

New Worship To Christ's Glory

The worship practices of thousands of Jews changed in one day! For at least three thousand people, religious life was completely different after hearing Peter present the gospel on the Day of Pentecost.

Having followed the instructions of the law of Moses all their lives, the Jews who became Christians in Acts 2 underwent an amazing transformation. Suddenly, thousands were worshiping God in ways that had never before been seen or heard. All of the familiar actions of the Old Testament were suddenly absent from their lives. Something momentous had happened; some law-shattering event had come about. Something had brought these people hope for eternity in the days following Jesus' crucifixion. Only instructions from God could account for such a new way of worship.

A NEW WORSHIP EXHIBITED

Following their conversion to Christ, these Christians accepted new actions in their worship and a new way of day-to-day living. They "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Never before this Day of Pentecost do we read in the Scriptures that followers of Jesus acted in this way. They were "steadfast" in these practices, just as they had been faithful followers of the Law.

Four actions mentioned by Luke began on this Day of Pentecost. First, Christians began to

follow the teaching of the apostles—the "apostles' teaching"—rather than following the teachings of the Law. They began to live by what the apostles were teaching, whether or not it coincided with the Law. They even used the public rooms of the temple in which to do much of the teaching (Acts 2:46).

Second, they continued steadfastly in the "fellowship" (*koinonia*) instead of continuing in the tithes of the Law. The word "fellowship" can have several meanings in the New Testament, but in this context it obviously refers to sharing in the needs of this life. Converts began to sell their possessions and lands and give the proceeds to any who had need during this time in Jerusalem (Acts 2:45). After a while, many of the visiting Jews would return home, but they were excited and eager to learn all they could about the Messiah and the new reign of the Son of God in His kingdom.

Third, Jewish converts began to "break bread" together. In other contexts the same phrase can and does mean to eat a common meal (Acts 2:46), but here they were doing something as an act of worship in response to the apostles' doctrine. This was obviously something new to them, while breaking their bread in a common meal was nothing new. Also, this activity is mentioned in Acts 2:42, where three other actions of worship are listed. The meal that they continued to share was the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20–28).

Fourth, the converts' prayers were offered

through the One who had died on the cross, Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:17, 18). He was recognized as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and as their mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Never before in the fifteen-century history of their nation had descendants of Abraham prayed through the mediating name of Jesus the Christ.

Not mentioned in this context is another act of worship that became part of glorifying God through Jesus: musical worship. Paul and Silas were singing praises to God while in prison (Acts 16:25). Music was included in the worship instructions of the apostles. When Paul was correcting some of the abuses and misuses of the assemblies in Corinth, he used praying and singing as examples to show that worship actions should be for the benefit of all, clearly understood (1 Corinthians 14:15). The music worship of the New Testament Christians was a cappella.

THE NEW WORSHIP EXPLAINED

“The Apostles’ Teaching”

The apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42) superseded the Law. Jesus claimed that all prophecies about Him had become facts; therefore, the Law and the Prophets would no longer be in effect (Luke 24:44). The apostles would receive a new and final revelation, which could be read and understood by ordinary people (Ephesians 3:3–5). This revelation was from God and was never to be changed into another gospel (Galatians 1:6–9). It was the final message from heaven and was “once for all” delivered to salvation seekers (Jude 3).

The Twelve (and later also Paul) spoke with the authority of Christ, because they were inspired of the Holy Spirit (John 14:25, 26; 15:26; 16:7, 8). The word “inspired” does not refer merely to something unusual or above normal human endeavors. Rather, it refers to the action of God the Spirit upon these speakers and writers. God the Spirit inspired them, breathed into them what should be said and written. These truths were breathed out by God and breathed into the apostles and other writers of the New Testament books. Therefore, every Scripture is “inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The authority behind such teachings of the apostles was not natural, but divine (1 Corinthians 2:13).

This understanding of the new truths and Scriptures shows the proper and true purpose of the Law: It was a “schoolmaster,” a “tutor” to bring the nation of Israel to Christ (Galatians 3:23–25). Now that the Christ had come, now that “faith” had been revealed and completed, the law of Moses was no longer in effect. It had accomplished its purpose. It had its place in God’s scheme of redemption, for it pointed the Jews to Jesus as the Christ. The new doctrines taught by the apostles were given for worshipers of God to respect and follow from that time forward.

The phrase “the apostles’ teaching” has an interesting grammatical construction. It is parallel to the word order of a highly disputed passage about fellowship in 2 John 9, 10:

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting.

Here is the phrase “the teaching of Christ.” In the Greek construction, both are exactly the same. Disputants about “the teaching of Christ” understand that it can mean either *the doctrines taught about Christ* or *the doctrines that Christ taught*. If it means only the doctrines taught about Christ, then fellowship should be maintained among all people who accept Him as the Son of God, regardless of their denominational affiliations and practices.

On the other hand, if it means all the doctrines taught by Christ and His apostles, then fellowship would be restricted to those who are faithful to all the teachings of the New Testament. On the one hand, all who accept Jesus as the Christ would have a loose fellowship; on the other hand, a distinctive fellowship would exist only among people who are true to all of the apostles’ doctrine.

Since the grammatical construction in these passages is parallel, Acts 2:42 could have been translated “the teaching of the apostles” rather than “the apostles’ teaching.” Likewise, 2 John 9 could have been translated “Christ’s teaching.” This, then, would give credence to the understanding that John’s teaching suggests a limited fellowship and is not the basis for a broad inter-

denominational fellowship of any who accept Jesus as the Christ. People who wish to break open the fellowship lines established by the Lord have a hard time in dealing with the true meaning of 2 John 9.

“Fellowship”

Fellowship, a second change adopted by these converted Jews, changed their views about their possessions and their regard for people in need. The word *koinonia*, in its broadest sense, refers to joint participation of brethren in religious privileges. In other contexts, it is used for the fellowship Christians have with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14); the fellowship Christians have with one another (1 John 1:7); and the fellowship Christians have in the Lord’s Supper with the blood and body of the Lord on the cross (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Koinonia is also prominently used for the sharing of earthly possessions with others (Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 9:13). Paul argued that since the Palestinians had shared the gospel with those in Rome, the Christians in Rome should reciprocate by sharing their earthly blessings with those in Palestine who were in physical need. Paul also reminded Christians in the church in Philippi that they had been faithful to help him with his physical needs (Philippians 1:5; 4:14–16).

In this context of Acts 2, “fellowship” most likely refers to the sharing of physical necessities with visiting Jews, new converts to the gospel who remained in Jerusalem for months seeking to learn all they could about the gospel. Historians record that such a phenomenon took place, with many families staying long enough in the environs of Jerusalem that they needed food and money for their journeys home.

One other intriguing fact about this new way of contributing to the work of the Lord is the fact that tithing was no longer mentioned! Tithing had been the practice prior even to the Law, as Abraham had paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1–4). The absence of any further teaching about tithing under the gospel of Christ indicates that a change in their method of giving had taken place. Under the new law, contributions were to be given as one had prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2), from one’s abundance (2 Corinthians 8:14, 15). Gifts were to be given

bountifully, purposefully, and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:6, 7).

“The Breaking of Bread”

The breaking of bread, another inspired change in the worship pattern, was a special memorial feast in honor of Jesus’ death on the cross. This meal was in memory of the Lord’s death (1 Corinthians 11:26), and it was eaten as a result of the instructions given by the Lord on the night He was betrayed (Matthew 26:26–29; Luke 22:17–20). This memorial meal was to be observed in the Lord’s kingdom, since He Himself would join in the fellowship and commune with faithful Christians in this feast (Luke 22:29, 30). This communion (1 Corinthians 10:16) was observed in the assemblies of congregations and was not to be a part of any common meal (1 Corinthians 11:20–22, 33, 34).

This memorial feast was to remind Christians that Jesus gave His body and blood for the sins of the world. New Testament Christians observed this on the first day of the week, Sunday (Acts 20:7). Sunday meetings were the regular practice of the early congregations. When Paul gave instruction on how to collect funds to assist the needy, he said it could be done on the day when they were already accustomed to meeting (1 Corinthians 16:2). Paul was not telling Christians to begin meeting on the first day of the week; rather, he was instructing them to lay by in store regularly when they normally met in their assemblies on the first day of the week.

These regular first-day meetings are most significant. The Jews were accustomed to using the seventh day, the Sabbath, as their day of meeting under the Law. Converted Jews held their special worship meetings on Sunday, the first day. Jesus had instructed the apostles to continue teaching the baptized believers “all that I commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). If the apostles taught the new converts to meet in honor of Jesus on the first day of the week, it must have been a direct result of what Jesus had commanded them to do. Students of the Bible can come to no other accurate conclusion than that first-day meetings to worship the Lord, including the Lord’s Supper, began because Jesus commanded them to begin. The apostles continued to teach what Jesus had

commanded, and the converts followed the apostles' doctrine.

"Prayer"

In addition to these other dramatic changes, prayers were changed and offered differently: Prior to this Day of Pentecost, these converts had prayed to Jehovah God; but now they began to pray to Jehovah God through the mediator Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17; Romans 1:8, 9; 1 Timothy 2:5). Previously, these Jews had addressed the Father respectfully; now they addressed the Father through the Son, likewise respectfully.

The apostles' doctrine, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers were all changes under the new gospel that was preached on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

A NEW WORSHIP EXPERIENCED

In John 4:21–24, Jesus promised the Samaritan woman at the well that worship soon would not depend on whether one was in Jerusalem or in the mountains of Samaria; rather, true worship would depend on being offered in "spirit and truth." The Samaritans were descendants of the rebels who had followed Jeroboam when the kingdom was divided (1 Kings 12; 13). They claimed that Abraham's children could worship in the mountains of Samaria without going to Jerusalem. Faithful Israelites had continued to observe the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, but Jeroboam had set up a feast in competition with the Passover so that his followers would not go to Jerusalem and serve Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:26–33).

In speaking with the Samaritan woman, Jesus ignored age-old debates and announced that worship to God would soon be changed, being offered in spirit and in truth. Worship "in spirit" refers to the intentions and motives within the worshiper. Worship "in truth" means that the worshiper's actions must be according to truth, God's Word. Worship offered to God in an empty ritual is unacceptable. Neither are worship actions acceptable if God has not instructed them.

True worship has several characteristics. First, true worship is *internal*. Although it may involve physical actions outside the minds of worshipers, true adoration and praise must emanate from the mind of each individual.

Second, true worship is *intentional*. It is done

with purpose of mind. Worship cannot be done accidentally. Going through the physical motions alone does not constitute worship; it must be an intent of the person involved.

Third, true worship is *vertical*. Worship is not directed to or dependent upon other worshipers. True worship is for the praise and glory of God, not for the acclaim and acceptance of others. Performances for the benefit of others are out of place in the worship of the Lord. While a person is teaching or singing, some benefits are derived by those who hear; but at the same time that Christians are "speaking to one another" in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, they are "making melody" and "singing with thankfulness" in their hearts *to God* (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). The recipient of worship can only be Deity.

Fourth, true worship is *momentary*. Worship is made up of actions directed toward God in response to His wishes. A person may worship anywhere and anytime in many ways. In Acts, praying and singing occurred on multiple occasions, both private and public, depending on the intent of one's soul. Worship is momentary and is limited to those actions which a person intentionally directs toward God in response to the instructions in His Word.

Furthermore, true worship is not vain (Mark 7:7). It is not ignorant (Acts 17:23) and is not performed according to human will or decisions (Colossians 2:20–23).

CONCLUSION

Worship of God is now the privilege of all Christians everywhere. It is not limited to any geographical place or to one priestly tribe. All Christians are designated as priests, able to offer acceptable worship to God (1 Peter 2:5, 9–11). Although the acts of worship (the Lord's Supper, prayer, singing, teaching, and the contribution) are to be done in assemblies of the saints, some of these are proper anytime and anywhere. One exception is the Lord's Supper, which was never eaten on any day other than the first day of the week. Singing, praying, teaching, and contributing are seen throughout Acts on other days as well as the first day. Therefore, we must conclude from this book that eating the supper on any other day is not acceptable to God. The Lord was resurrected on no other day, and no other

day is set aside for this special remembrance of His death.

The Lord's Day is a day of special homage and remembrance (Revelation 1:10). We have the marvelous privilege to be reminded every seven days of our forgiveness through Christ and His sacrifice for our sins.

Since God is the One to be worshiped, only He has the rightful choice of what human beings should do to honor Him. How arrogant it is for people to make up their own rules of worship! Men often choose to do what pleases themselves rather than what is taught plainly to be pleasing to God.

The new Christians in Acts, coming from Jewish backgrounds, readily accepted God's new instructions. This book records the marvel-

ous changes these Christians made in their lives, and their examples are worthy of the consideration and respect of people today. ♦

Take Action

"Do something. Either lead, follow, or get out of the way!"

"No one ever climbed a hill just by looking at it."

"Failure is not the worst thing in the world. The very worst is not to try."

"Acting without thinking is a lot like shooting without aiming."

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