



The Practice of Worship: Church Practices Series

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The Practice of Worship

Introduction

As we have seen in our last section on the essence of gospel worship, no matter what we actually do in our worship, it is a matter of the heart being right before God and our mind being engaged. If these conditions are not met, we are in sin. In this lesson we will be looking primarily at the practice of corporate worship. Though many of the aspects of corporate worship are found in private worship, it is a much more extensive picture we consider when we address the corporate worship of a local body of believers; what we call the local church. As we begin this topic it is important to review a few of the ideas that will bound this study. It is impossible to cover the entire landscape of worship in one lesson; therefore, we will be looking at it in the following manner:

- The approach to the application of Biblical worship for New Testament believers.
- The primary elements addressed in worship.
- The boundaries of Biblical worship.
- The practices we currently hold to at Southside Bible Church.
- Summary of other areas associated with the local church but not part of every worship service.

Approach to the Application of Biblical Worship

As we approach worship, the area that will inevitably cause more confusion is how we understand how to apply what the Scripture teaches concerning worship to our corporate worship in the local church. This approach to worship has been the subject of great debate throughout the history of the church and greatly effects how individual churches or even entire denominations practice worship. Though we do not hold to any unique revelation on this subject we put forth the following model that we intend to apply in our practice of worship. As addressed in our first lesson we look to the Scripture as our guide to worship. Man made ritual or requirements are not our desire, but in saying this we see that teaching concerning worship in the church has many areas that are not specifically bounded by commands when it comes to specific practice. Much of what we are shown is based in Biblical principles and the application to conscience that is appropriate to our peoples, times, and cultures. The Old Testament provides a wonderful set of guiding principles and examples as to the extreme importance of approaching our God with the proper attitude and in a manner that is pleasing to Him. This pleasing approach was addressed in our last lesson. It is instructive to see that even in the case of failure to perform the specific rituals called out by God when the people's hearts were purified God saw this as acceptable. Though it should never be our desire to fail to do as we ought, it is comforting to know that if our heart is doing its best to stand right before God He will honor that effort. This was evident even under the strict rules of the Old Testament

practices such as found in the passage below. It addressed the failure of the people to perform all that was required when the Passover was re-instituted under Hezekiah. It is also instructive to see that recognition of the failure and a request for forgiveness was made and then honored by God. Failing to do what is right is not an excuse to ignore the Holiness of our God.

- NAB 2 Chronicles 30:18 For a multitude of the people, even many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, **"May the good LORD pardon 19 everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification rules of the sanctuary." 20 So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.** (emphasis added)

Model Used for Applying Scripture to Practice

In this lesson we will use the New Testament teachings guiding worship as our basis for our practice and use the examples and principles found in both the Old and New Testaments as the models that give more detailed substance to the commands we find. Using this approach we can establish the boundaries drawn by commands and principles and also allow for the application of conscience that best fits the people worshipping at this church. We are never to take liberties that God does not allow when we bring worship to Him. Remember from our first lesson, principles extended beyond what they are allowed or applied incorrectly will create a violation of worship to God. This would also apply to personal conscience being violated thus bringing about sin to the individual. We must be careful when we approach God in worship. The table below can help us summarize this approach.

Pleasing Worship	Displeasing Worship
Heart Right and Mind Engaged (In Spirit and in Truth)	Heart Not Right and Mind Not Engaged (Not In Spirit and in Truth)
Commands and Prohibitions Obeyed	Commands and Prohibitions Not Obeyed
Principles Enacted and Applied Correctly	Principles Enacted and Applied Incorrectly
Conscience Not Violated for Individual	Conscience Violated for Individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This provides boundaries to protect us from sinful worship and gives the freedom to each peoples, times, and cultures to raise their hearts in joyful worship to our God. • Guidance based first on the New Testament commands, then on Old Testament and New Testament principles and examples; finally, on the conscience of the elders of this church (since matters of conscience associated with general practices are left to those established for the oversight of the local church). This does not mean that the conscience of the elders is binding on an individual, but is what has been determined to be “profitable” and “edifying” for this local body, at the present time. • Desire to be “profitable” and “edifying” in worship, even if certain actions are “lawful.” 	

It is also instructive to remember that a few very clear principles are given to us concerning any of our actions, but especially our conduct in the assembly of the saints.

As we saw in our first lesson, Paul shows us that though something is lawful, it is not always profitable or edifying. We must not injure a brother with behavior or practices that are intentionally hurtful to him. Paul also reinforces the fact that our gatherings should be edifying in 1 Corinthians 14. In this passage (v. 33), he also reminds us that our God is not a God of confusion but of peace. We are to be guided by these principles in everything that we do when we assemble. It was clear that the Corinthian church was falling into chaos in their practice of worship. We wish to avoid this trap. Liberty is a very dangerous thing when let run wild. This is why it is often seen as easier to set hard and fast rules in a church than to deal with the potential for chaos. We desire to avoid establishing “rules” to protect the flock, but also desire to ensure that all things are done as is proper in the worship of a Holy God. This must be done while teaching the congregation to handle these situations appropriately. Grace is needed for all of us when faced with such a challenging task.

Primary Elements of Worship

It is interesting to note that the New Testament never gives us any specific description of a worship service. Paul does have instruction to churches that are improperly conducting worship (1 Corinthians 11-14), but we never have a “how to” description of a New Testament worship service. This does not mean that God has left us to wonder when it comes to worship. It is also evident from both the New and Old Testaments that often what we call worship was not present when the term “worship” is used. Often praise, prayer, etc. can be going on and yet “then they fell down and worshiped.” This having nothing to do with anything else but a right heart and engaged mind that caused the action of falling down and worshipping. This heart and mind focused on the adoration of the Living God is where we should be in our worship.

- NAB Matthew 14:33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"
- NAB 2 Chronicles 29:28 While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this *continued* until the burnt offering was finished. 29 Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. 30 Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the LORD with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped.

We will leave this topic to the Spirit’s work on our hearts and focus more on the elements that comprise the “worship service” of New Testament believers.

In our understanding of corporate worship let us first consider the larger scope of activities/practices that we do find in Scripture related to the activities that happen when the church is assembled and then from that what elements would be found in a worship service.

11 Activities/Practices regarding local church *when assembled*

1. Gathering consistently (Heb. 10:24-25, Acts 20:7 implies the Lord's Day, first day of the week)
2. Equipping through the teaching/preaching of God's Word (Eph 4:11-12, 1 Tim. It is revered and guarded.)
3. Equipping is done by qualified church leadership and gifted teachers (Pastors/Teachers/Elders and those with the gift of teaching, Titus 1, 1 Tim. 3)
4. Result of the equipping is learning, exhortation, and edification (1 Cor. 14:26, 31, 1 Tim. 4:13)
5. Assembling is both orderly and peaceful (1 Cor. 14:33, 40)
6. The assembly is characterized by unity/love (use of spiritual gifts 1 Cor. 13, Eph. 4:1-6, James 2:1-13 no favoritism in the assembly)
7. Worship in song (1 Cor. 14:26 when assembled each one has a psalm...to sing)
8. Prayer – seen through out the NT Scriptures, see references in body of paper
9. Giving - see reference in body of paper
10. Practice of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-33)
11. The motivation and goal for all that is done is Jesus Christ

Let us now consider the elements that we find established or implicit when it comes to worship.

Teaching/Preaching

It is very clear from the New Testament that teaching and preaching is the very foundation of the worship of God. To proclaim Him before the congregation and instruct them in the ways of the Lord is part of our worship. In 1 Corinthians 14 we see Paul's instructions to the church (in correction). As part of this, he wants all instruction to be in an orderly manner and in a way that provides edification to all present, but especially believers. The following verses provide adequate reference to the centrality of preaching and teaching as part of the worship when the church gathers.

- NAB Acts 10:42 "And He ordered us to **preach** to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead." (He = Jesus)
- NAB Colossians 1:28 We **proclaim** Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.
- NAB Acts 5:21 Upon hearing *this*, they entered into the temple about daybreak and *began* to **teach**. Now when the high priest and his associates came, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel, and sent *orders* to the prison house for them to be brought.
- NAB 1 Corinthians 4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I **teach** everywhere in every church.
- NAB 2 Timothy 2:2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to **teach** others also.
- NAB Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Boundaries and Practices

It is apparent from the Scriptures that what is to be taught is the Word of God as it appears in the Bible. These are the boundaries that bind us. Teaching and preaching from the Bible is what is stated as our means of instruction. We know that we have been warned concerning false teachers that teach the precepts of men as if they were the Word of God. Thus, so far as practice is concerned, we will simply teach the Word of God. We will teach the Word as it comes from Scripture to bring out the meaning (exegesis) from the passages from which we teach. This is in opposition to reading meaning into the passages (isogesis). We will primarily teach entire books or at least major sections of books. This does not preclude "topical" styled teaching, but this being more prone to error and abuse it will be used sparingly during worship. There will be topics that are more encompassing that are contained in a single book which will require this topical approach; however, these will more likely be addressed in studies outside of the worship service. In either case meaning will be drawn out of passages, not read into the passage.

Singing/Music

It is a truly amazing sight when God's people praise Him with song. Both the Old and New Testaments are full of references to praising and worshipping God through song. This is, however, one of the areas that bring about much dissension in the church. It is a shame that such an incredible means of worship given by God, used by His people through all of history, has brought about such controversy. It is instructive for us to take a more detailed look at this subject so we may practice this glorious means of worship with both the reverence and joy that our God desires. For a quick look at the New Testament teachings concerning song the following verses suffice to identify the continuance of music as a means of worship. We need to take a look at the meaning of these commands to ensure clarity for the Church.

- NAB Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- NAB Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; 20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

New Testament Words for Praise or Song

The following words are used to describe the singing or praise used by New Testament believers:

Psalms - (*OT*) *psalm* (LU 20.42); *psalmos* – 1) a striking, twanging, 1a) of a striking the chords of a musical instrument 1b) of a pious song, a psalm. -- as used among believers *song of praise, sacred song* (1C 14.26).

Hymns - *humnos* --1) as song in the praise of gods, heroes, conquerors 2) a sacred song, hymn -- *a hymn, sacred song, song of praise to God*, esp. used to express thanksgiving.

Spiritual “songs” - *ode* -- 1) a song, ode -- *song*; in the NT, a relig. song sung by a community gathered for worship (Eph. 5:19).

We can see that these words have the same meaning that any of us would use when we describe what is considered a song or music today. The difference between music that is “religious” in nature and that which is not is the heart behind it and the meaning of the words. There is no “spiritual” music defined in the Bible. It is simply the music found wherever a believer's heart is bringing praise to God, no matter when or where or in what particular form. To illustrate this point we can look to the examples found throughout the Bible.

Uses of Song

- In the passage above (Colossians 3:16), Paul tells believers to use music to wisely teach and admonish one another.
- In the same passage and in Ephesians 4:19-20, Paul tells us that music is to act as a form of thanks to God.
- In heaven we see that song is used for praise to God eternally (Revelation 5:9).
- For encouragement in times of trouble (Acts 16:25 – Paul & Silas in jail).
- Throughout the Old Testament we see that music is used for praise to God.

Topics of Song

- In the Psalms there are many topics of song:
 - Prayers set to music (Psalm 86, 90, 142)
 - Against the folly of the wicked (Psalm 52, 53, 55)
 - For aid against enemies (Psalm 54, 57, 59)
 - Concerning God and Man (Psalm 90)
 - Concerning the Greatness of God (Psalm 92, 93, 97, 111)
 - Call for Worshipping God (Psalm 96, 100)
 - Concerning God's care for His creation (Psalm 104)
 - Concerning His People (Psalm 112, 113)
 - Pure Praise (Psalm 117)
- The prophet Habakkuk put his teaching to Israel into song (at least chapter 3)
Habakkuk 3:19

Forms and Length of Songs

We have already seen that the forms vary, from prayers to teaching. The New Testament does not specify any form of song outside of the brief “new songs” in Revelation. The Old Testament is more instructive for examples of song used in praise and worship.

- Songs can be:
 - Long (Psalm 119)
 - Short (Psalm 117)
 - Repeating (Psalm 136) - “For His lovingkindness is everlasting” repeats every other line
 - New songs (Psalm 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 149:1, Revelation 5:9, 14:3)
 - Old Songs (Revelation 15:3, “Song of Moses” - see Deuteronomy 32)
 - Played with all forms of instruments
 - Trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrel, stringed instruments, pipe, cymbals (Psalm 150)
(Note: every form of modern instrument is found here; string, wind, and percussive.)
- Sung without instruments (Acts 16:25)

- Songs can be Sung by:
 - Choirs with directors (2 Chronicles 29:28, 30 – reinstatement of temple worship, Psalm 85, 88)
 - By the congregation (Colossians 3:16, Mark 14:26 – Jesus and His disciples)
 - Though not specifically used in formal temple worship, other examples of song used in praise and worship are as follows:
 - Miriam leading the women in song and dance after the escape across the Reed Sea -- NAB Exodus 15:20 Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. 21 Miriam answered them, "Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea."
 - Miriam led the women and answered back to them, singing as an individual to God and the congregation of Israel.
 - We see that Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah at his death and was joined by male and female singers. This lament was made an ordinance (command) throughout Israel.
 - NAB 2 Chronicles 35:25 Then Jeremiah chanted a lament for Josiah. And all the male and female singers speak about Josiah in their lamentations to this day. And they made them an ordinance in Israel; behold, they are also written in the Lamentations.
 - Men and women were used as singers in the courts of David and Solomon and were counted as part of those of Israel when Ezra and Nehemiah returned (See 2 Samuel 19:35, Nehemiah 6:67, Ezra 2:65).

Boundaries and Practices for Music

We have seen that the use of music has few physical boundaries. The heart of the music is what carries the weight. This does not imply “anything goes.” A reverent and joyful heart is at the focus of music used in worship. We see that most forms of music and musical presentation have been used in giving God praise. The following areas we see as legitimate forms of music in our worship; however, the elders of this church or their specified designee will have say over song selection to ensure that we honor God in all that we do concerning music in the worship service.

- Congregational Singing with or without direction/leading.
- Choir/Ensemble Singing (men and/or women participating).
- Individual Song (men or women participating).
- Song with or without instrumentation. All forms of instruments are allowed; however, edification and profitability to the congregation will guide any instrumentation used in the worship service.
- Music provided by local musicians or other musicians via recorded media.
- Music accompanied by dance (Psalm 150). Edification and profitability will also guide this area of worship. This is a very foreign thought to our culture, though it was not to the Jews. Don't look for this anytime soon.

- Hymns and choruses.
- New songs.
- Old songs.
- Songs directed to God.
- Songs directed toward the edification of the believer.
- Shouts of praise so long as it is not disruptive to the service. Psalm 32:11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart. – The classic “Amen” is most representative of this act in the church today.

In all areas careful oversight will be given to those that participate in the preparation, participation, and presentation of music in the worship service. If at any time the elders deem that the content, instrumentation, participation, or presentation of music comes short of being intended to bring glory to our God or that it is not edifying or profitable to the church, such music will be ceased. Given that the hearts of believers are toward bringing glory to God, we do not see this as a major issue. A few thoughts on general practice of participating in worship music:

- Congregational Music
 - The congregation should come to worship with a prepared heart. They should recognize that we are giving praise to a Holy God. We are not coming to a secular musical event. It is not for our entertainment.
 - The congregation should sing with joy and from a full heart. It does not matter what kind of voice one has; it was given to us by God. He accepts the praise given in this way. None of the rest of the congregation should care what anyone else sounds like. A “joyful noise” should raise all of our hearts to bring even greater praise to our God.
- Individual or Group Music
 - As with the rest of the congregation the individual or group music must be approached with the right heart and attitude. It is not for the edification of the presenter of the song, but it is a sacrifice of praise to our God and/or for the edification of those that listen in the congregation.
 - Since this is a form of praise that can be easily abused, great care will be given to those that are permitted to participate. This is not to imply that it requires a professional level of talent to participate. It is important to ensure the right heart is exhibited and that it will be edifying to those that hear. This is why youths or children will only rarely be allowed to participate in this form of worship. The heart must be right else the elders would be encouraging those that do not understand what they are participating in to come without the proper preparation.

Prayer

This would appear to be very obvious to most believers that prayer would be part of our worship. This is true; however, most instruction or example of prayer is personal prayer, done in private. Jesus makes clear warning to not pray for public attention or praise. It is a great temptation to listen to an eloquent man pray and give great attention to that man. The heart is the part that matters, not the eloquence. When we practice prayer in our worship we must be ever vigilant to have our hearts right whether we are eloquent or not.

- NAB Matthew 6:5 "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they **love to stand and pray in the synagogues** and on the street corners so that they **may be seen by men**. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 "But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.
- NAB Luke 20:45 And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for **appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.**"
- NAB Matthew 14:23 After He had **sent the crowds away**, He went up on the mountain by Himself to **pray**; and when it was evening, He was there **alone**.

We are shown that prayer is something that the people of God are to practice regularly. Though there is nothing specifically stated in the form of a command to pray as part of our corporate worship, we see overwhelming evidence of the practice in the church. Also, we see the attention our Lord paid to the misuse of public prayer and the abuse of the temple while prayer was forsaken. The following verses are sufficient to establish the practice of prayer in congregational worship as the norm.

Old Testament References

NAB 1 Kings 8:30 "Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they **pray** toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive.

NAB 2 Chronicles 6:21 "Listen to the supplications of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they **pray** toward this place; hear from Your dwelling place, from heaven; hear and forgive.

NAB 2 Chronicles 7:14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and **pray** and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

NAB Isaiah 56:7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of **prayer**. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of **prayer** for all the peoples."

NAB Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the **prayer** of the upright is His delight.

NAB Proverbs 15:29 The LORD is far from the wicked, But He hears the **prayer** of the righteous.

New Testaments References

NAB Acts 6:4 "But we will devote ourselves to **prayer** and to the ministry of the word."

- Referencing the apostles' need to stay devoted to prayer.

NAB Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but **prayer** for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

NAB Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

NAB 1 Corinthians 14:15 What is *the outcome* then? I will **pray** with the spirit and I will **pray** with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.

- Referencing practices in the assembly of believers.

NAB Luke 18:1 Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to **pray** and not to lose heart,

NAB Ephesians 6:18 With all prayer and petition **pray** at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

NAB 1 Thessalonians 5:25 Brethren, **pray** for us.

NAB 2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, **pray** for us that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you;

NAB James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and **pray** for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

NAB Matthew 21:13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF **PRAYER**'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."

NAB Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to **prayer**, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Referencing the gathering of the disciples just after the ascension of the Lord.

NAB Acts 3:1 Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of **prayer**.

NAB Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by **prayer** and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

NAB 1 Timothy 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and prayers*, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, 2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

Boundaries and Practice of Prayer in Worship

Again, the prayers of God's saints need to be brought with the proper attitude. This being stated, the practice of prayer will be approached in a manner that fits best with the service each week. As general practice, those that will be bringing a prayer during the service will know before so that they may prepare. Prayers can be offered for almost anything, as is our example from Scriptures, however, we see prayer in the worship service as that most fitting to each aspect of the service. Also, as a general practice, we will have men bring the prayers. This is not to imply that women can not pray in public services, but this is in keeping with the principles of leadership of the church and home as resting with the men. (The subject of men and women's roles in the church will be presented in later lessons.) We desire to maintain this order in our worship. There may be occasions that women will be asked to bring a prayer, but this will not be the norm.

Giving

Though we find no command as to how we give, except with the proper, cheerful attitude, we see that giving to the work of the Lord was practiced in both the New and Old Testaments. This is not commanded as part of the worship "service." This practice is still, however, a part of the general practice of worship of God's people. Jesus gave us many warnings concerning practicing righteousness before men to be seen. Our giving is to be done in a way to call only attention to God's gracious gift not our giving. What one gives is a matter between you and God just as Paul told the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." This is not a lesson on the full extent of Biblical giving, but we do not want to neglect this subject in our worship.

The passages below are sufficient to establish giving (in the monetary sense) as part of our worship and general practice of our church and warn us concerning improper giving.

- NAB 1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. 3 When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;
- NAB Matthew 6:1 "**Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed** by them; otherwise **you have no reward** with your Father who is in heaven. 2 "So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to 3 "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that **your giving will be in secret**; and your Father who sees what is done in **secret will reward you**."
- NAB Philippians 4:15 You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, **no church shared with me** in the matter of **giving and receiving but you alone**;
- NAB 2 Corinthians 9:7 **Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart**, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for **God loves a cheerful giver**.
- NAB Luke 20:45 And while all the people were listening, He said to the disciples, 46 "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love respectful greetings in the market places, and chief seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets, 47 who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation." 21:1 And He looked up and saw the **rich putting their gifts into the treasury**. 2 And He saw a poor widow putting in two small copper coins. 3 And He said, "Truly I say to you, **this poor widow put in more than all of them**; 4 for they all out of their surplus put into the offering; but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on."
- NAB Exodus 23:19 "You shall bring the choice first fruits of your soil into the house of the LORD your God. You are not to boil a young goat in the milk of its mother.
- NAB Numbers 18:13 "The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; everyone of your household who is clean may eat it.

Boundaries and Practices concerning Giving in Worship

We choose to practice the custom established by Paul in Galatia and Corinth. Since we also meet to worship on the first day of the week, we choose to practice joyfully giving back to God

what He has provided to us during the corporate time of worship. This does not have any other meaning than this is our practice. Believers may give to God's work at any time, but it is easier to avoid confusion or abuse of funds if it is done when it is best controlled and checked. It is also profitable to have our minds focused on worshipping God when we give. It is too easy to write a check and fail to have our minds drawn to the joy and privilege we have to give to the work of God. If our hearts are not right before Him, the money we give becomes a mere attempt at bribery or consoling our wounded consciences. Let us strive to be cheerful givers as we honor the Lord for our provision in our worship.

Other Church Oriented Practices

We know that the assembly of believers had other practices that we know were performed publicly, such as, Baptism, the Lord's Supper (or Communion), recognition of set apart leaders, etc. These activities will be discussed in other lessons or in written form, but for the sake of time, a brief summary as to their practice will be given here. We do practice the Lord's Supper as part of our regular worship services (though not in each service). This is not to prohibit it from being performed at another time. Likewise, Baptism is encouraged, but not required to be before the assembly of God's people. In all these areas, corporate participation is the main theme behind them. We find no specific commands on these subjects concerning the practice during the "worship service." We know that Baptism was performed on a lonely road in the desert without any concern on Phillip's part as to its validity. Again, we desire for the church to celebrate these other corporate acts to their fullest, but they are not required to be part of a "worship service."

Areas of Exception

There is one element that remains to be dealt with. If you have ever looked into the Scriptures, you will find mention of tongues, prophecy, and revelations (1 Corinthians 14). Paul admonishes the Corinthians to "behave themselves" and gives specific direction concerning these topics when the church is assembled. He even gives instructions not to forbid the speaking in tongues (v. 39). Why then do we not practice these things? This is a great question. If we are to obey what is laid out for us, should we not practice these things? Much of what we see in the "Charismatic Movement" is based on passages like these. Though it is another major study, it is the collective understanding that the instruction given on these topics are associated with gifts that are not currently active in the body of Christ. These are what are referred to as "Sign Gifts." This has been the general holding of the church since the second century when they had no evidence of these gifts continuing beyond the "apostolic age." We hold to the same understanding (though there is much more to be said on this topic). If anyone does, however, believe that they have such gifts, they should bring this to the attention of the elders of the church. If it is determined that they are active gifts, the instructions given in Scripture concerning them will be followed. The abuses practiced by most "Charismatic" churches will not be tolerated in this congregation.

Summary

It is clear that the worship of our God is important and should be approached with a serious mind and a joyful heart. Though not everything can be dealt with in one lesson concerning worship, this should provide a solid basis for our practice.

Psalm 32:11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.