

The Divine Pattern of Acceptable Worship—Part 2

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

As mentioned in our [previous article on acceptable worship](#), it is alleged by some that worship is a matter that God has left unregulated.

Given O. Blakely, of the Independent Christian Church, adamantly argued this position in his debate with Alan E. Highers in Neosho, Missouri in April, 1988. Blakely contended that “in no case did they [the apostles] give directives for corporate worship” (1988, 37). Others are also ridiculing the concept of “pattern worship.” Like Jeroboam of Israel, they long to devise their own worship format.

Christ demanded that true worshipers must worship according to truth (John 4:24). What is the meaning of “truth” in this context?

In the same book, the Lord declared, “[Y]our [the Father’s] word is truth” (17:17). Deity thus must be worshiped according to the directives of the Word of God. Additional New Testament evidence corroborates this conclusion.

Paul affirmed that “God is my witness, whom I serve [latreuo—a term including worship] in my spirit in the gospel of his Son” (Romans 1:9). Note the object (“God”), the disposition (“in my spirit”), and the standard (“in the gospel”). There is a remarkable parallel to John 4:24.

The apostle informed the saints at Philippi that “we worship by the Spirit of God” (Philippians 3:3), which is equivalent to his direction through the Word of Truth (Ephesians 6:17).

In a context dealing with worship (e.g., singing), Paul stated that our actions must be “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:16, 17). The phrase signifies that which is grounded in the authority of Christ (cf. John 5:43; Matthew 28:18; Acts 3:6).

In the same epistle, “will-worship” is forthrightly condemned (Colossians 2:22, 23). W. E. Vine carefully noted that will-worship is “voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden” (881). Thayer defines will-worship as “worship which one devises and prescribes for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of the faith which ought to be directed by Christ” (1991, 168).

A few writers, attempting to justify the worship-is-not-regulated theory, have contended that the expression “truth” (aletheia) in John 4:24 merely means genuine, i.e., free from deceit. They deny that it denotes conformity to a divine standard.

This assertion, however, is utterly without the support of respected New Testament scholarship. Arndt and Gingrich show that aletheia is used “especially of the content of Christianity as the absolute truth.” They list John 4:24 and 17:17 as parallel examples (1967, 35).

Another scholar has observed:

Those who worship God in Spirit and in truth (4:23, 24) are not those who worship in sincerity and inwardness. The Samaritans are not criticized for lacking sincerity. True worship is that which accords with reality, which men grasp on the basis of revelation (Thiselton 1971, 891).

It is generally conceded that the church of the first century engaged in several devotional acts in the Lord’s day assemblies. The communion supper was observed (Acts 20:7), prayers were uttered (1 Corinthians 14:15, 16), the church sang songs to the glory of God (Ephesians 5:19), and a contribution was taken (1 Corinthians 16:2). Too, teaching was done, which included reading the Scriptures (Colossians 4:16) and the proclamation of the Word (Acts 20:7).

We will now give consideration to the divine pattern that is to regulate worship. We must remind ourselves that our worship, in order to be acceptable, must be authorized. We must not do that which we have not been authorized to do (cf. Leviticus 10:1, NIV); we must not “go beyond that which has been written” (1 Corinthians 4:6); we must abide within the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

The Lord’s Supper

With reference to the Lord’s Supper, there are several vital ingredients: First, the components of the communion consist of bread and fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-28). When the Mormons substitute water for the fruit of the vine, they do so without divine authority, hence, they err.

Those moderns who allege that “it would NOT be a sin or unscriptural to have ‘meat and potatoes,’ ‘pie and ice cream,’ or any other healthful, helpful food ‘on the table’ as an aid in worship” (Winder n.d., 123), have simply abandoned respect for the authority of the Scriptures.

Second, the communion celebration is to take place upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). We have no authority to alter the day; yet some have suggested that it is permissible to observe the communion on Wednesday or other days at the discretion of the church (Hook 1984, 17).

But by partaking of the supper (commemorating Jesus’ death) on Sunday (which memorializes his resurrection) the intimate connection between these historical events is preserved. We are not at liberty to ignore divine precedent and divorce these two events.

Third, Christ’s death must be remembered each Lord’s day. The divine pattern indicates that the early church met every Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:2—“every first day of the week” [Greek text]). The purpose of their meeting was “to break bread,” i.e., observe the communion (Acts 20:7).

We thus conclude that those early saints remembered the Savior’s death in the communion each Sunday. As a matter of fact, where is the authority for even meeting every Sunday if not to observe the communion with that frequency?

Fourth, all Christians must both eat the bread and drink the cup. The Roman Catholic doctrine of communion under one kind, i.e., the notion that the “lay person” can receive both bread and fruit of the vine by partaking of the bread alone, is without foundation. Jesus said, “[A]ll of you drink of it” (Matthew 26:27).

Singing Praise

In addressing the singing portion of our worship, we must observe that the New Testament is quite specific in delineating Heaven’s desires. One passage can serve as the basis of our analysis:

And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit; speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father (Ephesians 5:18-20).

Consider the specific instruction:

First, we are authorized to sing. Singing is the conveyance of thoughts by means of words set to music. Singing is a form of teaching (Colossians 3:16). We are not commissioned to make mere musical sounds.

One can no more be edified by a mere musical noise than he can by the words of a language which he does not understand. And Paul dealt with this type of abuse in his initial letter to the church at Corinth. The apostle declared that our music must be such as to invoke “understanding” on the part of those who are involved (1 Corinthians 14:15). This implies words, not just sounds.

On Sunday, July 4, 1993, “Pastor” John Hagee’s televised Cornerstone Church service out of San Antonio, Texas, featured a fireworks display. Would our brethren, who are defensive of the “sound worship” phenomenon, contend that this is a scriptural procedure in the church assembly?

Those who respect the authority of the New Testament, therefore, will not improvise by humming, clapping, whistling, employing instruments of music to accompany their singing, or imitating the sounds of instruments with their voices. Currently, there is a tremendous erosion of such matters within the body of Christ. Some churches appear to want a **human-centered** worship service rather than a **God-honoring** service.

Second, we are authorized to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. We are not empowered to incorporate into our worship services nationalistic songs, cultural favorites, or other lyrics of a secular essence.

Third, the grammar of the verse indicates that the entire congregation is to participate in the singing. The pronoun *heautois* (“one to another”) is a reciprocal, reflexive term, representing an interchange of action on the part of the singers. Congregational singing is clearly authorized in the New Testament; authority for choirs and solos is conspicuously absent from the divine record (see Jackson 1990, 34-38).

Will we live to see the day when a group “performs” the Last Supper before the congregation and the audience communes by proxy?

Communing through Prayer

Another feature of church worship is prayer. The prayer activity of the corporate church must likewise conform to the divine pattern.

First, as noted earlier, prayer should be directed only to deity (Nehemiah 4:9; Matthew 6:9). The Christian must never pray to any dead person (as in the practice of Catholicism).

Second, we are not authorized to employ mechanical devices as aids to our prayers. Buddhists frequently write their prayers on slips of paper and insert the petitions into “prayer wheels,” which, spinning, are supposed to propel the requests into the far regions of the universe.

Many religionists have utilized rosary beads to implement their prayers. Such was the practice of the ancient Ephesians in the worship of Diana, as archaeological data have revealed. It is well-known, of course, that this is a feature of Roman Catholicism. The prayer beads, blessed by a priest, allow the Catholic practitioner to keep account of some 180 prayers which constitute the rosary: Paternoster (“Our Father”), Ave Maria (“Hail Mary”), and Gloria. The premise behind such a practice is the assumption that repetitious prayers will secure indulgences—accumulated merit—which will exempt the faithful from the fires of purgatorial punishment. Contrast this with Matthew 6:7, 8.

Third, prayer is a communication between a child of God and his or her heavenly Father (Matthew 6:9), or, on occasion, the Son or Holy Spirit as well. It is never appropriate, therefore, to call upon those who do not belong to the family of God (Galatians 3:26, 27) to lead prayers in our public assemblies (or at other times, for that matter).

Fourth, prayers must be uttered in harmony with the revealed will of God (1 John 5:14). We may not pray for things like miracles (the age of miracles has passed) or salvation of the lost independent of their obedience to the gospel.

Fifth, prayers in assemblies of mixed sexes must be directed only by males. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul declared, “I desire therefore that the men [tous andras—the males] pray in every place” (1 Timothy 2:8). Since it is clear from complementary passages that women can pray anywhere (even in the assembly [1 Corinthians 11:5]), it becomes obvious that what the apostle limits in 1 Timothy 2:8 is **leading** prayer in a worship service.

Sixth, prayers in the assembly must be uttered intelligibly, i.e., so as to be heard. Mumbled prayers are no better than speaking in an unknown language (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:14-16).

Giving as Worship

God also has a pattern for church finance. It is most comprehensively set forth in 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the churches of Galatia, so also do you. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

There are several important elements in this context:

First, the passage suggests that the matter of regular giving for the support of the Lord's work is one of serious responsibility. The term "order" denotes a command. Unlike tipping, Christian giving is not an option; it is an obligation. In spite of its obligatory nature, giving should be viewed as a thrilling blessing, not as a burdensome matter for grumbling (cf. 2 Corinthians 9:7).

In this connection, it must be stressed that giving is the only authorized method for financing the work of the church of Jesus Christ. We are not authorized to operate businesses, conduct bingo parties, hold pay-at-the-door concerts, etc. The kingdom of Christ is not a commercial enterprise.

Second, the child of God is to contribute every Sunday. The Greek text of 1 Corinthians 16:2 literally reads, "[U]pon the first day of **every** week . . ." (see NASB, NIV). Each week that a Christian is blessed with prosperity, so must he give for the support of Heaven's work.

But what if the saint is paid only monthly or biweekly? Perhaps he could budget his funds so as to be able to participate in this act of devotion each Sunday, consistent with what inspiration has prescribed. Moreover, one's giving should be consistent regardless of necessary absences from the Lord's day assembly.

Further, we must mention in this connection that whereas the specific use of this collection (1 Corinthians 16:2) was for the relief of the destitute among the saints in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26), the underlying principle of this passage serves as a precedent for how the church is to raise its financial resources for the implementation of every divinely authorized work. It is wrong, therefore, to suppose that 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 has no application today. A few preachers have argued this position, but they continue to take their salaries from the Sunday collection!

Third, the responsibility to contribute toward the support of the kingdom belongs to each Christian. Whether one is a businessman, secretary, pensioner, or teenager working at the pizza parlor, the obligation to give, consistent with one's prosperity, is ever present. In dual-income households, contributions should come from both salaries.

Fourth, while it is certainly possible (and desirable) that church members give of their incomes for the support of good works on an individual basis (Mark 14:7), nevertheless, there is also the responsibility for each saint to give into the church treasury on the first day of the week.

Paul says we are to "lay by him [or by itself] in store." The word thesaurizoon, rendered "in store," is literally "put into the treasury" (McGarvey and Pendleton n.d., 161).

Mcknight translates the verse:

On the first day of every week let each of you lay somewhat by itself, according as he may have prospered, putting it into the treasury, that when I come there may then be no collections (1954, 208; cf. McCord 1988, 343).

It is erroneous to suggest that Paul was merely urging his brethren to save something at home or put it aside in a special place, as some translations have suggested. This would have defeated the apostle's purpose in not wanting to have to contact each Christian individually when he came. The notion that one may simply freelance his contribution in doing good, with no obligation to the local church, is a myth contrived by the covetous.

Fifth, each Christian is to give "as he may prosper," or "according to his ability" (Acts 11:29). This is proportional giving. Amazingly, some in the early church gave even beyond their ability (2 Corinthians 8:3). Those who have more should give more (both in amount and percentage). When the more prosperous generously give of their abundance to compensate for the deficit of the poorer folk, the type of equality that God desires will prevail (see 2 Corinthians 8:12-15).

Finally, while it is true that the New Testament sets no percentage (as in the case of the tithe under the Mosaic regime), surely those who flourish under the "better covenant" (Hebrews 7:22) will want to go beyond the standard of the inferior economy. The least God ever stipulated for his people in the support of his work was ten percent (cf. Genesis 14:20; 28:22; Numbers 18:21-24); the most he has accepted is one hundred percent (Mark 12:41-44). Surely, somewhere between these two examples, the conscientious child of God can find his appropriate level of giving.

Teaching the Word

There are also regulations for the church's teaching program. And let there be no mistake about it, teaching and preaching is a form of worship. Paul viewed his preaching ministry as a form of religious devotion comparable to priestly service in the temple. Such is the significance of the terms "minister" (leitourgos), "ministering" (hierourgeo), and "offering up" (prospheira), as employed in Romans 15:15, 16.

First, the content of our teaching must be the Scriptures, for it alone is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

We do not need discourses on America's foreign trade policy, slum clearance, or the tax crisis—as those enchanted with the "social gospel" are inclined to discuss. The godly teacher will bring the sacred Scriptures into contact with the minds of his audience; he will let Heaven's power do its work (Romans 1:16).

Second, only the males of the church are to occupy the role of public teachers in the assembly. Paul writes: "I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (1 Timothy 2:12).

The negative conjunction *oude* ("nor") is explanatory in force, revealing that the apostle is forbidding any teaching or similar activity in which a woman exercises authority over a man (Lenski 1961, 563).

Godet notes that Paul "regards speaking in public as an act of authority exercised over the congregation which listens," and that consequently, "during the present economy, he draws the conclusion that the speaking of the woman in [the] public [assembly] is in contradiction to the position assigned to her by the Divine will expressed in the law" (1890, 311).

See the apostle's similar admonition in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36. The popular notion that Paul's instruction was based upon cultural considerations, and thus is not applicable today, is totally without justification. His argument regarding woman's subordinate role is grounded on timeless concepts that are transcultural (1 Corinthians 11:2ff; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:13, 14). Moreover, his application of these matters is universal (1 Corinthians 11:16; 14:33, 34), not local. That which is transcultural and universal is neither local nor temporary. The restrictions are therefore as binding today as they were in the first century.

Men have been ordained of God to lead the worship services. The devout Christian must not be swayed by the fickle whims of a changing society; rather, he must abide by the authority of the eternal Word.

Third, the teaching of the local assembly must be done by "faithful" men (2 Timothy 2:2). Occasionally there are brothers, woefully unfaithful in their conduct of life, who covet a teaching position. Such men must not be allowed to be a hindrance to the cause of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:12).

Fourth, the teachers of the church assembly should be men who have cultivated their instructional abilities so that they are "able" to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

Fifth, assembly teaching should be plain, easy to understand. When men are applauded because of their alleged scholarship, yet one can scarcely understand what they are saying, something is drastically wrong. Sincere souls are longing for the truth; they want men of God to "tell [them] plainly" (John 10:24), and if we are teachers in the mold of our Lord, we will do precisely that (cf. John 11:14; 16:25, 29). We need to rid ourselves of worthless, theological double-talk, and proclaim the saving grace of God in language that is easy to grasp and retain.

Conclusion

And so, in conclusion, we must ask: does God's New Testament record contain a pattern by which we can know how to direct our worship so as to be pleasing to him who made us?











Indeed, it does.

The devout student will diligently search the Scriptures to know the mind of Christ on this theme. He will attempt to avoid the extremes of both legalism and liberalism. A legalistic philosophy would bind items which are simply expedients (e.g., the use of an invitation song—though this is a wise procedure), the employment of a particular translation (King James Version only), whether the church uses literature, a class arrangement).

A more liberal ideology, on the other hand, has no problem with the use of mechanical instruments of music as an accompaniment to singing. It feels that women may speak or lead in the worship service; it sees no harm in having a rummage sale to finance a mission project, etc. Wisdom in discriminating such matters is one of the desperate needs of the day.

Finally, as we determine the course of true worship, let us worship with great passion. We must not convey to the world the impression that the worship of our God is a boring, lifeless ritual. We have been redeemed from sin. Let us therefore praise our Maker as those who are grateful for his bountiful blessings.

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Scripture References

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