

# THE WORSHIP OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

God has designed the local church to assemble in the same place at the same time (1 Corinthians 14:23). When the church assembles, God has left a pattern in the New Testament for the activities the church engages in. These activities serve two purposes. First, these activities serve to worship (praise, glorify) God (1 Corinthians 14:24-25). Second, these activities serve to build people up in the faith (1 Corinthians 14:26).

## JOHN 4:19-24

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Jesus indicated that true worship is not about a location but about people worshiping in spirit and truth. That is, the kind of worship God desires involves both the internal (the spirit of the person that is heartfelt and sincere) and the external (worshiping the true God and doing the things He desires in worship). Therefore, the church cannot just offer whatever people may desire to offer God in the assemblies as worship (Leviticus 10:1-3; Matthew 15:7-9; Colossians 2:20-23). Instead, every member of the church must make sure they are worshiping in the spirit that pleases God. Then, the church must only engage in the activities they know please God and are honoring to Him as worship, according to the pattern revealed by God in the New Testament Scriptures (2 Thessalonians 2:15; 2 Timothy 1:13).

## 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16

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Like in the Jewish synagogue, Christians needed/need to assemble to hear God's word read and explained (i.e. on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7; 2:42). Those (men, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14) who have learned the apostles' teaching (like Timothy) need to teach those who assemble. So, the training of those who can teach is critical (2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14). The messages written by the apostles and prophets

could also be publicly read during these times (Colossians 4:16). Note that most did not have access to the Scriptures privately at this time (with the New Testament still being written and the Old Testament being limited in availability). This work of teaching God's word in church assemblies was also aided in the New Testament times (while the New Testament was being written) by miraculous gifts (e.g. prophecy, 1 Corinthians 14:1-12), though these have ceased today (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

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This passage helps churches know how to observe the Lord's Supper in a way that pleases God (as it should be observed on the first day of every week, Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Notice the Corinthians were *not* pleasing God with their observance of the Lord's Supper by allowing the Lord's Supper to be something that further divided the church (i.e. between those who would have plenty to eat and drink and those who would not) and making it into a common meal to feed the body. In correcting their error, Paul helps us recognize the Lord's Supper to be a spiritual feast that contains only two elements (unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, Matthew 26:26-29) that help Christians remember Jesus's sacrifice. Churches that share in the Lord's Supper according to God's design both proclaim the Lord's death through this memorial and work to strengthen the Christians spiritually by remembering Jesus's love and the forgiveness He provides.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 14:15

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Both prayer and singing are important elements of worship when the church assembles in one place (v. 23). In context, Paul demonstrated that praying and singing (which may have involved miraculous gifts at that time) required being able to understand what was said. There are many references to Christians praying together in Scripture (Acts 2:42; 4:23-31; 12:5, 12; 13:1-3; 14:23), as such was critical to the life of the church both privately and publicly. Then, singing is another aspect of what God desired and designed the church to do together.

## EPHESIANS 5:18-21

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Here and in every passage in the New Testament about the music of the church in the assemblies (e.g. Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15), the consistent pattern is one of singing. There is never a New Testament reference to churches using mechanical instruments in their music offered to God as worship! Instead, the music came from the individual's heart and was produced by the mouth. The songs sung in the assemblies were psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (songs that praised God and were focused on spiritual things that taught and urged others to follow the word of God). These were offered as worship to the Lord and built other Christians up in the faith as they were sung by the whole church.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-2

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When the church came together on the first day of the week, they were to use that opportunity to lay money aside. This was a free-will offering each member of the church would give according to how each one had been prospered by God (2 Corinthians 8-9; no certain percentage was required). In this passage, the money was used to help needy Christians. Yet, this is the only passage that teaches how and when local churches get money to do any of the work God desires them to accomplish. Today, local churches should take up a collection on the first day of the week as their only means of raising money for the work it does.

## CONCLUSION

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God has provided a pattern concerning the activities done when the church assembles and worships. Although many local churches today have changed this pattern in various ways, following this pattern is the only way to know that what is done in the assemblies pleases God. In following this pattern, every member can be united in what is done and offer God the worship they know is acceptable to Him!

## DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

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Why does God desire the local church to assemble?

What is involved in worshiping in spirit and truth?

How can the local church make sure they are worshiping in spirit and truth?

What is the importance of publicly reading and teaching God's word during the assemblies?

What is the importance of partaking of the Lord's Supper and when is this to happen?

What is the importance of publicly praying and singing?

What kind of music should the church use to worship God?

What is the importance of taking up the collection and when is this to happen?

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