

GIVING, TEACHING AND PRAYER

In previous weeks we have considered the Lord's Supper and singing as acts of worship in which the early church engaged. We concluded from Scripture that the Lord's Supper is properly administered every Sunday, and that singing in the New Testament is not accompanied by instrumental music.

These studies are important, not because we can contrast what we have said with ~~other~~ denominational liturgies, but because we are obligated according to the Word of God to worship in truth. In John 4:24 our Lord said: "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in Spirit and in truth." It is important to study the worship of the New Testament church because we must, according to Jesus, worship God in conformity to the truth which is according to John 17:17 the very word of God. Our purpose has been, then, to note the actions of worship in which the New Testament church participated when they gathered together. When we discover what the churches of the first century did, then we will know the pattern of truth that we ought to follow. Thus far in our study of worship we have noted that the New Testament church met every first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper, and that they sang praises without the accompaniment of instrumental music. This morning we wish to conclude our study of worship in the church by noting three other acts which always characterized the assemblies of the first century.

In this respect, we may take our key from Acts 2:42. It was in Acts 2, if you remember, that the church was first established, and on that day 3,000 souls were baptized. In Acts 2:42 it is recorded that these saints "were continually

devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." In this one passage we read of four acts of worship in which the church participated. (1) teaching the apostles' doctrine; (2) fellowship, or as the word in the Greek might better convey, sharing or giving; (3) breaking of bread which is the Lord's Supper; and lastly, prayer.

First, then, the assemblies of the first century church were continually characterized by teaching or preaching. Nothing was as essential to every assembly of the saints as preaching or teaching the word of God. This includes such functions as reading of Scripture. Notice carefully what the apostle Paul told the young minister Timothy in I Timothy 4:13, he writes: "Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching." Paul, then, emphasized the necessity of teaching and reading Scripture in the assemblies of the saints. Further, Paul was emphatic that the preaching should have the word of God as the object of its task. Note again what Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 4:2 where he writes: "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction ." So many preachers ought to take to heart the instruction of Paul here. He demanded that Timothy preach the word of God. So many modern ministers desire to speak of the social and political issues about us, they would rather discuss whether or not taxes should be raised than the word of God itself. But the words of the apostle are clear, we must preach the word of God if we are going to preach at all, and this is for the purpose of reproof, of rebuking and of exhorting in the atmosphere of patience and instruction.

Thus, it is evident that preaching was a very important part of the worship of the church. In fact, it was so important that Acts 5:42 records that every day, in the temple and from house to house, the apostles kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. We must, then, do as the early Church did--preach the word in every assembly of the saints.

A second function of worship mentioned in Acts 2:42 is termed "Fellowship." Actually, the original word simply means sharing, and here probably refers to the communal sharing that took place among the early Christians in Jerusalem. However, this communal type sharing was not obligatory upon the churches, but another type of sharing was. We read of this in I Corinthians 16:1,2, where the apostle Paul writes: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." The command here is clear, we ought to give of our income to the church according to how God has prospered us that week. It is our Christian obligation to give in support of the work of Christ here on earth. Again, note what the apostle wrote in II Corinthians 9:7: "Let each one give just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly, nor under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver." God has determined according to the words of the New Testament that his work here on earth be financially supported through the free will gift offerings of the members. This is the only means recorded in the New Testament by which the church might obtain money for its work. In the New Testament, there are no fund-raising dinners, no bake sales, no rummage sales or any such

thing. This program is itself a work of the church in Northeast Philadelphia, and the church of Christ there supports it through the free will offerings of its members and not by asking non-members for money on the radio. God has not authorized such fund-raising in Scripture, but he has only directed that the church be supported by its own members through their giving. As good stewards of what God has already given us, we ought to be faithful and cheerful givers. For Jesus said in Luke 6:38, give and it shall be given unto you. If we are found faithful in our stewardship, he will give to us that eternal crown of life.

Since we have previously discussed the action of breaking bread in the worship, we will lastly discuss the prayer as an act of worship by the church. I assume no one will doubt the importance of prayer. James in answer to some of the grumbings of the church to which he had written said in 4:2, "You have not because you ask not." We must, if we expect any special blessing from God, we must ask our Father for it. God gives when we ask; and when we do not ask, He does not give those special blessings we wish. Prayer, then, must form an integral part of the church's worship for here is where we go before that throne of grace, and forgiveness and blessings pour forth as water from a fountain. As Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica in I Thessalonians 5:17--"pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Again, in writing to the young minister Timothy, Paul says in I Timothy 2:1; "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that

we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." Any congregation that ignores prayer or downgrades its importance, does not follow the pattern set for us by the church of the first century in the New Testament. We ought always in every assembly of the church to pray, and this without ever ceasing.

Thus, in our study of worship in the New Testament, we have discovered that five actions characterize the assemblies of the church. On every first day of the week when the disciples gathered together, we may observe five actions through which the church offered worship and praise to God and Christ. These five actions are: (1) the teaching and reading of scripture; (2) the partaking of the Lord's Supper; (3) praying for all men; (4) giving of our means; and lastly singing without the aid of instrumental music. If we are to worship God acceptably, we must according to Jesus in John 4:24, worship him in spirit and in truth. That is, we must always worship God from the heart in a proper attitude or spirit, and we must also worship him in the way he directs. It is God who we worship, and therefore only he can direct our worship. By precept and example in the New Testament, our Lord has directed us to sing, teach, pray, give and partake of the Lord's table every first day of the week. This we must do if we are to worship God in truth as well as in spirit. If we are going to restore New Testament Christianity, we must have New Testament worship, that is, we must worship as the church of the New Testament did.

SALVATION IS IN CHRIST'S CHURCH

For several months now we have been discussing various aspects of the church of the New Testament. We have considered, for instance, the organization of the church in the New Testament and the form its worship took in their assemblies. But why is all this important? Why should we be so concerned with the local church when it is Christ who saves and not the church? For example, most people you might meet would argue that man does not have to be a member of the church to be saved. They maintain that membership in the church is an optional matter. This reminds me of the eloquent phrase often used by the Jesus Movement a few years back, it proclaimed: "Jesus yes, the church no." Those who would support such a declaration speak as if one could divide Jesus from the Church, and separate them from each other; as if one could be saved by Christ without being a member of the church. However, we wish to raise the question whether anyone can be saved outside of the church which is the body of Christ. The Bible is clear in its teaching that no one can be saved outside of the church of the New Testament. If one is not a member of the New Testament Church there is no redemption or salvation for that person. This is self-evident by just noticing a few passages from Scripture.

First, salvation is in the church because Jesus Christ purchased the church with his own blood. When Paul was getting ready to leave for Jerusalem, he called the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him before he left. His speech to these elders is recorded in Acts 20. In verse 28 of that chapter he says: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,

among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." The church, therefore, is a blood-bought institution; and each member is a blood-bought person. Paul wrote to the members of the church at Corinth that "you are not your own; for you have been bought with a price" (I Corinthians 6:19,20). That price was the blood of Christ. The church as a whole, and each members as individuals were bought with the blood of Christ. To say, then, that one may be saved outside of the church, is to say that one may be saved without being bought by the blood of Christ since the church is that which was bought. If the church is a non-essential institutuin, the God gave the blood of his son to no avail. Every person who says that man can be saved out of the church brings an indictment against God.

Second, salvation is in the church because Paul promised that Christ would save the church. Notice what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:23-27 concerning Christ and the church. He says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the churdh, He himself being the Saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love you wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." In this passage we just read there are some very important things to note. In thefirst place, notice

that the relationship that exists between Christ and the Church is analogous to the relationship that exists between husband and wife. Just as one cannot separate husband and wife, neither can one separate Christ and the church. In fact, we are "one flesh" with Christ just as husband and wife are one flesh because as Ephesians 5:30 records we are members of His body. One cannot, then, separate Christ from the church as the Jewish Movement a few years ago wanted to. Rather, they form one unity which cannot be divided. To be saved by Christ is to be a member of the church, and to be a member of the church is to be saved by Christ. This is evident from the statement Paul makes in the Ephesians 5:23 where it Paul says that Christ himself is the savior of the body. The body is the church, and we as members of the body in the church are saved by Christ. Since Christ is the savior of the body or the church, what about non-members. They cannot be saved for Christ only saves His body. For as Ephesians 5:25 records Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. As Christ bought the church with his blood, so he gave himself up on the cross only for her. Christ efficaciously died only for the church, and only those who are members of the New Testament church for which Christ died can be saved. Therefore, Paul is clear in the fifth chapter of Ephesians that one cannot separate Christ and the church, and only those in the body of Christ may be saved from the wrath of God.

Third, Scripture records that reconciliation to God occurs only in the church. This is expressed by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:16, there he writes that he abolished the

law which stood between the Jew and Gentile, thus establishing peace and that he might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross." The central import of this text is that Jesus Christ reconciles sinners to God through the cross in one body. The body is, of course, the church as the body of Christ himself. Now it is admitted by all that if one is to be saved from his sins, he must be reconciled to God. It is recorded in II Corinthians 5:17-21 that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Further, we noted from Ephesians 2:16 that reconciliation to God occurs in the body, that is the church. God is in Christ, or God is in the church reconciling the world unto himself. Thus, if one is to be redeemed, he must be a member of the church in the New Testament for it is there where reconciliation is accomplished. Church membership, therefore, is not an optional matter.

Fourth, salvation is in the church because the body of Christ is also the family of God. This is recorded in I Timothy 3:15 In this place the apostle Paul writes to Timothy that he is writing so that he "May know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and the support of truth." We all recognize, of course, the necessity of becoming a child of God in order to be saved. We must be adopted into the family or household of God, and the Bible teaches that the family of household of God is the church. Thus, one cannot be a child of God if he is not a member of the household of God; if he is not a member of the church. To become a member of the church is to become a child of God; and to become a child of God is to become a member of the church. Church membership, then, is essential to one's salvation.

The Scriptures we have just studied all indicate one very important fact, one must be a member of the New Testament church in order to be saved. But when I say church, I do not mean some denominational group. I mean a local body of God's people who worship God according to the New Testament, who are organized according to the teaching of the apostles, who teach correct doctrine, who in essence follow the New Testament in all its particulars. We must be a member of that type of church in order to be saved, a member of the New Testament Church.

This church you do not go about to join, rather you added to that body the day you are forgiven. Acts 2:47 says that "the Lord added to the church daily those that were saved." If you are saved, then you are a member of that New Testament Church. But you must express your salvation, your worship according to the pattern God has given us in the New Testament. Thus, you must find a congregation of the Lord's people who do follow the New Testament, who do worship and work according to the pattern in the New Testament. You may find such a congregation in any Church of Christ in the area. You find that the churches of Christ are seeking to be the Church of the New Testament, that they are seeking to remain true to the word of God.

WE must be a member of the church, because salvation is in the church. But how do we become a member of the church? How do we enter the church that we read about in the New Testament. Tune in next week as we seek to answer that very question .