

## 2

# *True Worship: Presenting Your Bodies as Living Sacrifices*

What is true worship? Is worship something that simply takes place in a geographical location once a week? Is worship like a faucet—cut on and off at will? Is the traditional view of worship assigned to a particular point in time and stops at a particular point in time correct? If someone were to ask us to define worship, how would we explain it? If someone were to question us as to where worship takes place, how would we respond? Is worship confined to a specific time frame? For instance, does worship begin at 9am and stop at 10am? Is worship something that we perform once a week? Is participation in preaching, singing, praying, giving, and breaking bread in the communion on Sunday morning spoken of as a worship service in the New Testament? Does taking part in all of these five acts on Sunday morning complete our worship for the week? Do we ever read in the New Testament writings of five ritualistic acts defined as worship?

Do Christians not do the things they do on Sundays because they are worshipers of the one true God? Is preaching worship? Is not preaching a proclamation of the Good News that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners? We proclaim the “Good News” of God’s Way of salvation because we are worshipers of God. Are we not to tell people about God’s Way of redemption “through” Jesus in our journey through life? Do the Scriptures ever define one of the above five acts performed on Sunday morning as true worship? **Do we not engage in these five activities because we are worshipers of the one true God?** Worship among many Christians is generally identified with a so-called worship service, not one’s way of life. But does the New Testament ever speak of a “worship service” or does it ever speak of our “going to worship”? R. L. Kilpatrick (1927-2004), editor of *Ensign*, goes right to the heart of what worship is all about when he writes:

He didn’t say one single word about performing a Sunday a.m. ritual.... I have come to the conclusion that God never gave any such instructions to the church, that it is not taught in the Bible, that there is not a single instance where God, an apostle, or any inspired writer ever instructed the church to come together to perform a worship service. A corporate form of worship is not taught in the Bible. **There are a number of instances where the Christian community assembled, for a variety of reasons, but never for the express purpose of engaging in items of worship.** We are instructed to meet together to “exhort one another to love and good works,” for mutual edification, to encourage, to admonish, to take care of brotherhood problems (for example, the man who married his

father's wife, taking brethren to law, resolving the Gentile question [Acts 15]), and a number of other reasons, but never to perform public (corporate) "acts" which we call "worship."<sup>1</sup> (Emphasis mine—bold)

A solution to these questions about worship should rescue us from a sterile, barren, fruitless, and infertile life in Jesus. Furthermore, a resolution to these queries about worship should expedite the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Failure to understand true worship is not something new to the twenty-first century. Many saints in the early church failed to properly understand the true nature of worship. Paul had to deal with the heart of Christianity versus ritualism. For instance, in Philippians 3:3, Paul sets forth one of the many characteristics that is descriptive of God's people. In this passage he describes the believer as one who **worships by the Spirit** and **glories in Christ Jesus**. The individuals to whom Paul wrote were those who had heard the Gospel and responded through repentance and acceptance of Jesus as God's Way of salvation. They were members of God's new community. The Christians in Philippi were in danger of the circumcision party, that is to say, the Judaizers. In fact, Paul warns, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh" (3:2). These men who were mutilators of the flesh were the very ones that Jesus warned His disciples about in the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

In this essay and the ones following on the subject of worship, we will observe a certain amount of repetition. Yet, repetition is sometimes necessary in order to reinforce certain teachings. This is why Paul reminded them again of certain things even though they knew the things he was writing about: "Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for **me to write the same things to you again**, and it is a safeguard for you" (Philippians 3:1). Paul is troubled about the legalistic teachings of the Judaizers that could cause the Philippians to abandon their concept of true worship. We today also need to be reminded of what true worship is. It is not rituals performed on Sunday morning between the hours of 9am and 10am, but rather worship is presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to God in our daily walk with Him—twenty-four hours a day. Paul, in his Epistle to the Roman Christians, sets forth the very heart and core of true worship:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, **to offer your bodies as living sacrifices**, holy and pleasing to God—**this is your spiritual<sup>a</sup> act of worship**.<sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. (Romans 12:1-3)

---

<sup>1</sup>Pat Kilpatrick, "Editorial: Thirsting for a Pattern?" *Ensign* 21 (January 1993): 2-3.

<sup>a</sup>Or *reasonable*

## THE TEMPLE OF GOD AND SACRIFICE

In the Old Testament, the Jews went up to the Temple to worship. They offered their sacrifices at the Temple, which constituted their worship. But today we are the Temple of God. It is in this vein that Paul addresses the Corinthians:

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore **honor God with your body**. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We are the Temple of God! The Holy Spirit dwells within this Temple. Is this not what Paul refers to when he says, “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God” (Philippians 3:3)? When Jesus told the woman at the well that “a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). Did Jesus not refer to a worship that is under the control of the Holy Spirit and a worship that is “in” and “through” Him, the Son of God?

To “**worship by the Spirit of God**” and to “**honor God with your body**” appear to be parallel. The construction of Philippians 3:3 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 seems to be similar to Romans 12:1-3. Since the body is the Temple, then Paul informs the Corinthians to “Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18). In the beginning of his Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul asked these believers a question: “Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Paul does not deviate from this concept concerning the body. Just a brief reflection upon Romans 12:1-3 reveals that true worship is the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices to God, which is our spiritual act of worship. Paul tells them “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices” (12:1). What does “sacrifice” call to our minds? Does it not indicate death? The animal died as a sacrifice. When we present our bodies as “living sacrifices,” this act also indicates death at some point in our lives? **We, as disciples of Christ, not only die to sin, but we are resurrected to walk in newness of life, thus we are continually living sacrifices.** There is a constant dying to sin. In Paul’s letter to Rome, he pictures the death and resurrection of every believer:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. <sup>5</sup> If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. <sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, <sup>a</sup> that we should no longer be slaves to sin— <sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. <sup>8</sup> Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live

---

<sup>a</sup> Or *be rendered powerless*

with him. <sup>9</sup> For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup> The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup> Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup> Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:1-14)

**We die to self and are resurrected to a new life, which life is a life of worship.** Since this is true, we must present ourselves as “living sacrifices,” which, as Paul says, is our “spiritual act of worship” (12:1). There is a continual offering of our bodies as “living sacrifices.” We should never assume that we have arrived at a position in our Christian life that does not require reflection or reminders of what Christianity is all about. All Christians need to be aroused to a proper understanding of worship. As a result of the Judaizers seeking to adulterate true worship, Paul, as noted earlier, calls attention to the imposters by calling them “dogs,” “evil,” and “mutilators of the flesh” (Philippians 2:2). Paul impresses upon their minds what constitutes true worship: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (3:3). This concept of worship is taken from the words of Jesus in His conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:21-24).

## IN THE SPIRIT

The passage in Philippians, so it seems, refers to the eschatological significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The coming of Christ has ushered in the new age of salvation prophesied by the prophets. The Holy Spirit is the sign of this redemption. Christians have the Spirit and because of Him are able to offer worship that is pleasing to God (Romans 8:8-9; 12:1). **The body is now the new temple of God.** We cannot help but wonder if “by the Spirit” in Philippians 3:3 is not an allusion to “in spirit and in truth” in John 4:24. Are Jesus and Paul referring to a life controlled by the Holy Spirit? **The phrase “in spirit and in truth” may be contrasting ritualism versus the outpouring of our souls in confession to God through the Spirit.** In Jesus’ conversation with the woman of Samaria, He rejects the geographical location as well as the performance of liturgical worship. Worship is now to be a worship that presents our bodies as living sacrifices, that is to say, a life that is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

## JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA

To grasp the words of Jesus in John 4:24, a brief background of the worship of the Israelites and Samaritans is essential to a proper understanding of Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman. Jesus, in the course of his remarks, mentions two mountains: (1) **Mount Moriah**—site of the Temple in Jerusalem, and (2) **Mount Gerizim**—site of the Temple in Samaria. As we examine Temple worship, we become conscious that the focus of Jewish worship in ancient times centered on the Temple. The first Temple was built by King Solomon

and, by the era of Josiah (641-609 BC), was regarded as the only legitimate place of sacrifice. The Babylonians in 586 BC destroyed this Temple. Later, after the seventy-years of Babylonian exile, the Temple, under the leadership of Zerubbabel (zě-rüb`à-běł), was rebuilt and later enlarged by King Herod.

## MOUNT GERIZIM

The Samaritans were the descendents of the Jews of the Northern Kingdom that was decimated, or destroyed, by the Assyrians in 721 BC. When the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile under Ezra (446 BC) and Nehemiah (445 BC), they were not permitted to worship in the Temple in Jerusalem because they were not full Jews. They were of mixed blood—Jewish and Assyrian. They were now mixed blood because of intermarriage with the Assyrians. Since they were not permitted to worship in Jerusalem, they built an alternative shrine on Mount Gerizim (gě-rī`zīm or gěr`ī-zīm). The Samaritans retained their own liturgy<sup>2</sup> and customs and developed their own Codes of Law. They kept all the biblical festivals and sacrificed the paschal lamb at Passover. For just a little background concerning Mount Gerizim, I cite the following comments by Mark Krause:

**GERIZIM, MOUNT** (הַר גְּרִיזִים, *har gerizim*; ὄρος Γαριζῖν, *oros Garizin*). A mountain in central Palestine with historic, strategic, and religious significance.

### Introduction

Mount Gerizim is a mountain rising to about 2,849 feet (868 meters) above sea level at its peak and 330 meters (1,080 feet) above the valley floor where the modern Palestinian city of Nablus is sited (ancient Shechem, later Neapolis). Mount Gerizim (modern *Jabal at Tur*) is located on the south side of the valley. Its northern face is steep, giving it an imposing look from the Nablus Valley. The valley is flanked to the north by Mount Ebal (modern *Jabal Ibal*), which is higher (940 meters; 3,080 feet), but not as steep as Mount Gerizim. These are the highest mountains in this region of central Palestine.

Shechem, at the base of Mount Gerizim, was the crossroads of well-traveled trade routes. It is one of the most frequently mentioned cities of the Old Testament, having a role from Abraham to Hosea (Gen 12:6; Hos 6:9). Mount Gerizim itself plays a role in the conquest of Canaan, the Maccabean period, and the ministry of Jesus.

Explicit reference to Mount Gerizim occurs only four times in the Old Testament. Three of these are related to a covenant-renewal ceremony orchestrated by Joshua upon entering the land of Canaan (Deut 11:29; 27:12; Josh 8:33). In Deuteronomy 11:29, Moses instructed the people of Israel to pronounce blessings on Mount Gerizim and curses on Mount Ebal [ē`bāl] after crossing the Jordan River. This ceremony is described in further detail in Deut 27:12–26, where instructions are given to divide the nation and have six tribes on each of the twin mountains. The Gerizim-Ebal ceremony was to be led by the Levites, who proclaim 12 curses, each followed by all the people shouting “Amen.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Liturgy is employed in the sense of a rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship.

<sup>3</sup> Mark S. Krause, “Gerizim, Mount,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

## MOUNT MORIAH

The Temple in Jerusalem centered on the offering of sacrifices. The priests made sin offerings on the festivals as propitiation for the nation's sin and for individuals. Burnt offerings of animals were made twice daily with two additional lambs offered each Sabbath. Also, to accompany the animal offerings, meal offerings were also made and libations were poured out. After the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, prayers and fasting took the place of sacrifice. Today, the synagogue liturgy is based on the times of the Temple sacrifices. Jeremiah Garrett's gives some information about the construction of the first temple by Solomon:

**MORIAH, MOUNT** (הַר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, *hammoriyyah har*). The mountain of (the Lord's) appearance (2 Chr 3:1). The name "Mount Moriah" is used once as the Chronicler's term for the site of Solomon's temple. It also refers to the altar that David built following the census.

### The Chronicler's Account

Second Chronicles gives Mount Moriah as the precise location for Solomon's construction of the first temple: "Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, at the mountain of the appearance, where (the Lord) had appeared to David, his father, which (He) appointed at the site of David, that is, at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite" (2 Chr 3:1, author's translation). This location is not included in the parallel account in 1 Kgs 6–7. The temple is said to be at Jerusalem, on the mountain *of moriah*, which was not a proper name in the Chronicler's mind but rather a descriptive phrase: "the mountain of the appearance" (Waltke and O'Connor, *Introduction*, 242, 249; Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, 505). In case the reader has any doubt regarding which mountain is in discussion, the Chronicler specifies: "where (the Lord) had appeared to David."<sup>4</sup>

## ESCHATOLOGICAL AGE

Even though God commanded ritualism in the Old Testament and a geographical place of worship (Jerusalem), Jesus is now saying that in the eschatological age—the end of the political power of Judah (Daniel 12:7; Genesis 49:10; Revelation 12:5)—worship would no longer employ a prescribed mechanical form such as the rituals performed on Mount Moriah and Mount Gerizim, but rather be a worship that flows out of a grateful heart for salvation made available through Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit—no longer confined to a geographical location. In other words, His people would no longer "live according to the sinful nature but live lives that are led by the Spirit of God." Pay attention to Paul as he sets forth true worship:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>a 2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the **Spirit of life** set me free from the law of sin and death.<sup>3</sup> For what the law

---

Joüon *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*

<sup>4</sup> Jeremiah K. Garrett, "Moriah, Mount," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

<sup>a</sup> Some later manuscripts *Jesus, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit,*

was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature,<sup>b</sup> God did by sending **his own Son** in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.<sup>c</sup> And so he condemned sin in sinful man,<sup>d</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1-4)

True worship is no longer located to or in a particular geographical place nor is worship the performance of certain required rituals to be performed on a Sunday morning or evening, but rather, it is something that takes place in every Christian on a daily basis—twenty-four hours a day. It seems, from the context, that the worship that is “in Spirit and in Truth” is a worship that is lived within the sphere of God’s Holy Spirit. True worship involves our walking in the Spirit. In other words, it is a life that adheres to the teachings of Jesus. It is a life that seeks to keep the commandments of God. Jesus instructed His disciples about keeping His commandments. Listen to Jesus as he speaks to His disciples: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). Once more, Jesus calls attention to obedience to His teachings:

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup> He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. <sup>25</sup> All this I have spoken while still with you. <sup>26</sup> But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (14:23-26)

Paul also expresses this truth in Romans:

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. <sup>10</sup> But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.<sup>g</sup> And by him we cry, “*Abba*,<sup>h</sup> Father.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. <sup>17</sup> Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Romans 8: 9-17)

Even though Israel offered up their sacrifices at the Temple, this responsibility did not release them from offering their lives in holiness to God. But in the Christian age, God has not

---

<sup>b</sup> Or *the flesh*; also in verses 4, 5, 8, 9, 12 and 13

<sup>c</sup> Or *man, for sin*

<sup>d</sup> Or *in the flesh*

<sup>g</sup> Or *adoption*

<sup>h</sup> Aramaic for *Father*

legislated concerning rituals—such as, five acts to be performed on Sunday morning—but rather, the presenting of our bodies “as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). Worship takes place in the Temple. We, as God’s saints, are now the Temple of God. We have too long identified worship as the performance of certain rituals discharged on Sunday morning. **But there is not one Scripture in the New Testament that ever identifies worship as the fulfillment of five acts.** Worship in the New Testament is never defined as what happens on Sunday morning. Not one time did any writer of the New Testament Scriptures ever tell Christians to “go to worship.” Nor did they ever **specify five acts as worship.** For the writers of the New Covenant Scriptures, true worship is the presenting of one’s body as a living sacrifice.

## SPIRITUAL ACT OF WORSHIP

The means whereby we present our bodies as living sacrifices is presented in Romans 12. It is this ethical behavior that God, through His prophets, warned the children of Israel to practice. Even the performance of rituals without ethical behavior that is descriptive of God’s holiness is not acceptable to Him. Consider the following citations from the Old Testament. God, through Amos (760 BC), goes right to the point of ethical behavior:

Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5: 14-15)

True worship centers on seeking good and hating evil. He also wanted the Israelites to maintain justice in the judicial system. Even with the sacrifices offered up at the Temple, God still wanted behavior that would bring Him glory. Isaiah (739 BC), approximately twenty-one years earlier, also called attention to right behavior:

Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, <sup>17</sup>learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed.<sup>a</sup> Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. (Isaiah 1:16-17)

*Fasting* is devotion, or worship, toward the One who redeems us. Is fasting simply doing without food for a day? Does biblical fasting include ethical conduct? The Jews fasted in their devotion to God. It is not wrong to fast, but we also need a life that represents **biblical fasting.** Listen to Isaiah as he relates God’s message to Israel:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? <sup>7</sup>Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? (58:6-7, see also Matthew 25:31-46)

---

<sup>a</sup> Or / *rebuke the oppressor*

Through Micah (735 BC), God again calls awareness to what really matters: “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To **act justly** and to **love mercy** and to **walk humbly** with your God” (Micah 6:8). The Jews were to participate in ceremonial ritual as well as internal devotion to God. Even though the Israelites expressed their worship in ceremonial forms such as sacrifices and festivals, which rituals were a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 10:1-7); nevertheless, they were to learn to do right, to seek justice, and to encourage the oppressed. The First Book of Samuel and Psalms address ceremonial forms: “Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni (höf’ nī) and Phinehas (fīn’ ē-ās), the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD” (1 Samuel 1:3). Again the psalmist writes: “Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool—arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might” (Psalms 132:7).

Their worship, in addition to sacrifices and festivals, still required upright behavior, submissiveness of spirit, and confession of sin. Yet, the rituals themselves were of no use if the person did not worship God in his heart and life. God complained to the children of Israel about their ethical conduct: “**These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men**” (Isaiah 29:13). But, today, in the new heavens and new earth (God’s kingdom), the required regulations or rituals<sup>5</sup> of the old heavens and earth (Judaism) are no longer employed in true worship. Is this not what Jesus is dealing with in John 4:24? Is not Jesus, in this passage, drawing attention to the absence of rituals and focusing on behavior that is under the control of the Holy Spirit? What is the contrast? Jesus is saying that true worship in the coming kingdom age, prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 2 & 7), will not be worship with rituals, but rather true worship will be a life that is under the control of the Holy Spirit.

## RETURN TO RITUAL WORSHIP

Today, numerous Church of Christ journals are filled with an emphasis upon ritual worship. We have substituted ceremonial procedures of the Old Testament for a new set of ceremonial traditions, which conventions consists of five ritualistic acts to be performed on Sunday morning in a specific manner. We, unknowingly, have perverted true worship of which Jesus spoke about to the Samaritan woman. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ alone, and these divisions are over prescribed ceremonies that God did not command in order for worship to be true.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Churches of Christ are divided over acappella singing versus instrumental. Singing is one of the so-called prescribed rituals that must be performed without the instrument. Can Christians sing with or without the

---

<sup>5</sup>This essay employs the word *ritual* to refer to the established form of a system of rites, that is, a ceremonial act or action, specifically a set order of acts prescribed for a religious ceremony.

<sup>6</sup>Since my background is associated with the Churches of Christ, I am able to write about the divisions within this once united body with insight since I, too, taught, at one time, what is still taught within this movement that is known today as the Restoration Movement.

instrument when they assemble to strengthen and encourage one another?<sup>7</sup> Within some segments of the Churches of Christ, we observe another custom that involves the assembly on Sunday morning. This particular formal procedure deals with whether Christians can participate in Sunday school/Bible study classes for adults and children when they assemble. I do not question the sincerity of these honest believers, but, at the same time, we need to go back to the Scriptures and reexamine our concept of a so-called worship service. Debates over the Sunday school question have divided God's family into warring factions.<sup>8</sup>

Another ceremony disagreement surrounds the use of wine or grape juice in the observance of the Lord's Supper. Must believers use wine only or grape juice only when they assemble? The Churches of Christ are divided over the number of containers (cups) to be used in the Communion. If one uses individual cups, according to some Christians, the so-called prescribed practice of "one" container is violated. In other words, the entire congregation must drink from one cup (container). Must individuals use one cup or multiple cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper when they come together?<sup>9</sup>

Is it wrong to practice solo singing or must there be strictly congregational singing? Can there be quartet singing? Can Christians clap their hands during an assembly of the saints? The Churches of Christ are divided over a worship service. **If God has not commanded a worship service with five acts to be carried out in a fixed manner, how can Christians impose all the restrictions that are currently being demanded by certain interpretative communities?** The divisions within many Christian communities are over how to conduct a "worship service" that God did not address. Have we allowed our inherited traditions from our forefathers to separate us from other Christians? Paul faced two hundred years of traditions from the Pharisees in his missionary journeys.<sup>10</sup> Paul did not want the Philippians to allow the Judaizers to separate them from true worship. Paul prayed that this would not happen. He begins his letter with a prayer.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup> being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. <sup>8</sup> God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup> so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:4-11)

---

<sup>7</sup>For a detailed study of this question, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL, 2008), 236-248.

<sup>8</sup> See Dallas Burdette, "Oddities in Pattern Theology" for a detailed study of the Sunday school controversy, *Ibid.*, 55-86.

<sup>9</sup>For an in-depth study of the "cup" question, see "Passover Traditions in the First Century, *Ibid.*, 181-195.

<sup>10</sup>For an analysis of the political leaders in the first century, see Dallas Burdette, "Political Powers of the Pharisees," in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts Through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood, FL, 2009), 78-92.

The Judaizers went around teaching that it was not enough to believe in Christ. In other words, they were saying that you must be circumcised. They were saying that you cannot do away with the rituals. Paul counteracts this philosophy with stinging words: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8). Once more he issues a strong warning about the traditions of ritualism:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup> Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. <sup>19</sup> He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. <sup>20</sup> Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? <sup>22</sup> These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup> Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. (Colossians 2:16-23)

Remember, God had a reason for the rituals and sacrifices. In other words, the rituals and sacrifices points toward “reality.” Many Christians have substituted other rituals and have lost the connection with His children. We are divided over a so-called worship service. **One cannot help but wonder why none of the writers of the New Testament books ever addressed the so-called worship service, a worship service that is greatly emphasized by many Christians today.** We need to recall the words of Paul as he thwarts this philosophy of the Judaizers with: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

## LITURGY VERSUS TRUE WORSHIP

Again, I ask, what do we mean when we say that we are worshipping God? It seems that countless Christians do not clearly differentiate between liturgy and true worship. There is still a tendency on the part of numerous believers to go back to mechanical forms of the Christian life and worship through ceremony. How to conduct these ceremonies have divided the Churches of Christ for almost two-hundred years.<sup>11</sup> And these rituals are identified as true worship—not the presenting of one’s life as a living sacrifice. Today, self-styled Christian worship has been reverting to set forms. Countless Christians have been persuaded that only certain rituals executed in definite ways are true worship. But true worship is not adherence to assigned observances discharged in a defined manner.

---

<sup>11</sup>For a detailed study of the divisions that exist within this movement, see Dallas Burdette, “Congregational Worship and Division” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 171-180.

**The litmus test to apply to true worship is to look at our ethical behavior.** Jesus describes this kind of course of action in His Sermon on the Mount. Worship has nothing to do with the geographical location concerning a particular building or pertaining to certain traditions performed on Sunday morning. We are the Temple of God and worship takes place within us. The true worshiper is not one who goes devotedly to early morning celebration and then claims the rest of the week to live any way he or she wishes. The true worshiper is one whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit. The first characteristics of true worshipers, as expressed by Paul, are: “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who **worship by the Spirit of God**, who **glory in Christ Jesus**, and who put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3).

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP DEFINED

The Apostle defines Christian worship as a worship that is controlled by the Holy Spirit. And this worship is a worship of rejoicing. It is no longer a matter of duty—it is a desire. In the words of John: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The consciousness of being moved inwardly and of being gripped silently and of being led by the Spirit constitutes the characteristics of worship that is by the Spirit. **To worship by the Spirit of God is not something cold and formal, it is always warm and loving and free.** Since the Holy Spirit is in us, there must be something of the love of God in us. Paul says, “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5). As we worship God more and more by the Spirit, we become less and less dependent upon means. By means, I mean buildings, liturgies, preachers, or even other people. The person who worships in the Spirit realizes the presence of God.

Remember, as stated above, that Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Anyone who realizes the presence of God realizes something of His holiness and feels his or her unworthiness. The author of the Book of Hebrews expresses worship this way: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship (*λατρεύομεν*, *latreuōmen*, serve) God acceptably with reverence (*εὐλαβείας*, *eulabeias*, an attitude of caution) and awe (*δέους*, *deous*, “an overwhelming feeling of fear and wonder)” (Hebrews 12:28).

Since God has not commanded a worship service on Sunday morning, then when Christians bind upon other Christians their particular brand of orthodoxy they are enslaving where God has set us free. It would be well for Christians in every interpretative community to recall the words of Paul to the Galatians: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). All over again, Paul complained about their making certain days and festivals as mandatory, which ideas indicated their failure to comprehend what Christianity is all about: “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you” (Galatians 4:10).

Yet again, Paul, in this same vein, writes to the Colossians:

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

Paul nipped in the bud the concept of absolute perfection in one's knowledge concerning the observance of certain days or the eating of certain foods. Paul writes to the Romans: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). True worship is not in the keeping of days; it is not in practicing circumcision; it is not in singing with or without the instrument; it is not in the manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper (break the bread or pinch the bread); it is not in the use of wine only or grape juice only, and so on. True worship is a life that is surrendered to God in obedience. Our English word *worship* is unfortunate since it does not adequately describe the various words employed in the New Testament that is descriptive of worship.

Prior to this admonition about days, Paul encouraged all the believers to surrender themselves to the Lord because of His mercy. Listen to Paul as he issues his plea:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual<sup>a</sup> act of worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

What does it mean to present your body as a living sacrifice? Pay attention to Paul as he enumerates ways in which we worship God:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.<sup>a</sup> Do not be conceited. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay,"<sup>b</sup> says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."<sup>c</sup> <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (12:9-21)

---

<sup>a</sup> Or *reasonable*

<sup>a</sup> Or *willing to do menial work*

<sup>b</sup> Deut. 32:35

<sup>c</sup> Prov. 25:21, 22

## CONCLUSION

For Paul, the doctrine of worship and ethics converge, that is, worship and ethics come together. Worship is not replaced by ethics, but rather ethics are turned into worship. Many Christians know very little about true worship. Pick up the newspaper and read the advertisements by the churches: morning worship, 11am. But frequently “morning worship” is nothing more than “morning liturgy.” But for us, as Christians, the whole of our lives are to become our spiritual act of worship. It is a worship of reasonable service. The only acts that God has ordained for the Christian in worship are to exemplify God in our daily walk with Him.

May God help us not to enslave God’s people with **ritualistic worship**. The next three chapters/studies will examine every Greek word translated worship in the New Testament. This individualized study of the various Greek words reveals that not one Greek word that is translated worship is ever associated with a so-called worship service. **We do not deny that what we do on Sunday morning is worship. The point of controversy over worship is not that singing and praying are not acts of devotion, but rather, whether God has ordained a worship service with five ritualistic acts that have to be performed in a prescribed manner in order for our worship to be acceptable to God.**

The so-called worship service has wreaked havoc of God’s community of believers and divided them into many militaristic camps. If we are not worshipers of the one true God before we assemble, we certainly cannot be worshipers, in the biblical sense, during this one hour. We assemble because we are worshipers of the one true God. Worship is not like a faucet—turn off and on at will. Worship is our way of life—twenty-four hours each day. Paul, toward the end of his Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, focused on worship as one’s way of life twenty-four hours a day. Pay attention to him as he explains godly behavior:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.<sup>17</sup> Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.<sup>18</sup> Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.<sup>19</sup> Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord,<sup>20</sup> always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>21</sup> Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-21)

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.<sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:12-17)