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Talks From The Bible: The Elements Of Christian Worship

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Recommended Citation

Cobb, Charles E., "Talks From The Bible: The Elements Of Christian Worship" (1950). *Stone-Campbell Books*. 472.
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TALKS
FROM
THE

Bible



**THE ELEMENTS
OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

A Prayer

Our Father.

Bless these words, we pray,

To the honor and glory of Thy Name,

And to the salvation of the souls of men.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

The Elements of Christian Worship

“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23, 24.)

Jesus taught men to worship God. He pointed out that there are *true* worshippers which suggests the possibility also of *false* worshippers. He stated that God is a Spirit. Those who worship him must do so “in spirit and in truth.” Any other kind of worshipper than *true* or any kind of worship other than “in spirit and in truth” is unacceptable to God.

The word worship means, “To prostrate oneself in homage, do reverence to, adore.” One, therefore, who worships pays homage to, reverences, adores, God.

Man is a worshipping creature. He will worship—pay homage—to something. He will worship things, or beings, or self, or God. Without proper direction he will be like the Athenians (Acts 17) who worshipped prolifi-

cally. But, fearful of possible oversight of some deity, they had an inscription which read, "To the unknown God." The apostle, detecting this, announced, "The God whom you ignorantly worship, I declare unto you." Man must have proper direction if he is to worship the one true God—acceptably.

God disallows the works of men's hands as worship (Acts 17:24, 25). If this were not true, then God would be a respecter of persons. The Bible teaches, "There is no respect of persons with God." (Rom. 2:11.) The rich or poor, bond or free must all worship God according to the same instructions. The necessary instructions are given in the New Testament.

Worship Forbidden

Frequently, the people of ancient times were rebuked for the worship of idols. The law stated, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." (Ex. 20:3, 4.) God did not tolerate the worship of idols in that ancient day.

God will not tolerate the worship of idols now. Jesus said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matt. 4:10.) Later, the apostle Paul declared, "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things." (1 Cor. 8:5, 6.) The worship of any kind of an idol is a sin.

God also has forbidden the worship of angels. As John, the apostle, was seeing and hearing the marvelous things about which he wrote in the closing chapters of Revelation, he said, "I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things." The angel's response was immediate, "See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." (Rev. 22:8, 9.)

It is forbidden also that fellow-creatures should receive our worship. The apostle Peter was sent for by Cornelius the Centurion so that Peter could tell him what God wanted him to do. When Peter came into his house,

Cornelius "fell down at his feet and worshipped him." This was not the will of God for we are told in the very next verse, "But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man." (Acts 10:25, 26.)

We are forbidden to worship in these last days after the order of the Old Testament. When Jesus appointed the Lord's Supper for the observance of his disciples, he said, "This is my blood" (referring to the cup, the fruit of the vine) "of the New Testament." (Matt. 26:28.) The Old Covenant has been taken out of the way (Col. 2:14). For anyone to go back to the worship as it was under the Old Testament would involve that one in the exaltation of the blood of bulls and of goats above the blood of Christ. The blood of the Old Covenant was the blood of animals. The blood of the New Covenant is the blood of Christ. (Heb. 10:1-10). Our directions for the worship of God are found in the New Testament.

Singing

The first element of worship we shall consider is that one that blends our voices, lifts our spirits, bonds us together, encourages fel-

lowship among us. God wants us in worship to sing.

The New Testament teaches us all that we need to know about singing as an act of worship to God. "According as his divine power hath given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3.) Whatever God wants us to know, he has revealed.

The songs of Christians can be raised from any place and heard by the listening ear of the heavenly Father. This is shown by the activity that took place in a jail in Philippi, "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." (Acts 16:25.) The praises which they offered to God, they sang. We know, therefore, that in singing, God is praised, adored, worshipped.

Our praise is given to God by the "fruit of our lips." The writer of Hebrews points this out in these words, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to

his name." (Heb. 13:15.) This praise is to come from the heart as we have already seen in the statement that God is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

One of the things specified by the inspired Paul as he wrote the Ephesians was singing. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. 5:19.) That which God approves in our singing is made clear. He wants us to sing *psalms*, *hymns*, and *spiritual songs*. Such songs do not make their appeal to the "animal nature," but will bless and strengthen the soul.

The apostle also wrote, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Col. 3:16.) We are again reminded of the *kind* of songs we are to sing. One purpose included in our singing is "teaching and admonishing one another." Our songs are to be "to the Lord."

Those who sing are to keep their minds upon that in which they are engaged. "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will

pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." (1 Cor. 14:15.) There is a hallowed association of man's spirit with God as he sings before the Lord.

Often men seek to change that which God has ordained. Under the New Covenant we are to *sing* in worship, but *man* has added the mechanical instrument of music. God has told us what he wants. He did not have to make a long list of things he does not want! If God had wanted the mechanical instrument of music used in worship to him since the word of the Lord is perfect, surely it would have been included as part of his directions. The New Testament is silent about it. Therefore, we conclude that God by specifying what he wants has excluded everything that he does not want.

It is *safe* to *sing*. One does not have to have a mechanical instrument of music to *sing*. It is always better to be *safe*. If one sings—and God has said we are to sing—then surely, one would be doing the will of God! Why take a chance on something other than that ordained of God?

Prayer

“Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thess. 5:17.) This is the instruction given by Paul to the church at Thessalonica. Men should pray as individuals. Men ought also to pray as they assemble to worship for prayer is a part of the worship.

The Bible reports that upon the establishment of the Lord's church in the city of Jerusalem, “They continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42.) The early church knew the value of prayer. They continued earnestly in prayer.

The church can and should pray for specific things. The apostle Peter was put in prison. “But prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5.) The church prayed for the welfare of that great man of God. We can pray as the church for others and for those things that are needed as we worship together, for prayer is an element of worship.

Lord's Supper

The Bible tells us that Jesus met with his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem. This

meeting was during the passover. Jesus who is our passover then instituted the world's most magnificent memorial.

“And as they did eat, Jesus took bread and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14:22-25.)

How could any Bible believer read these words and fail to understand the significance of the Lord's Supper? How could one read, and fail to understand, his responsibility as a Christian to observe this memorial—with regularity?

The early disciples met on the first day of the week for this observance as an act of worship (Acts 20:7). The teaching of Paul insists upon its importance, and its regular observance (1 Cor. 11:23-30). All Christians

are to meet to worship God on the first day of the week. As a part of the worship, the Lord's Supper (Communion) is to be observed.

Giving

Giving is an element of worship. When we assemble on the first day of the week, we should expect in our worship to bring a gift to the Lord. This is a grace in which God wants us to abound. "Therefore as ye abound in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." (2 Cor. 8:7.)

It is settled in heaven and delivered to us: "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7.) We are to have a "willing mind" (2 Cor. 8:12). We are to give liberally (2 Cor. 9:6). We are to "purpose in our heart" (2 Cor. 9:7).

We should rejoice at the opportunity to "lay by in store" on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2). God gave for us the dearest and best—his only begotten Son.

To refuse to give according to the truth is to refuse to worship as the truth directs.

Teaching

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles teaching.” (Acts 2:42.) This was a characteristic of the early church and it must be characteristic of the church today. When we seek to worship, teaching is to be included as one of the elements of worship.

A discussion of world events, upheavals, wars, and the like may prove to be interesting, but such is not teaching. The Bible is that which is to be taught.

“Preach the word.” (2 Tim. 4:2.) “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.” (Titus 2:1.)

The world—and the church—need to know the truth for the truth is that which shall make us free (John 8:32).

We plead with men everywhere to renounce the complicated schemes and ways of men and follow the simple way of the Lord. Let all obey the will of God as the people did of whom we read in Acts chapter two. Let us then assemble upon the first day of the week with hearts full of love for God and one another and

sing, pray, meet around the Lord's table, give, and study together. From hearts that are pure, souls that are conscious of need—and full of hope, we shall be *worshipping God*.

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95:6, 7.)

NOTE

The lesson contained in this booklet was first presented as a series on the radio program, "Talks From the Bible." This program is heard Monday through Friday over Station WHIN, Gallatin, Tennessee, from 6:50 to 7:00 A.M.

The speaker on the program is Charles E. Cobb, minister of the South Water Avenue Church of Christ, Gallatin, Tennessee.

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P. O. Box 36
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\$6.00 per hundred
\$50.00 per thousand
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