

The Ancient Pattern: The Pattern For Worship

Introduction. COVID-19 has caused a big ripple effect in attendance. In 2019, only 14% of all US adults said they never went to a worship service. In 2020, that number jumped to 53%. That's an almost 40 point jump in less than twelve months. But the numbers get starker. In 2019, 100% of practicing Christians had gone to a worship assembly within the past 6 months. Six months into the pandemic, 19% and 22% hadn't attended at all — digital, physical, or reopened.

Let that sink in. One of five church members have simply stopped attending all forms of worship in 2020. Now, it's much easier for us to react than to respond. Wise Christians spend their energy responding to unfavorable circumstances instead of reacting to them. That means we have to keep important concepts in mind. First, we shouldn't overfocus on content at the expense of connection. Second, we shouldn't have an obsession with attracting and ignore equipping. Third, we shouldn't make politics and ideology more important than the teaching of scripture.

Our closeness to God is greatly affected by what we do in our worship. The New Testament reveals a pattern, and we've looked at several patterns to date. We know we need a direct statement, necessary implication, or approved example to establish authority for our worship.

But this means more to us than a conceptual analysis. We should want to feast on the spiritual food found in worship. We should also want to proclaim the excellencies of God to Him and our brethren. To help us understand and do all of that better, we study this lesson tonight.

I. The Purpose Of Worship

- A. Worship is about God, not me (Colossians 2:20-23).
 - 1. Worship today for many is about what they get out of it. It's basically a consumer mentality in too many churches.
 - 2. But when worship is about pleasing man, it is actually idolatry.
 - 3. The Colossians were worshipping how they wanted to and what they thought was best. It wasn't focused on God or following His will.
- B. Worship is about God's commands, not mine (Matthew 15:9).
 - 1. Worship today for many isn't about what God commands; it is about what they want or what they follow by tradition.
 - 2. Jesus said that God wants a certain type of worship (John 4:23-24). This means in agreement with God's law, and with our mind or will engaged. If worship is based on what man says and wants, it is vain.
- C. Worship is about God's people, not me (Hebrews 10:24-25).
 - 1. Again the consumer mentality causes so much grief today. If the worship isn't just right, if the church doesn't meet my needs, then I'm leaving!
 - 2. Worship is about how we can serve others. The consumer mentality is about selfishness, not service.
 - 3. "Let us consider one another" is collective in Hebrews. Our singing is for God, then others, and then us (Colossians 3:16).

- D. Worship is designed by God to help me (1 Corinthians 14:26).
1. Our entire service is about edification. All of it is for the purpose of being more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10).
 2. Yes, worship does help us, strengthen us, but it is through service this is achieved, not selfishness. That's the problem with modern worship.

II. The Pattern Of Worship

- A. What did the new Christians do after being saved? What is our pattern?
1. Teaching (Acts 2:42).
 - a) This is the message they had received from Christ. They were given Christ's authority. They weren't following their own message; they followed the message of the apostles.
 - b) Their authority was not the Old Law, tradition, or anything else — only Christ's teachings.
 - c) This is what we're attempting today. We're examining what the apostles taught, and then following the New Testament.
 2. Breaking of bread/Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42).
 - a) "Breaking of bread" is a euphemism for the Lord's Supper (cp. Acts 20:7).
 - (1) It's more than just a meal, although the expression could sometimes mean a meal (Acts 2:46; 20:11).
 - (2) The context in both of the passages in Acts is the factor in determining what was meant.
 - b) It was instituted by Christ as a memorial of His death (Matthew 26:26-29).
 - c) It was practiced by the apostles (Acts 20:7). Paul assembled at Troas on the first day to do it.
 - d) It was practiced in the church (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
 - (1) It can be practiced wrong (vv. 17, 20-22). It's not a common meal (10:16-17).
 - (2) Paul handed down what Christ gave to him (vv. 23-26). This establishes that the memorial is indeed a pattern.
 - (3) We have to partake properly. Refusing to do so, or not doing properly leads to weakness and spiritual death (vv. 27-34).
 - e) How often did they do this?
 - (1) On every first day of the week — the same day as the resurrection and Pentecost (Acts 20:7).
 - (2) However, the Bible doesn't say "every" first day. Denominations do it monthly, quarterly, etc. But neither did the Bible say "every" Sabbath (cp. Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12). When they commemorated the Sabbath, they commemorated every one in the year.
 - (3) There's no authority for any other day, only Sunday. Secular history answers the question: early Christians partook every week.
 3. Prayer (Acts 2:42).
 - a) Prayer was an important part of their time together, and it continued to be so in the early church (Acts 6:4; 12:5; 14:23; 20:36).

- b) Early Christians prayed for many things. These prayers could be for the Lord's work, the sick, the lost, the weak, leaders (spiritual and non-spiritual), etc.
- 4. Giving (Acts 2:44-45).
 - a) Initially they were willing to give to take care of the needs of the brethren.
 - b) Giving is something that the Lord expects and desires. But He wants it to be done willingly and cheerfully. There is no compulsion in giving.
 - c) When did they give? On the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).
 - d) Did they have to give a specific amount? There are no tithes in the New Testament. That is a myth of modern denominations. Giving agrees with your prosperity (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- 5. Singing (Acts 2:47).
 - a) More is included in praising God, but singing is one of the means of praising God.
 - b) It may come as a surprise to many that the New Testament never has passages where the church used mechanical instruments in worship.
 - c) Ten passages mention singing in the New Testament, but no passages mention instruments.
 - d) Many today don't have a problem with instruments. They say, "God didn't say not to. He just said sing."
 - (1) Silence is not authoritative (Hebrews 7:14).
 - (2) But why not argue this about the Lord's Supper? It doesn't say only fruit of the vine and unleavened bread, yet religious groups venerate those elements by not changing them. Why not add hamburgers and coke? Silence is limiting!
- B. They devoted themselves to each other — fellowship. This isn't a meal, but it is devoting themselves to their relationship in which they entered at baptism (Galatians 3:27-28), first with Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9), and then with each other (2 Corinthians 8:4). They enjoyed each other's presence and helped others.

III. The Punishment Of Incorrect Worship

- A. Did it matter in the Old Testament? Yes!
 - 1. The golden calf (Exodus 32:4).
 - 2. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3).
 - 3. David and the ark of the covenant (1 Chronicles 15:1-2, 14-15).
- B. Does it matter in the New Testament? Yes!
 - 1. If it mattered in the shadow, how much more the reality (cp. Hebrews 10:1).
 - 2. It was people who didn't follow the Father's will that wouldn't be saved (Matthew 7:21-23). They practiced lawlessness. They acted without authority.

Conclusion. Today it seems that people think it doesn't matter how you worship God — however you want to worship will be accepted. But the Bible simply does not teach that. We have to hold to Christ's teaching through the apostles, and worship in the same way they did.

I am deeply indebted to Shane Millard for the use of his material.