

How God Wants Us To Worship Him, Pt. 4

Biblical Worship

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Acts chapter two beginning with verse 37 and we will read to the end of the chapter.

“Now when they heard this...”¹

And, as we know, the “this” is referring to Peter’s sermon previous to this.

Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.²

First I want to focus on verse 42 today.

¹ Acts 2:37.

² Acts 2:37-47.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”³

Now this is the fourth sermon in our series on worship and I have said I chose the worship of God as the subject of my first sermons here at Reformation Presbyterian Church for one reason and that is because worshipping God is the most important thing we can possibly do. And the only way to worship him properly is to worship him biblically as he has laid out in the Bible how to worship him.

If we go wrong in our worship it won’t matter what else we do right in Church or in life, in our families and our daily walk. He will be very displeased.

On the other hand, if we take the time to learn how he commands us to worship him and then obey him, we know that he is pleased with us. So that is why we are taking our time. We are going through the Scripture. It is not a race. We are going slowly in order to know as much as we possibly can about how the Lord wants us to worship him, because, above all, he is our Father. And we love him and we want to please him. It is the duty of every Christian to search the Scriptures to find out all you can about how to worship the Lord biblically and then find a church that practices biblical worship.

It is not always easy, is it?

Now to summarize last week’s sermon we said that God is to be worshipped only in the manner he has commanded in the Bible. And we said this is called the regulative principle of worship which by now I am sure you are well aware of and well assimilated with. We said that because we are under grace, but not under law that is what the Bible says. But we said that doesn’t mean we can worship God any way we feel like it. Jesus said, “True worshippers,” and, of course, Jesus is New Testament. This comes in the New Testament. Jesus said that, “True worshippers are those who worship God in spirit and in truth.”

Nowhere did Jesus ever say that we have the freedom to worship God only in the spirit and ignore the commandments, the truth. A right spirit is critical and a right spirit is the inner internal part of worship, the heart. And without a right heart before God, our worship would be like the Pharisees, cold and sterile and unloving. But of equal importance, Jesus said, is worshipping God in truth in addition to spirit.

Now what is truth? Well, Jesus tells us, “Thy Word is truth.”⁴ God’s Word, the Bible is truth. So to worship God in truth means to worship him according to the Bible. Not to add to it or take anything away from it.

We said that some accuse those who are concerned about externals in worship of being Legalists. Well, a Legalist is not someone who obeys God. As I quoted my dear, dear

³ Acts 2:42.

⁴ John 17:17.

friend and brother Jack Einstein who said, “Well, I haven’t murdered anybody today so I must be a Legalist.”

A Legalist is someone who thinks salvation comes by obeying God. You know, you have got to follow these rules and if you follow all these rules then you will be saved. I remember talking to one woman about her state of her soul and she said to me, “Yes, I think I am going to go to heaven because I am better than at least half the people I know.”

And that is the attitude of a lot of people. Well, you know, as long as there is going to be this giant balance scale, remember we talked about it. You know, God will put all the good things here and all the bad things here and we kind of hope it will all kind of balance out to the good.

Well, people make that up. There is no... nothing in the Bible about that at all. It is faith in Jesus Christ that has paid for our sins that produces salvation, God’s grace produces faith in our hearts to believe in Christ.

And we said that Christians are to obey God, but:

Are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:
Not of works, lest any man should boast.⁵

So Christians obey God out of love for him doing good works which were prepared by him before hand for us to do it says in Ephesians 2:10.

We said that the animal sacrifices, the altars and the robes and the priesthood and the musical instruments and the incense and such of Old Testament worship was a shadow of a picture of the coming of Christ. For us to practice these things now would be to deny that Christ has come.

We said that what from the Old Testament is not fulfilled in the New Testament is still in force. And we said this has to be because God hasn’t changed his mind about wanting to be worshipped as he commands. Nothing in the New Testament even hints at anything like that.

We said that the New Testament, just as the Old, teaches the regulative principle of worship. Matthew 17 verses one through six on the Mount of Transfiguration. Remember when Peter said, “Oh, Lord, let’s build three tabernacles or places of worship for you and Moses and Elijah.” The Father, the heavenly Father seriously rebuked Peter and basically told Peter to shut up.

He said, “Listen to my Son. Don’t make up your own worship.”

So, again, that is the regulative principle of worship. Jesus said in Mark 7:6 to the Pharisees by adding their own ideas to the worship of God they were hypocrites, that they

⁵ Ephesians 2:8-9.

gave lip service to God. But he said their hearts were far from God and that because they ignored what God commanded for worship substituting their own commandments... Now listen to what Jesus said, “Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”⁶ Teaching that you have to do certain things in worship that aren’t in the Bible and you say, “Well, yeah, you have got to do these.”

Well, Jesus said, “In vain do you worship me if you do these things.”

Also we noted in Matthew 28 the Great Commission where Jesus commanded his ; disciples which includes all of God’s people, saying, “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”⁷

And we pointed out he didn’t say, “Teach them to observe whatsoever I haven’t forbidden,” which is the way a lot of people think worship ought to be. Well, as long as it is not forbidden in the Bible it is ok to do.

That is spinning Jesus’ words completely around.

Now that should be plenty of evidence from Scripture that the regulative principle of worship, that we do only in worship what God commands, is confirmed in the New Testament. But there is more.

And, by the way, my plan for this series is once we have completed our survey of Scripture to demonstrate the biblical validity of the regulative principle in worship we will then examine Scripture to discover exactly what it is that God wants us to do in worship. So in other words we started by saying, ok, he doesn’t want us to invent our own worship. But then that is not enough, is it? We have got to find out what he actually does want us to do in worship and we are going to do that, Lord willing.

But I want to finish our survey of the New Testament of showing how it also reinforces the regulative principle of worship.

When Paul tells us how the Lord’s Supper is to be administered he says, in 1 Corinthians 11, “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.”⁸

This repeats the regulative principle of worship. He received from the Lord the instructions exactly as he had... for how that the Lord Supper is to be administered. And he delivered those instructions exactly as he had received them from the Lord, not adding to or taking away from them in any way. I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered to you, not I have received of the Lord... I took out a few things that sounded

⁶ Mark 7:6-7.

⁷ Matthew 28:20.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:23.

kind of harsh and I added a few things of my own, because they made it more spiritual and loving and holy, because as long as your heart is sincere, that is what really matters.

That is not the verse, is it?

Well, if the Lord had wanted that he would have told Paul to do it that way. He would have said, "Paul, you are the great apostle, you know. And I trust you to take my instructions and you know what sounds good. You know what sounds holy. Fix them up a little bit."

He didn't do that.

Of course, he wanted Paul to structure the worship in a certain way without changing anything. And Paul did that. What Paul said is very simple. "I received the instructions of the Lord about what the Church is supposed to do and I have given them to you exactly as he gave them to me and you are to do it exactly that way."

Just as David received the instructions for building the temple for the worship of God, right down to the tiniest details and he gave them to Solomon expecting that he would follow them down to the tiniest detail without adding to it or taking away from anything.

Now the worship of the New Testament Church is not based on the worship that took place in the temple. So how do we know that? Well, for one thing the New Testament book of Hebrews tells us that the temple worship with its altar and its sacrifices and all the ritual was a shadow pointing to the coming of Christ.

Hebrews 8:5 says, "The copy and shadow of the heavenly things."

Turn to the book of Hebrews in the New Testament chapter 10 beginning with verse one.

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. herefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7 ¶ Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He

taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.⁹

That is telling us that the temple worship is over. The sacrificial system is over. We are not to look to the temple worship to structure our worship today. The temple worship taught the Israelites that God requires a blood sacrifice for sin. It was a teaching ministry among other things. It was a picture of Christ's sacrifice to come, the living sacrifice, the true Lamb of God. Because they had been given this atonement system in the temple worship as a picture of Christ's atonement, they had no excuse for not understanding Christ's blood atonement for the sins of his people when it did come.

Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament sacrificial system with its offerings and ritual ceremonies and holy clothing and all the rest of that that had its culmination pointing to Christ in the temple worship.

So God has left no doubt that his church is not to look to the temple worship as its model. In fact, he... if we had any question about it, where would you go to have temple worship today? Don't go to Jerusalem. It is not there anymore. God utterly destroyed it in 70 AD shortly after Christ was crucified and resurrected.

When Jesus said, "Look at this temple and, you know, there won't be a stone left, a stone upon a stone left," well, he was saying what was going to happen.

When the Roman army invaded Jerusalem and obliterated the temple not one stone was left on the other. You read the account of that time by Josephus, an early Jewish historian. Many historians say this may have been the most horrible event in human history, the sacking of Jerusalem.

Josephus says that there were bands of marauders wandering through the streets looking for food and they killed people to get the food and they smelled some food cooking and they broke into a house and they demanded of the woman there, "Give us this food that you are cooking." And she said, "Oh, sure, I will be glad to share it with you." And she pulled her baby out of the oven. And even these horrible murderers were horrified that a mother would cook her own child.

⁹ Hebrews 10:1-6-18.

And the woman said, “Don’t you want to share it with me? Well, fine. I will take it all for myself.”

That is the situation in Jerusalem at the time of the sacking, at the time of the Roman invasion.

All right.

God has further shown that temple worship is at an end once and for all never to be instituted again by preventing the temple from ever being rebuilt. It has never been rebuilt in 2000 years. He utterly abolished the whole ceremonial system of which the sacrifices and all the rest of it was a part of worship.

So what is our biblical model for worship today if it is not the Old Testament temple? The Old Testament ceremonial system is fulfilled so what is now commanded today? Well a more important question could not be asked. What our model today is is the worship that the Lord Jesus Christ practiced, the worship that the apostles continued, the worship that the early church after the apostles continued, the worship that the remnant of the early church has always practiced. There have been little enclaves, most notably probably the Waldensians in northern... familiar with the Waldensians, you know, in northern Italy and southern Switzerland in the mountainous regions. They were isolated geographically so they could teach the purity of the early Church. Many people think the Waldensians may go back to the time of the... around the time of the apostles and continuing. So they were God’s remnant.

New Testament worship is based on simple synagogue worship which replaced the elaborate detailed temple ceremonies that prefigured Christ in his redemptive work.

Now what was the synagogue worship? Well, we looked in Acts... remember when we began with our verse we looked in Acts chapter two. Let’s turn back to that.

Acts chapter two verse 42.

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”¹⁰

We know also from Scripture and from history that the singing of psalms was a part of synagogue worship. For example, at the last supper Jesus and the apostles sang a psalm, the great Hallel.

Synagogue worship consisted of prayer, the apostle’s doctrine here it is called, which would be reading and expounding the Scriptures; breaking of bread, which we know is the Lord’s supper; and, as I say, we know elsewhere in Scripture the singing of psalms which we will discuss.

¹⁰ Acts 2:42.

This synagogue worship was the worship that Christ himself practiced. And so for those who say that we must have more in worship, that we must have rituals, that we have to light candles and have an altar, et cetera, we have to have priests and fancy clothes and that we must sing songs written by men and we have to accompany our signing with musical instruments and stage plays and have other forms of entertainment, we have to tickle people's ears with sermons that make them laugh and feel good about themselves. I have only one question for those people who advocate this. Do we dare tell the Lord Jesus Christ that we know better how to worship God than he does? The worship of the Church is the simple worship of the synagogue under the instruction of God in the New Testament. Every biblically orthodox scholar agrees that this was the worship of the apostles and the early Christians. There is no doubt of that.

Now, of course, we are not to conclude from this that, ok, we.... we are going to abandon the Christian Church and start worshipping in a Jewish synagogue. That is not what I am saying. The synagogue worship is our model, but it has been fulfilled in Christ as he himself said when he worshipped in the synagogue.

In Luke four beginning with verse 16 the Lord said, the Bible says:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.¹¹

Christ fulfilled synagogue worship. He showed us that the elements are our model, but he is God and the trinitarian God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is the God that we worship.

The modern Jewish synagogue, of course, denies that Jesus is the Christ and worship there would be an abomination. It would be denying that Christ has come.

But he taught us that our New Testament worship is the fruit from which the seed is the synagogue.

Now what more as I hope we can discuss at some point in a Bible study or a sermon, the apostles and the early church were Presbyterian. The Bible teaches nothing about

¹¹ Luke 4:16-21.

organizing the Church along [?] lines, like a hierarchy of bishops and archbishops and, you know, cardinals and what not such as the Roman Catholic or Episcopalian churches have. Nor does it teach anything about like congregationalism that every church is absolutely independent and there is no other higher church courts or authorities. The Bible clearly teaches that elders were ordained in every church. Paul told Timothy, “Go and ordain elders in every church.”

This goes back to the Old Testament. Elders, Israel had elders that ruled.

One of the true Greek words for these church officers is πρεσβυτερος (pres-boo'-ter-os) which is translated presbyters. That is the word from which we get the Presbyterian.

The Bible teaches they met together as equals in a presbytery or a regional meeting of the elders. The Bible doesn't teach that any church can be independent, an island unto itself. The body of Christ doesn't have a toe or a finger that works by itself independent of the rest of the body.

Well, let's look back at God's Word now and see how he wants us to worship him, continuing on that subject.

In Acts 15 verse 21 the Lord says, “For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”¹²

That is Acts 15:21. “Those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”¹³

Revelation 1:3 says, “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”¹⁴

Therefore we conclude from these Scriptures that the Scriptures are to be read aloud in worship.

In 2 Timothy four verse two Paul's instructions to Timothy the young pastor is, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”¹⁵

Therefore the Word of God which is the Bible is to be preached in worship.

The definition of preaching is found in the Bible.

¹² Acts 15:21.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Revelation 1:3.

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 4:2.

In Nehemiah eight verse eight Ezra and the priests of Israel stood before the people and the verse says, “So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”¹⁶

So preaching must, first of all, be to read the Bible distinctly to the people. What does distinctly mean? Well, Matthew Henry, the Puritan commentator said, “Reading the Scriptures in religious assemblies is an ordinance of God whereby he is honored and his church edified. And upon special occasions we must be willing to attend for many hours together on the reading and expounding of the Word of God. Those mentioned here in Nehemiah were thus employed for six hours.”

I am not going to keep you for six hours. Not today.

Matthew Henry continues, “Let those that read and preach the Word learn also to deliver themselves distinctly as those who understand what they say and are affected with it themselves and who desire that those they speak to may understand it, retain it and be affected with it likewise. It is a snare for a man to devour that which is holy.”

When they read they expounded. They showed the intent and meaning of it and what use was to be made of it. They gave the sense, in other words, that they might cause the people to understand the reading.

Matthew Henry says, “It is requisite that those who hear the Word should understand it, else it is to them but an empty sound of words. It is therefore required of those who are teachers by office that they explain the Word and give the sense of it.”

Understand thou what thou readest and have you understood all these things are good questions to be put to the hearers, but how should we accept someone guide us is as proper a question for them to put to their teachers.

In Acts eight Philip ran to the Ethiopian eunuch and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

And the eunuch said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. “So they read in the book of the law...”¹⁷ going back to Nehemiah.

“So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Nehemiah 8:8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Reading is good. Preaching is good. But expounding brings the reading and the preaching together and makes the reading the more intelligible and the preaching the more convicting.

To give the sense of Scripture means to explain what it means as the Lord gives the preacher the guidance and the ability to do it.

Now Paul adds to this his charge to Timothy and to all preachers that they convince, rebuke and exhort.

Now Matthew Henry again says about this, “Call upon those under thy charge to take heed of sin, to do their duty. Call upon them to repent and believe and live a holy life. Convince wicked people of the evil and danger of their wicked courses. Endeavor by dealing plainly with them to bring them to repentance. Rebuke them with gravity and authority in Christ’s name that they may take thy displeasure against them as an indication of God’s displeasure.”

So in the service and otherwise, the preacher must direct, encourage and quicken those who began well. Exhort them means persuade them to hold on, endure to the end with all longsuffering and doctrine. You know, do it very patiently with all longsuffering. He must do it rationally, not with passion, but with doctrine. That is, quote, “in order to the reducing of them the good practices instill into them good principles. Teach them the truth as it is in Jesus. Reduce them to a firm belief of it. And this will be a means to reclaim them from evil and to bring them to good.”

Therefore the Bible is to be preached.

James 1:22 says, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”¹⁹

Acts 10:33 says, “So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God.”²⁰

Therefore we must gather together in worship. The Bible also says, “Forsake not the fellowship.”

We must hear the word read and preached in worship, as James says, “Not just in our ears, but in our hearts.”

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”²¹

¹⁹ James 1:22.

²⁰ Acts 10:33.

²¹ James 1:22.

That is true hearing and the proof that we truly hear the preaching is that we do the words. We take it out of the church with us and take it with us all week and we do the word. That is the proof that we truly hear the Word.

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”²²

Matthew 13 verse 19 Jesus said, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side.”²³

The sower and the various seeds and what happened to them. Some sprung up in the sun and didn't last et cetera.

We must understand the words, Jesus said, read and preached to us. If we allow our minds to wander during worship not stirring up ourselves to focus our attention away from all worldly thoughts and on to the Word itself, we will not understand the Word and it is going to do us no good.

Satan is waiting to distract you from hearing the Word, to snatch it away from your hearts just as it is sown. And his weapon is to distract you with worldly thoughts.

As you are in church and as you read the Word in family worship and in your private devotion.

Jesus said, “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.” So make it your life's work to understand the Word. Make it your life work to understand the Word. Don't be a hearer and not a doer.

Hebrews 4:2 says, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”²⁴

This teaches us we have to receive the hearing of the Word with faith. If you don't have faith in the triune God of the Bible, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit the Word of God will do nothing for you. You will be a clanging cymbal, an empty wind signifying nothing. Faith is not something you can create in yourself. You can't decide to have faith. It is a gift from God. If you don't have faith, ask him for it.

Remember Jesus said, “You have not because you ask not.” Have you ever asked God for more faith? It should be part of your daily prayer to ask God for more faith. Ask him to overflow you with faith. You will be surprised what may happen.

²² James 1:22.

²³ Matthew 13:19.

²⁴ Hebrews 4:2.

Isaiah 66:2 says, "For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word."²⁵

By this we know we have to receive the Word with reverence. Your heart should tremble at his Word.

Well, so far we have learned from Scripture that our worship must have the reading of the Word with godly fear. It has to have the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word in obedience to God with understanding faith and reverence.

There is more, but that is a good place to stop in our sermon series on worship. Lord willing, next Lord's Day we will look at some other areas that Scripture commands for worship and then put it together and compare it to what we are doing here at Reformation Presbyterian Church.

Let's pray.

Our Father, teach us how to worship thee. Remove our hearts of stone and create in us hearts that love you beyond all earthly love, hearts that want to know you above all else. Create in us hearts that produce worship in spirit, but also create in hearts that pant after truth, that drive us to discover how you want to be worshiped.

Father, we do desire to worship thee in spirit and in truth. We know that we commit many sins in worship. Make us truly repentant. Teach us our sins. Show us truth. Give us the right spirit. We come to this place on the Lord's Day because of our desire, most of all, to worship you rightly, to worship you according to your Word and not according to man's word. Thank you, Lord, for putting that desire into our hearts in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

²⁵ Isaiah 66:2.