

A BRIEF ABSTRACT ON WORSHIP

Wayne Coats

It would be difficult to hear of a more complete absurdity than the modern palaver that there is no divinely authorized order, principle, or pattern set forth in the New Testament for Christians to adhere to in worshipping God. I will state the case thusly: "There is a stated form of worship set forth in the inspired word to govern me as I worship God, or there are no principles to which I must subscribe as I worship Almighty God."

By the foregoing statement, I do not mean to convey the idea that there are no rules to govern our worship as to *HOW*, *WHO*, *WHEN*, and *WHICH* activities to be engaged in by the worshipper. There are some incidentals to be sure as we think about worship.

There is no mandate for every congregation to meet for worship at the same time each Lord's Day. We do not subscribe to the idea that each action of worship must be followed by the same acts of worship in each congregation. Different acts of worship can be participated in as the first acts of worship in some congregations whereas the same acts can be seen engaged in as the last activities of worship in other congregations. Insofar as I know, the Bible does not mandate that we are to follow the same procedures in our worship each Lord's Day. On one Sunday we might begin our worship services with the singing of some good scriptural songs. On another Sunday we might begin the worship period by having a good brother to lead the congregation in prayer. Who can say that such is unscriptural?

Every child of God will admit that there is a command as well as a privilege set forth to worship or there is *not* any mandate stated for man to worship God.

Suppose we contend that there is not any Bible instruction given for man to consider as he contemplates worship. In other words, we do not have any information relative to worship which might guide us along the way. If there is no information regarding worship, can there be any such thing as disorder or error when we worship? Can there be innovations in worship if there are no instructions pertaining to worship? We insist that there can be no transgressions concerning worship, if there is no rule or law regarding worship. What is *disorder*, but acting contrary to order? What is *transgression*, but allowing self to go across the line, rule or realm of authority? We engage in error when we stray away from the scriptural standard.

A very pertinent question would be, "Why do children of God assemble together to worship on the first day of the week?" If there is no pattern or information regarding Lord's Day worship, may all Christians refuse to meet together for worship on the first day of the week?

People tell me that I am supposed to meet with the saints of like precious faith on Sunday (Hebrews 10:25). Since there is no pattern for worship as some say, can I willfully refuse to assemble and fail to participate in any activities of worship?

One fellow in our area, who appears to be real smart according to some people, seems to be happy saying, "I reject pattern theology." If there is no pattern for worship, will it suffice for a few people to assemble some morning and sing for two hours and then go home? Would it suffice for a group of brethren to meet together and read for two hours, and then adjourn to their home? The Christian Scientists will tell you *HOW* to read. Is there any specific law which regulates how we spend our time in worship on the Lord's Day? How can Christians violate a rule that does not exist?

The Bible teaches that there are specific acts of worship which the early church engaged in. Those acts comprise the actions of worship today. We are not at liberty to dispense with them. If the acts of worship are divinely taught in one congregation, then such acts are uniformly found in all other congregations where faithful saints are found.

If no established rule or standard is given for men to assemble and worship God, then it would follow that all sorts of mundane activities could be followed as the whims of men dictate. A worship service without rule or reason is irrational and foolish.

How completely unreasonable do men become when they declare that God must be worshipped but He has not told us *HOW* to worship Him. We must never become disposed to tell God *HOW* He should be worshipped. Such amounts to sheer mockery of the truth which declares, "*God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:24).

Thank God for the truth, which tells us *WHO* is to be worshipped, and *HOW* He is to be worshipped.

It is truly sad that a few men will presume to cast the truth aside, and tragically, they can always find any number of supporters to encourage them. Try to imagine the Bible being silent on *WHO* and *HOW* to worship.

If we are not instructed by the Bible regarding our worship, then we are no better off than those who read the Book of Mormon, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures and the Koran.

God is the object, and the Truth is our guide in worship. Which, can we cast aside?

In order to make the worship of God of no value and without merit, Satan has convinced many people to continue to observe the old Jewish law regarding the Sabbath day.

The Lord's Day or first day of the week is completely rejected by Sabbatarians. What would some liberal brother say to people who insist on keeping the Sabbath Day? If one would object to the Sabbath keepers, why would objections be made?

Sabbath Day keepers kindle fires in violation of the law (Exodus 33:3). They refuse to abide in their houses on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29). They bear all kinds of burdens as needs arise. All kinds of work is performed on the Sabbath Day or Saturday. It is a fact that all normal persons violate the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament.

The Sabbath Day was given only to the Jews. Moses wrote, "*And remember that thou was a servant in the land of Egypt and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day*" (Deuteronomy 5:15). The writer also said, "*Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever*" (Exodus 31:16-17).

The Gentiles were not brought out of Egypt and the Sabbath was never given to them as a sign. Moreover, the Gentiles were charged in the New Testament with committing numerous sins but not one time were they ever charged with violating the Sabbath. The Sabbath Day sustained the same relationship to the Jew as circumcision. Neither was a part of the new covenant.

The Sabbath was one of many Holy Days to be observed by those under the old law. Christians were never instructed to observe a single one of those holy days. May we ask why? Early Christians were careful to meet on the first day of the week to worship.

They did not do so by any principle contained in Moses' law. It seems strange that God would set forth laws and regulations for the people to worship Him under the Old Covenant but keep completely silent about the manner of worship under the New Covenant.

When Peter preached on Solomon's porch, he quoted Moses who wrote, "***For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people***" (Acts 3:22-23).

Under the new covenant, there was a new table for Christians to gather around. The apostle wrote, "***Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's Table and the table of devils***" (I Corinthians 10:21).

I would make a strong appeal for each child of God to make every effort to worship God in an orderly manner (I Corinthians 14:40). We need to be overly cautious as we plan and prepare for worship.

We know the apostles did not sit by and allow the Christians to worship in a wrongful manner. Luke records, "***Upon the first day of the week, the disciples met together to break bread and Paul preached unto them***" (Acts 20:7). The purpose of meeting together was to break bread. Of course Luke did not say, "each and every first day of each and every week." It happened that on the first day of the week, Paul was present to break bread with the disciples. Luke did not need to spell out *EVERY* first day of every week. Among those who object to members of the church of Christ breaking bread each Lord's Day, the same can be said about meeting on the first day. The hue and cry is made that we must assemble together. Sincere people say, "If we do not habitually meet together, the preacher cannot receive his weekly check, but we do not have to keep the communion service." Nonsense!

If assembling together was a mere matter of opinion, so was the communion and vice-versa. By what authority do people gather together on Sunday? If the disciples did not break bread each first day, they did not meet together each first day. If they met together each first day, they broke bread each first day of the week. The two stand or fall together.

Please consider that the inspired apostle used the definite article -- *the* -- which denotes a stated time. Luke did not say, "Upon a first day of a week some disciples met together." *The* disciples who met together were in Troas. They were not in Corinth, Laodicea or Rome. A stated time was given by the use of a definite article. The purpose of the assembly in Troas was to break bread. The time of the assembling was upon the first day of the week.

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he attempted to help the congregation which was having trouble concerning the communion (1 Corinthians 9:2). It is actually declared that some will say, when the apostle declared, "As oft as ye eat," he meant that the apostle gave brethren the liberty to eat when they wanted to.

Again there are those who say that the frequent observance of the Lord's supper on each Lord's Day, will cause the great event to lose its solemnity and it becomes rather commonplace. According to the idea of some folks, the utterance means, "the more frequent, the less solemn." The opposite would be, the less frequent, the more solemn. Such a consideration is not worthy of one's time or attention. Does it really follow that the less we pray, the more precious prayer becomes? Does the preachers who palaver against the weekly communion observance try to get serious about the weekly collection? Sometimes we wonder whatever became of common sense.

In my library are several different creed books. Each one is different from all others. Also, each one attempts to present a plan for man to worship God.

It is still true as was taught by our Lord hundreds of years ago, and we need to give heed thereto. Jesus declared, "***But in vain they do worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men***" (Matthew 15:9).

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Note: I am forever grateful to Brother Wayne Coats for this great abstract on Worship, and it is a blessing to me to pass it on to you. Thanks and God Bless, Bill Richardson, Member of Hartselle Church of Christ, Hartselle, AL 35640