

Back to Bible Basics

Issue 3

TRUE WORSHIP

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To justify the introduction of the mechanical instrument in worship many began to reason that everything that a Christian does in life, that is not sinful, is worship. They argued that if a practice was not inherently evil then it was acceptable to God. Therefore, if an activity was acceptable to God then it could be employed in worship to God. Since strumming a guitar or playing the organ is not an inherently evil activity, it must be alright to incorporate the use of these instruments in worship. This kind of logic is flawed. In the first place, it is obvious that not all non-sinful activities constitute worship. If one takes out the rubbish he is not sinning. However, taking out the rubbish is certainly not an act of worship. Worship is not defined as any activity that does not violate the law of Christ.

In the second place, an activity that is not sinful outside of worship can become sinful when God has not authorized its use in worship. For example, Nadab and Abihu used "strange" fire to light their censers. God did not specify the source of the fire used by the Jews to cook their meals or to warm themselves in the cool of the evening. However, it is evident that God did specify the type of fire to be used in Hebrew worship. Nadab and Abihu used fire in worship that was not acceptable to God. They received a severe punishment for the way they casually introduced an element into worship that God did not approve. Acceptable worship is not defined by men (Matthew 15:9).

During the course of His conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus spoke of two key elements that must be applied by any worshipper who desires to offer up acceptable worship to the Lord. Those two elements are "spirit and truth." (John 4:23, 24). The "spirit" refers to the sincere desire of the worshipper to conduct himself in a manner that will be pleasing to his Lord. The one who worships God in "spirit" is the one who does not seek to please himself in worship. The sincere worshipper will seek to worship God within divinely specified guidelines.

It is the commandments of Christ that constitute "truth." They are the definition of truth. One who holds to the truth is one who obeys the commandments of Christ (John 14:15,21). Therefore, one who hopes to worship God in truth is one who obeys the commands of God relating to worship. He must be careful not to introduce into worship elements that he personally feels will enhance the service. If he does so, he will be making the same mistake as Nadab and Abihu. The true worshipper must confine himself to praising God through the acts that the Lord has ordained. Furthermore, the true worshipper must perform those acts in the manner that the Lord has stipulated in the Law of Christ. To do otherwise is to engage in vain (empty, useless) worship (Matthew 15:9).

God has commanded the church to worship Him through the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13). Prayer, giving and the presentation of God's word are also elements that the Lord has ordained for worship (Acts 2:42; II Corinthians 9:7). It is obvious, from a study of Christian worship in the New Testament that partaking of the Lord's Supper ("the breaking of bread") was the focal point of their service on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-29). When one applies the law of exclusion he recognizes that anything beyond these five specified acts does not constitute true worship.



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LEADERS IN THE LORD'S CHURCH

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It has been said that an organisation is only as strong as its leaders. Secular organisations pay huge salaries for persuasive and dynamic leaders. However Paul emphasized the danger of church leaders having “persuasive words of man’s wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:4). It is good for leaders to be able to persuade men, but sometimes such men are a great danger to the church. There are many examples of persuasive leaders drawing God’s people into error. In Ezra’s time, the leaders and rulers were foremost in taking foreign wives and mixing their seed with foreigners (Ezra 9:2). It was the shepherds who led Israel astray (Ezek 34:7-8). We also see how Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, used his talent as a leader to draw Israel into a false religion (1 Kings 12:25-33). In the New Testament, Paul warned the Ephesian elders that apostasy would come from among themselves. He said; *“Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”* (Acts 20:30).

Unlike secular organisations, the church is not free to arbitrarily select its own leaders. Notice our text for this article: *“And he gave some, **apostles**; and some, **prophets**; and some, **evangelists**; and some, **pastors** and teachers; ¹² for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:”* (Ephesians 4:11-12). The context of this verse shows us that when Christ went to heaven He gave gifts to men to bring the church into the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4: 8-10). Although the miraculous gifts ceased when the church was brought into full knowledge, the positions of leadership mentioned in the text remain in the church.

THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS RULE THE CHURCH

The apostles and prophets received the word through the power of the Holy Spirit and wrote it down (2 Peter 1:19-21; Ephesians 3:1-5). Although the apostles and prophets no longer live, the church is built on the foundation of their teaching (Ephesians 2:20). The New Testament which they revealed is also called “the apostles doctrine”. This remains the only standard of authority for the church (Acts 2:42). This is how the church today still has apostles ruling over it.

THE EVANGELISTS PREACH FOR THE CHURCH

Evangelists were charged with preaching the word

(2 Timothy 4:1-5). They were to do this with “all authority” (Titus 2:15). Some of them like Paul and his travelling companions planted churches, (they went into communities and began congregations). Others, like Apollos, were waterers (they edified established churches) (1 Corinthians 3:6). Evangelists do not oversee the church, their job is to reprove, rebuke and exhort (2 Timothy 4:1-5). They are also involved in helping churches ordain elders (Titus 1:5).

THE PASTORS OVERSEE THE CHURCH (Acts 20:28).

Pastors are also called elders (older men), and bishops (or overseers) (1 Peter 5:1-3). Their function is to watch over the souls of the local church (Hebrews 13:17). They had to be married with faithful children, be skilful teachers, and be a good example both in the church and the community. (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). Each local church, when fully organized, is to be led by a **plurality** (or board) of elders called “the presbytery” (1 Timothy 4:14; Acts 14:23, Philippians 1:1). **There is therefore no authorisation for one pastor to rule a church**, or for any person to be called “**the pastor**”. In fact no one in the church, except the Lord Jesus has authority to wear a title (Matthew. 23:5-12). The rulership of elders is restricted to the local congregation of which they are a member.

THE TEACHERS EDUCATE THE CHURCH.

All the men listed in the text must be teachers. However one can be a teacher without holding any of the positions mentioned in the text. Those who teach in the church, however, must realize that the souls of both themselves and those who hear them are at stake (1 Timothy 4:16). Unfortunately, many desire to be teachers but have no understanding of what they say or affirm (1 Timothy 1:7). Those who are teachers must realise that they will be judged more strictly. *“My brethren, be not many masters (Teachers ImcP) , knowing that we shall receive **the greater condemnation**”* (James 3:1).

It is interesting that “deacons” are not mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. Deacons are assistants to the elders in carrying out their duties. Like elders, deacons must also be married men who rule their children well. But unlike elders their children do not need to be old enough to believe. The reason that the Lord did not put them in this list of leaders is probably because they are not required to teach (1 Timothy 3:8-13). May God help each church to select qualified leaders in accordance with His will.

