

Thirdly, we draw near to God with our **financial gifts**. The apostolic church collected monetary gifts on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1,2) to advance God's worship and to meet the needs of the poor. In Philippians 4:18, financial support for the ministry is said to be a *sacrifice* offered as an act of worship. Should we, in the New Covenant contribute the 10% tithe? Although the tithe is not specifically prescribed in the New Covenant, it does help us to determine how to give both righteously and generously. As the spiritual sons of Abraham, have we not been given hearts that desire to do as Abraham did (John 8:39)? When Abraham met Melchizedek, who was a prefigurement of Christ, Abraham tithed (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7). If we have the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:11; Galatians 3:7-9), and if we meet with Christ Himself in worship, then will it not be in our hearts to do as Abraham did? We too, at the minimum, will tithe - and do so with a cheerful heart (2 Corinthians 9:7). It is the heart of love that makes tithing a spiritual act and thus a part of New Covenant worship.

V. Our Practice of Worship: God Drawing Near to Us

What are the activities performed in worship by which God draws near to us?

First, God draws near to us in the two ordinances of **Baptism and the Lord's Table**. Baptism depicts our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. As the disciple is submerged under the water, he testifies of the death and burial of the old man in Christ. As he emerges out from the water, he testifies of his new life of holiness in union with the resurrected Lord (Romans 6:1-11). At the Lord's Table, Christ's gathered disciples remember that Jesus' sacrifice is the basis of our worship and salvation. We remember His promises. He will come again for us (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Secondly, God draws near in the **public reading of Scripture**. *Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching*" (1 Timothy 4:13). We will not be able to preach through the entire Bible, but we can consecutively read through the Bible several times during the few years we have together here before we arrive in heaven.

Thirdly, God draws near in the **proclamation of the Word of God**. Preaching is central in New Covenant worship. Our God speaks. Our communion with Him is enjoyed primarily through His Word. The people of God are built up in the faith through preaching (Ephesians

4:11-16). The unconverted are brought to saving faith through preaching (Romans 10:14; 1 Corinthians 1:21). The church's esteem of preaching is one indicator of her relative spiritual vitality. In the same way that sound health is evident by the ability to digest a good meal, so too the spiritual health of the church is evident in the diet served from the pulpit and digested in the pew.

There are many other aspects of New Covenant church life, but these six activities have Biblical warrant to comprise the substance of our corporate worship. Simply stated, worship involves our speaking to God and God speaking to us. Worship should not be cluttered with innovations of *self-made religion* (Colossians 2:23). We must not allow our worship to become man-centered. Our primary purpose as those created and redeemed by God is to glorify Him. All true worship will have the glory of God as its ultimate goal and will bring to Him only that which He requires: nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else.

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36). *To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen* (Ephesians 3:21).

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The Lord's Day

Bible School (Classes for all ages)..... 9:30 a.m.
Worship..... 11 a.m.
Worship..... 6 p.m.
Lord's Table (last Sunday of every month)..... 6 p.m.

Prayer Meeting

Wednesday 7:30 p.m.

THE WORSHIP OF GOD

By Alan J. Dunn

I. God's Presence in Worship

In the Old Covenant, worship was located in the temple, but the location was significant only because God was there. We worship where God is present. Although it is true that God is everywhere, He is yet pleased to meet with His people in a special covenantal and personal way as we draw near to Him in worship. He says in Exodus 20:24 *I will come to you*. In Exodus 23:15 He calls Israel to *appear before Me*. In worship, we come face to face with God. Psalm 27:8 *When Thou didst say, "Seek My face," my heart said to Thee, "Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek."* God's worship was never intended to be an external, heartless ritual, but a genuine enjoyment of God Himself.

In the New Covenant more light is shed upon the special covenantal presence of God. Jesus promises *Where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst*. (Matthew 18:20) 1 Corinthians 3:16 tells us that today the church is the New Covenant temple of God. The gathered church is the place where God's special covenantal presence is localized among His worshippers. In John 4:21-24 Jesus tells us that God's worship is not tied to a geographical location, but is found wherever believers gather to worship *in spirit and truth: for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers*. Our gathering in the name of Christ is a holy convocation because of the special covenantal presence of our God who meets with us as we draw near to Him by faith.

Many go to church to get something. Whatever they get, they should get something in church that they can get in no other place: exposure to the special covenantal presence of God. 1 Corinthians 14:24,25 says that those who visit the church should be impressed with the presence of God. We need to prevent worship from becoming more man-centered than God-centered. God is present! His presence is what makes worship possible. Without God being present, men simply perform religious rituals for themselves, not for the glory of God.

II. God's Provision for Worship

Worship cannot originate in us because of our sin. Apart from God's provision, our worship would be idolatry. Without God's provision, we would worship the wrong god or worship God wrongly. What is God's provision for worship?

When the first man Adam fell through sin into death, he severed man's communion with God (Genesis

3). Sin must be dealt with if we are to worship God. Our first parents tried to deal with sin by covering themselves with fig leaves. God replaced their fig leaves with animal skins. God enacted the death penalty (which sin deserves) upon a sacrificial substitute which shed its blood instead of sinful man. By this act, God teaches that men must worship as confessed sinners, worthy of death, whose only hope is in God's grace. Sinful man can come into God's presence only on the basis of the sacrifice provided by God. Blood sacrifice is God's provision for acceptable worship.

Believers have worshiped God with sacrifice since the Fall. When the Lord established the nation of Israel, He institutionalized His worship. He regulated how sacrifices were to be offered by His chosen priests. The sacrificial system provided the means by which the holy God could yet dwell among sinful men. With sacrifice as the basis of worship, God's holiness is honored, His justice is satisfied, and His grace is demonstrated as sin is vicariously punished. With the death penalty satisfied in the death of the substitutionary sacrifice, the sinner can now be brought near to God and offer acceptable worship.

The Old Covenant sacrificial system pointed to the cross of Jesus Christ. In the New Covenant we still worship on the basis of sacrifice: the sacrifice of Jesus. True worship is sacrificial worship. We worship trusting in *the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, the one sacrifice for sins for all time.* (Hebrews 10:10-14). The blood of Jesus was shed as our atoning sacrifice and is God's provision for New Covenant worship.

We cannot concoct acceptable worship. We are sinners. God alone provides us with the basis upon which we can approach Him. He has done just that by sending His Only Begotten Son to die as our sacrifice. We know that His sacrifice was accepted because God raised Him from dead and He now sits as the New Covenant Priest-King upon God's throne. *Through Him we have our access in one Spirit to the Father* (Ephesians 2:18).

III. God's Principle for Worship

God is concerned about how He is worshipped. In Exodus 32:8, God sees the golden calf as disobedience to His commands for worship. Nadab and Abihu gave *strange* (unauthorized) worship and were slain (Leviticus 10:1-3). Korah (Numbers 16), Uzzah (1 Chronicles 13:6-14 and 15:12-15), even King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-23) all intruded upon God's prerogative to regulate His own worship and were all severely punished.

God asks: *when you come to appear before Me, who has required this of your hand* (Isaiah 1:12)? What do

we offer to God as worship? Is that what God wants? Who says that what we do as worship actually is worship?

Historically, Christians have regulated worship by one of two principles. "The Normative Principle" says, "If God has not explicitly prohibited a practice, then that practice can be incorporated into worship." But "The Regulative Principle" is more Biblical. "The Regulative Principle" is seen in Deuteronomy 12:29-31 where Israel is warned not to incorporate pagan worship practices into God's worship. *Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.* (v.32) Worship is to entail only what God commands: nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else. God accepts that worship which is based on the sacrifice of Jesus and is obedient to His commands.

Colossians 2:23 likewise warns the church not to be influenced by paganism. False worship, rooted in pride, is ritualistic, legalistic, and spiritually dead. It is *self-made religion*, man-invented, man-centered. *Self-made religion* has the *appearance of wisdom*, but is actually *of no value*. It is ineffective and will not nurture genuine spiritual life. Is there not a lot of *self-made religion* in the "Great Religions of the World"? Does God look at so much religion and say, *In vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men* (Matthew 15:9)?

What regulates worship today? The answer seems to be pragmatism. If it draws a crowd and pleases people, then it "works" and is welcomed. Today's worship is often man-centered and amounts to nothing more than religious entertainment. Who is the focus of our worship? Who regulates our worship? When we worship, are we doing the things God commands, or filling up our time with man-made rituals designed to gratify self rather than to glorify God?

IV. Our Practice of Worship: Drawing Near to God

We are not left to our imagination as to how to worship. We cannot rely upon our sincerity. We are liable to sin and can be sincerely wrong. Yet worship must be sincere. It must express true heart-love to God, but it must be performed in obedience to the truth of God's Word. We are to worship *in spirit and truth* (John 4:24). *In spirit*: the heart of the worshipper is the heart of worship. We care about the external acts of worship, but the primary activity of worship is that of a believing heart. We engage not merely our emotions, but all our rational faculties (Romans 12:1,2). We also worship *in truth*. God's Word regulates our worship. We are to obey God's

Word as we worship in His presence for the glory of His Name.

Worship is a two-way dynamic: *Draw near to God and He will draw near to you* (James 4:8). In worship we do things by which we draw near to God, and we do things by which God draws near to us. Old Covenant worship was performed in the temple by priests who offered sacrifice. The New Covenant church is now God's temple, and Christians are *a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 2:5). How do New Covenant priests draw near to God to offer these spiritual sacrifices?

First, when the church gathers to worship, we draw near to God in **prayer**. *Thanksgiving and praise* are *sacrifices* pleasing to God. (Hebrews 13:15,16) We are to approach God with humility and confession of sin: *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit* (Psalm 51:17). Our prayers are to envelop others in intercession. *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations* (Mark 11:17; cf. 1 Timothy 2:1,2,8).

Secondly, we draw near by **congregational singing**. In the Old Covenant, music was offered to God by the Levitical priestly choir *in unison... the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord* (2 Chronicles 5:12,13). Today the church is the New Covenant priestly choir united in worship *that with one accord (we) may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 15:6). The church praises God with a unified voice of adoration. Colossians 3:16b envisions us *with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thanksgiving in (our) hearts to God*. Musical praise is not directed to men, but to God.