did. The revival was so great that King Baasha of the North had to build the first Iron Curtain to keep the people from flocking to the South to join that great revival. Where did it begin? When Asa rebuilt the altars of the Lord and led the people in great worship.

Hezekiah, as a boy, was afflicted with that wicked father of a king who cut up the holy vessels and shut the doors of the temple. Yet in the first month of Hezekiah's reign, that godly teenager opened the house of the Lord and called for the restoration of the Passover. When the first burnt offerings ascended, "the song of the Lord began also" (). The people got their joy back. But most important, God got His portion, and so the whole nation was blessed.

BEFORE THE LORD. First, Aaron served first before the Lord, and second, He blessed men in the Lord's name. "Before the Lord" is an important phrase that runs through both OT and NT (including variations like "unto the Lord"). This expression signals something offered solely for God's delight and pleasure. So the burnt offering was "before the Lord," and the priests ministered "unto the Lord." The high priest wore the breastplate "before the Lord." The lamp burnt continually "before the Lord." All of these occurred for God's pleasure primarily, or even exclusively. All spoke of God's Son, and were for God's delight alone.

It is noteworthy, then that Ep 1:4 says that God chose us to be "before Him" (NIV: "in His sight"). God saved us not to keep us from hell, though we'll never be there. He saved us not to take us to heaven, though we'll always be there. Instead, He saved us to be before the Lord, to bring joy and delight to His heart. He saved us to wear the likeness of His Son, to wear his name upon our foreheads as a diadem of beauty and as a badge of authority. To worship.

BLESSING MEN. Whenever a priest centered his life on God, and zealously gave God His rightful due, people were blessed as a result. Although not a Levitical priest, Christ was a priestly man on earth, for He perfectly exemplified this. He was indeed a priest--a Melchizedek priest. We can increase in priestliness, and ought to strive to be priestly. A key point here is that God intends His priests to be intelligent in the Scriptures. "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction--because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty" (MI 2:7). Tragically, Israel forgot that God ordained a *teaching* priesthood (Lv 10:11; 2 Ch 15:3). The priests became entangled in legalistic ceremony, and the people went astray.

Examine yourself. Προσκυνεω means literally "to kiss toward," and illustrates worship as a kiss. This reminds us of the story of the sinful woman in the house of Simon the Leper. She wept over the feet of the Savior and kissed them. Embarrassed, she wiped His feet off with her hair, for she had no towel. She gave Him His due. But the Lord's word to Simon ought to search us: "Thou gavest me no kiss." Worship is the kiss of the soul in the feet of the Savior. It is His due. After we have attended a meeting, and maybe even prayed or given out a hymn, do we hear the Lord say, "Well, that's all very nice, but thou gavest Me no kiss."

ISSUES:

1. If priesthood is only collective, then sisters are only priests *de jure*, not *de facto*. Further, personal worship would be separated from priesthood, which cannot be. Perhaps it is best to view both private and public access as part of our priesthood, just as the Levitical priest could offer sacrifices for himself or on behalf of the people. Sisters then function as priests in their private times, and e.g. for their children. Could it be because we're always gathered together (Mt 18:20) that priesthood is always collective?