

## Lesson Seven

### THE ASSEMBLY AND WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

#### INTRODUCTION:

- 1) Jesus set the pattern for his people in rejecting any object of worship other than God (Matt. 4:10, quoting Deut. 6:13; 10:20).
  - a) He taught the proper manner of worshiping God (John 4:24).
  - b) He became himself the way of coming to God (John 14:6).
- 2) In this lesson we look at the assembly and worship of the church.
  - a) We will find a horizontal relationship with others as fellow worshipers.
  - b) We will find a vertical relationship with God as the object of worship.

#### BODY:

- 1) English definition of worship.
  - a) “Worship” is derived from two words, “worth” (worthy) and “ship” (condition or quality).
  - b) Worship says that the object is worthy, and to worship God is to ascribe worth to him.
- 2) Theological foundations of worship.
  - a) The nature of God.
    - i) The nature of God determines how he is served.
      - (1) If God were a God of nature, he would be served by naturalistic rituals such as those intended to promote the fertility of nature.
      - (2) If God were a philosophical principal, the highest human activity would take the form of meditation.
      - (3) The biblical descriptions of God are accompanied by statements of the proper response to him.
    - ii) Descriptions of God’s nature.
      - (1) John 4:24.
        - (a) Worship takes place in the spiritual realm – it is not limited to a place (such as the temple or Mount Gerizim).
        - (b) Worship must be in truth or reality, as opposed to what is false or what is not permanent (John 3:21; 4:23; 8:44; 18:37; 1 John 1:6; 2:21), or to “sincerity” or “genuineness” in contrast to pretense or mere words (1 John 3:18, “in reality” is possible here, too; 2 John 1; 3 John 1; cf. Phil. 1:18).
          - (i) The adjective “true” in John 4:23 suggests the “real” or “genuine” worshipers.
          - (ii) “Truth” in John is related to Jesus (John 1:14; 14:6), the Spirit (John 14:16; 1 John 5:6), and the word of God (John 17:17).
      - (2) 1 John 1:5, 7.
        - (a) Light and darkness in this context contrast righteousness and sin.
        - (b) Since God is light, his people are in the light, too.

- (c) As there is no darkness in God, his people must not walk in darkness.
- (3) 1 John 4:8-11.
  - (a) God showed his love in sending his Son, so that we might have life in him.
  - (b) The resultant behavior by those who have the love of God is to love their fellow human beings, defined in very practical ways in 1 John, helping with the goods of this world those who are in need, even laying down one's life for another (1 John 3:11-16).
- (4) 1 Pet. 1:15-16.
  - (a) God's people are to share his nature – his love and his holiness.
  - (b) Once more the response to God is expressed in terms of the total conduct of life.
  - (c) What 1 John expressed as light Peter expresses as holiness, and the holy conduct of a holy people is a pervasive theme through 1 Peter (cf. 2:5, 9).
- (5) Heb. 12:28-29.
  - (a) The worship of God is related to his awesome presence.
    - (i) The author of Hebrews had earlier contrasted Israel assembled at Sinai (Heb. 12:18-21) with Christians assembled in the presence of God, describing their present status in heavenly terms (Heb. 12:22-24).
    - (ii) If the former scene was fearful, the blessings of their present condition should warn Christians not to reject the voice of the Lord (Heb. 12:25-26).
    - (iii) The God who made such a fearful revelation at Sinai is the same God to be worshiped now.
  - (b) In gratitude for receiving the unshakeable kingdom, his people will remain faithful in every way, not turning their backs on the new revelation in Jesus but practicing Christian love (Heb. 13:1ff.).
- (6) Heb. 9:14; cf. 3:12.
  - (a) The designation "living God" often occurs in contrast with the lifeless idols of paganism (Jer. 10:10 in the context of the chapter; Acts 14:15; 1 Thess. 1:9).
  - (b) In Hebrews 9, the designation highlights the contrast between the necessity for repeated external purifications by the blood of dead animals and the once-for-all purification of the conscience by the blood of Jesus, who by offering himself "through the eternal Spirit" obtained an "eternal redemption" (vv. 6-14).
  - (c) The whole passage is in a context of contrast between the worship of Israel in an earthly sanctuary and Christ's high-priestly ministry in the heavenly "tabernacle."
  - (d) His eternal sacrifice is in keeping with the nature of God as "living."
  - (e) Similarly, God's worshipers are purified from "dead works," a designation of moral wrongs in Hebrews 6:1.
  - (f) As the "only God" (1 Tim. 1:17; John 17:3), he only is to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10).

- b) The Atoning Work of Jesus.
    - i) Jesus' promise of forgiveness abrogates the atoning system of the earthly temple.
      - (1) This is the message of Hebrews 7-10, which describes his once-for-all sacrifice in the heavenly temple (Heb. 9:11-12).
      - (2) During his ministry Jesus was criticized because he offered forgiveness of sins directly rather than through the priestly temple sacrifices ordained by God in the law of Moses (see Mark 2:1-12 and parallels).
      - (3) He instituted a new covenant in his blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).
    - ii) According to Hebrews, the blood of Jesus:
      - (a) Establishes a new covenant (Heb. 10:29; 12:24; 13:20);
      - (b) Sanctifies a new people (Heb. 9:14; 10:29; 13:112);
      - (c) Opens a new way of approach or worship to God (Heb. 10:19-20; cf. 9:12).
    - (2) Thus an earthly temple with continual sacrifices can no longer be of consequence; any theological basis for a sacrificial or cultic worship centered in an earthly temple has been removed.
    - (3) Heb. 10:19-22 draws on Old Testament imagery to stress the importance of the Christian's privileges in approaching God, and it leads into a statement of the Christian assembly (Heb. 10:25), thus relating what is done in the assembly of the church to the worship in the heavenly sanctuary.
  - c) The Access to God through the Holy Spirit.
    - i) Christ has made direct access to God in the heavenly sanctuary possible.
    - ii) That access is also related to the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:18).
    - iii) The Spirit is the medium of revelation of truth in Jesus (John 14:17; 15:26; 1 Cor. 2:10, 13; Eph. 3:5).
    - iv) In addition to his role in revelation, the Spirit also mediates the human response to God (Rom. 8:26; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 5:18-21; 6:18; Phil. 3:3).
  - d) The Result of Salvation.
    - i) God's saving work in Christ enables his people to approach him with boldness, freedom of speech (*parrhesia*).
      - (1) This word referred to outspoken, frank, or open speech, and so to confidence.
      - (2) It was used in the Gospel of John of Christ's preaching, in Acts for the preaching of the gospel, and in Paul for his apostolic activity.
    - ii) Especially relevant here is its use in Hebrews for the security of the Christian's faith that not only must be held on to (Heb. 3:6; 10:35), but that also gives the right of free approach to God (Heb. 4:16; 10:19).
- 3) The New Temple in His Body.
- a) The church as a temple.
    - i) The ancient world viewed the temple primarily as the home of the deity where the cult statue was kept.
      - (1) This was also true of Israel with the exception that there was no statute of God.

- (2) His presence was represented by a cloud symbolizing the coming of his presence to the tabernacle (Exod. 40:34-38).
- (3) The temple in Jerusalem formed the center of the Jewish nation; its religious life centered around the festivals, and the priesthood had a privileged position in the national life.
- ii) Picking up on prophetic declarations, early Christians affirmed over against Jews dedicated to the temple that God did not dwell in houses made with hands (Acts 7:48), followed by a quotation from Isa. 66:-12 (cf. also 1 Kings 8:27), and over against the popular religion of pagans that the God who made the world and all things in it does not live in shrines made by human hands is not served by human hands (Acts 17:24-25).
- iii) Christians can enter the true, heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus ministers as high priest (Heb. 8:1-2; 9:11, 24).
- iv) Christianity rejected worship restricted to a particular holy place (John 4:21-24) or to holy days and seasons (Col 2:16; cf. Rom. 14:5-6 for days as indifferent), spoke only of the believing community as priestly with no provision made for a special priesthood chosen from it (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), and reinterpreted the language of sacrifice for the life dedicated to God (Rom. 12:1).
- v) The temple was the community.
- vi) The New Testament put no emphasis on the place of worship – house, synagogue, or temple – because wherever the community gathered was the place of worship.
- b) Priest and Priesthood.
  - i) The words for priests and priesthood are applied to Christians only in 1 Peter and Revelation.
  - ii) In every case the use usage is collective; the community of Christians, not the individual Christian, is priestly.
    - (1) This is particularly evident in 1 Pet. 2:5, 9, where the word is *hierateuma*, “a body of functioning priests,” used in parallel to “spiritual house,” “elect race,” “holy nation,” and “people for God’s possession.”
    - (2) The source of these designations is Exodus 19:6, where the reference is to the whole nation of Israel.
    - (3) Revelation employs the word for “priests” (Rev. 1:6; 5:10, also with clear reference to Exod. 19:6; and 20:6, in parallel to 5:10), but always in the plural and with reference to the collective body of believers.
    - (4) The references to Christians as priests, drawn as they are from Exod. 19:6, refer to the status of Christians, not their function.
    - (5) The church is a priestly people, and to learn of the activities associated with this concept we turn to the language of sacrifice.
  - iii) Sacrifices of the Christian Priest.
    - (1) Hebrews 13:5 describes praise and thanksgiving as sacrifices.
      - (a) The sacrifice of praise is offered by “us,” the people together.
      - (b) Heb. 12:28 instructs, “Let us give thanks, by which we offer worship well pleasing to God.”
      - (c) A sacrificial context for prayer is given in Rev. 8:3-5.

- (2) Heb. 13:16 includes acts of benevolence as sacrifices.
    - (a) Material sacrifice is now not what is burned on the altar but what is used to help those who are in need.
    - (b) Matthew twice quotes Christ speaking Hosea 6:6 (Matt. 9:13; 12:7), desiring mercy and not sacrifice.
    - (c) The Christian application of the prophecy puts acts of mercy (doing good and sharing) in the place of the sacrifices on the literal altar.
  - (3) Philippians 4:18 employs sacrificial language for another use of financial resources, support for preaching of the gospel.
    - (a) As with other passages, “well pleasing” describes the activity.
    - (b) Additionally, Old Testament expressions used to describe sacrifices God accepted is used: “Fragrant offering” (Gen. 8:21; Exod. 29:18; Ezek. 20:40-41, a prophecy about the age to come) and “acceptable” (Isa. 56:7, another eschatological reference).
  - (4) Philippians 2:17 uses an image from sacrificial ritual to describe Paul’s self-giving in the work of preaching.
    - (a) Similarly, Romans 15:16 expresses the bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles as the work of a priest.
    - (b) “Offering,” the common word for gifts brought as an offering to God, is used here for the Gentile converts brought as an offering to God.
  - (5) 1 Peter 2:5 does not specify the content of the “spiritual sacrifices” offered by the Church as a “holy priesthood,” but the context suggests that the holy life, the Christian moral and ethical conduct, is in mind.
  - (6) Rom. 12:1 in its language of offering the body (the person or self) constitutes the high point of the Christian conception of sacrifice.
    - (a) The verb “present” had a technical meaning in the Greek world for the bringing of sacrifice.
    - (b) The word translated “reasonable service” or “spiritual worship” was used in the literature of the time to refer to worship that proceeded from the highest part of human nature, the reasoning faculties, to what belonged to the realm of words and thoughts and was not material.
- 4) Attitudes Toward Worship and in Worship.
- a) Worship and Assembly.
    - i) Modern usage applies the word “worship” to the assembly of believers gathered for corporate acts of devotion.
    - ii) The passages above demonstrate that the New Testament usage of the words for worship is much broader, including the Christian moral life and acts of service on behalf of people.
    - iii) Christian worship, properly understood, covers the Christian life as well as the Christian assembly, all acts of service and devotion to God.
    - iv) This does not make the assembly less important but serves to make Christian existence in all of its expressions sacred.
    - v) Worship to God occurs in church meetings, but not exclusively there.
  - b) Misunderstandings of worship.
    - i) The external or mechanical interpretation.
      - (1) Some think of worship as items to be performed in order to fulfill a duty.

- (a) Acts of worship have a benefit from the doing, the going through the motions.
- (b) By doing certain things people improve their heavenly credit rating.
- (2) This is a carryover from the cultic or temple understanding of worship that was abrogated by Christ.
- (3) John 4:23-24 teaches us that worship must be done spiritually and truly, sincerely and genuinely.
- (4) Many biblical passages teach us that God's concern was with the heart as the basis of outward actions.
- (5) This is true not only of the New Testament (Matt 5:17-48), but was the burden of the message of the Old Testament prophets (Isa. 1:10-17; Jer. 7:1-15; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:24; Mic. 6:6-8).
- (6) The worship of the New Testament is not simply the substitution of a new set of religious exercise for those of ancient Israel.
- ii) The individualistic interpretation.
  - (1) Worship is seen only as private religious devotions, even if these are done in the corporate setting of the assembled church; in the assembly, the people do individual religious exercises together.
  - (2) As a consequence of this view, some say that they can worship as well at the lake as in the assembly and the meeting house.
  - (3) But there are some things that can be done only in the assembly.
    - (a) The church is a group, and the assembly is a corporate activity (Heb. 10:24-25).
    - (b) In the assembly, concern is expressed for one another (cf. Col. 3:16).
    - (c) The Lord's supper is not compared to eating a meal alone in a restaurant, but to a family meal where the being together is as important as the eating (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:33).
    - (d) Corporate worship has the advantage over individual worship that a symphony has over a soloist.
    - (e) The assembly is different from all other aspects of the religious life, because there is opportunity to express the fact that the people are "church."
- iii) The emotional uplift interpretation.
  - (1) People come to worship because of what makes them feel good; they come for what they can get out of it.
  - (2) We want our needs met when the truth is we don't know what our true needs are.
  - (3) Worship is secularized when the focus shifts to the enhancement of the worshipers.
  - (4) Even very religious people equate praise for God with emotional exuberance rather than with the objective recital of God's qualities and deeds.
  - (5) Making worship "useful" destroys it, because this introduces an ulterior motive for praise.
  - (6) If one fails to get that "good feeling," the comment is heard, "I didn't get anything out of church today, so I don't think I'll come back."

- iv) The performance interpretation.
  - (1) Instead of being participants, those who are present are observers of what the leaders do.
  - (2) Those who have a more visible role become performers.
- c) Proper attitudes.
  - i) The basic human attitude before God is a sense of dependence and humility.
    - (1) This follows from the truth that God is Creator.
      - (a) All that humans have and are come from God.
      - (b) The Bible repeatedly affirms that the One God is the Creator (Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 8:6).
    - (2) As the Maker of the world and everything in it, he has need of nothing, not even worship (Acts 17:24-25).
    - (3) The origin of sin was the human desire to be god (Gen. 3:5-6); hence, the Bible treats idolatry very seriously.
  - ii) Because of their salvation in Christ, Christians come to God in thanksgiving and joy.
  - iii) Because of the promises associated with their salvation, Christians come to God in expectation and hope.
- 5) The Importance of the Assembly.
  - a) Passages about coming together.
    - i) The sheer number of passages in the New Testament about Christians coming together is impressive.
    - ii) The frequency of these statements demonstrates the importance of coming together to the early Christians.
    - iii) Four terms are used to describe the activity.
      - (1) "Come together" is used in Acts 2:6; 10:27; 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:17, 33-34; 14:26 (1 Cor. also uses "in church" (assembly), 11:18; "in the same place," 11:20; and all three are combined in 14:23, "if the whole church comes together in one place."
      - (2) "Gather together" (to congregate) is used in Acts 4:31; 11:26; 14:27; 15:6, 30, 20:7-8, and 1 Cor. 5:4. The equivalent compound form of the verb and noun is used in the admonition against deserting church meetings in Hebrews 10:25 and in the description of the gathering together of the elect at the end of the age (2 Thess. 2:1; Matt. 24:31; and Mark 13:27).
      - (3) "To assemble" or "gather into a group," fairly common in classical Greek, is rare in the New Testament. It is used in Acts 12:12 for a prayer meeting.
      - (4) While the final phrase, *epi to auto*, can have several translations depending on the use (together, in the same place, to come together, gather together), it seems to have acquired on occasion in early Christian literature almost a technical sense of "in the assembly," "in the church meeting." This may be the sense of Acts 2:44 (cf. 2:1, where the phrase must mean "in one place," since "together" is redundant) and consequently also in Acts 2:47.

- iv) The cumulative impression of these passages is to demonstrate how often the early Christians were together in meetings and consequently the importance of these meetings for them; Christianity was not a private religious experience.
- b) Distinctiveness of the Assembly.
  - i) The assembly of the church is a distinctive expression of the church.
  - ii) Not everything acceptable in other contexts has a place in the church meeting.
    - (1) Paul makes a distinction between behavior that is appropriate elsewhere and what can be done in the assembly.
      - (a) Thus, he distinguishes eating to satisfy hunger at home and coming together to eat the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:20, 22, 33-34).
      - (b) Although he claimed to speak in tongues more than all the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:18) and says he would like for all of them to be able to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5), he says that he would rather speak five words with his mind in order to instruct others than to speak ten thousand words in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:19).
      - (c) Paul does not impose permanent silence on women, only in the churches (assemblies) women should be silent (1 Cor. 14:34).
      - (d) Paul does not support the idea that if something is right or good at other times it may be done in the assembly.
    - (2) The examples from 1 Corinthians show that appropriateness in the assembly is not a question of gifts.
      - (a) Speaking in tongues was a gift of the spirit (1 Cor. 12:10-11), but this fact did not give the speaker in tongues the right to speak in the assembly.
      - (b) If an interpreter was present, then one could exercise the gift in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:27); otherwise, the speaker in tongues was to be silent (1 Cor. 14:28).
- c) Specific Purposes of the Assembly.
  - i) Glorify God.
    - (1) The goal of the Christian is to glorify God in all that is said and done (1 Cor. 10:31), and this is especially so when the church is together (Eph. 3:21).
    - (2) This verse is not limited to the meetings of the church, but it certainly includes doing so when the church is assembled.
    - (3) Glorifying God in the assembly means that the assembly will reflect the character of God.
      - (a) Thus Paul corrects abuses in the assemblies of the Corinthian church by reminding them that God is a God of peace (1 Cor. 14:35), so all things should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).
      - (b) Thus, the assembly will reflect the doctrine of creation and God's created order; specifically, human sexual distinctions based on creation will continue to be observed (1 Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-36).
  - ii) Exemplify the Church.
    - (1) The assembly is meant to exemplify what the church is.

- (2) When the church comes together, it will especially express its nature and its concerns.
  - (3) Paul reminded the Corinthians that what he taught them he taught in all the churches (1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:16).
  - (4) He invokes this principle specifically in regard to the assembly in 1 Cor. 14:33.
  - (5) This common practice of the churches does not mean uniformity in every respect but does indicate sufficient commonality to reflect a common identity.
- iii) Edify Christians.
- (1) In 1 Cor. 14 Paul sets forth edification as the goal of the Christian assembly (14:26).
  - (2) In that chapter some form of “edify” or “build up” occurs seven times (vv. 3, 4 (twice), 5, 12, 17, 26).
  - (3) Everything done in the assembly should contribute to edification, or building up of the members.
  - (4) The church meetings are designed for the spiritual improvement of the members.
- iv) Express and promote fellowship.
- (1) The assembly promotes the community or “body” life of the church.
  - (2) The sense of being one people and acting with one accord results from the whole congregation’s being frequently together.
  - (3) The word for “together,” or “with one accord,” a favorite of Luke, describes the early Christians (Acts 2:46; cf. 4:24; 5:12; 15:25).
  - (4) Paul observed that “together you may with one voice glorify God” (Rom. 15:6).
  - (5) The meeting together was a time to encourage one another (Heb. 10:25), an opportunity lost when meeting together is neglected.
- v) Properly impress non-Christians.
- (1) In 1 Cor. 14:23-25 Paul assumes the presence of non-Christians in the assembly.
  - (2) It is consistent with the other purposes for there to be meetings aimed especially at non-Christians.
  - (3) The attitudes and reactions of non-Christians will not be determinative of the Christian assembly, so these considerations are secondary.
- vi) Commemorate and proclaim salvation.
- (1) The remembrance and declaration of God’s saving activity in Christ glorifies God, shows what the church is all about, edifies believers, unites Christians in the faith, and calls unbelievers to the faith.
  - (2) The Lord’s Supper especially serves this purpose (1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:17-34), for in celebrating the Lord’s Supper the church remembers and reenacts the salvation in Christ.
- d) Criteria for Activities in the Assembly.
- i) That which accords with the will of God.
    - (1) God has placed in the assembly those activities that will fulfill its purposes, and he has left out those that do not contribute to its purposes.

- (2) To glorify God means to seek his will in all things.
- (3) For the Christian age, this means relating everything to the name of Jesus Christ.
- ii) That which reflects the character of God.
  - (1) To correct disorders in the assemblies at Corinth, Paul invoked the character of God as a standard to govern how the meetings were conducted (1 Cor. 14:33, 40).
  - (2) Peace and good order were the attributes of God that the Corinthian church needed.
  - (3) Other attributes of God may be called for in other situations.
- iii) That which is spiritual.
  - (1) The nature of God and of the church dictates that the assembly of the church not cater to the fleshly or carnal, the ritual or cultic (John 4:21, 23-24; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:16-23; 1 Pet. 2:5).
  - (2) By the same token, the true worshiper does not seek experiences, emotions, or sentiment for their own sake.
  - (3) That which is spiritual may make one feel good or give a feeling of uplift, but these things are by-products of seeking God and the welfare of fellow believers.
  - (4) Those who seek an individual emotional experience in the assembly place themselves in the camp of the immature Corinthians whom Paul corrected in 1 Cor. 14.
- iv) That which is edifying.
  - (1) According to 1 Cor. 14, that which is edifying is understandable, instructive, and contributes to spiritual improvement.
  - (2) In the assembly one seeks not to please the self but to benefit the community.
  - (3) The greater gifts are those that edify the church (1 Cor. 12:31; 13:13; 14:5).
- 6) Activities in the Assembly.
  - a) Jesus meetings with his disciples after the resurrection in Luke 24 centered on two activities in which Jesus was made known – the breaking of bread (vv. 13-35, esp. 31 and 35) and interpretation of scripture (36-53, cf. 32) – and the liturgy of the table and the liturgy of the word have remained two foci of Christian worship.
  - b) The order of the acts of worship may not be important, but what is in the order of service, what gives “form” to it, is important as expressing the nature of the church, the relationship of its members to God and one another, and the spirit of worship and service.
  - c) Scriptural activities.
    - i) Lord’s Supper.
      - (1) Both theologically and sociologically, the Lord’s Supper was the central act of the weekly assemblies of the early church.
        - (a) There were meetings to observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-21, 33), and these occurred on the first day of the week (Acts 20:28).
        - (b) The Lord’s Supper is expressive of the central realities of the Christian faith and of what the church is all about.

- (2) The New Testament uses the word “body” in reference to Jesus in four senses:
    - (a) The physical body of his incarnation (Heb. 10:5; Luke 23:52);
    - (b) The glorified body of his resurrection (Phil. 3:21);
    - (c) The spiritual body of his church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:23); and
    - (d) The bread of the Lord’s Supper (Matt. 26:26).
  - (3) Each of these usages has a bearing on the nature of the church.
    - (a) The Son of God became flesh and blood (John 1:14; 19:34; Heb. 2:14) so that by his death and resurrection he might redeem a new people of God (Col. 1:18-20; Phil. 2:5-10; Acts 20:28).
    - (b) These people will some day share the likeness of his glorification (Phil 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:44; 1 John 3:2).
  - (4) Attitudes in taking the Lord’s Supper.
    - (a) Self-examination. 1 Cor. 11:28.
    - (b) Confession.
      - (i) Self-examination leads to confession of sin.
      - (ii) Confession of sin brings to mind his death and resurrection which leads to confession of Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36).
  - (5) Reconciliation.
    - (a) The Lord’s Supper is a community act, not a private communion.
    - (b) Hence, one will make every effort to come to the communion in harmony with the brothers and sisters of the community.
    - (c) There will be loving thoughts and prayers for those with whom one is united in this shared experience.
  - (6) Rededication.
    - (a) The celebration of the covenant leads to a renewed dedication to the Lord.
    - (b) Loyalty to him excludes associations with all that is sinful (1 Cor. 10:21).
  - (7) Joy.
    - (a) Reliving the events of redemption and experiencing the anticipation of the end time brings eschatological joy.
    - (b) The glad and generous hearts of Acts 2:46 may not be limited to the breaking of bread in assembly, but certainly includes it.
- ii) Prayer.
- (1) The New Testament offers several indications of prayer in a congregational setting (e.g., Acts 4:23-31; 1 Cor. 14:2, 16, 28, which is discussing the assembly; so also 1 Tim. 2:1-2).
  - (2) Many features of private prayer and congregational prayer are the same, but the group setting gives a distinctive color to the prayers.
    - (a) The leader of the prayer is not speaking his private prayers in a public setting, and the people are not overhearing some else’s prayers.
    - (b) The leader is speaking for the people to God; as their representative he is voicing their corporate concerns.

- (c) The people themselves are praying while their spokesman is leading their thoughts and giving expression to their praise and petitions.
  - (d) The corporate nature of prayer is brought out by the word “Amen.”
    - (i) This Hebrew word, very frequent in the Old Testament, is an affirmation of truth and came to be a term of ratification used especially in prayer.
    - (ii) “Amen” was the congregational unison acclamation at the close of a prayer in the Jewish synagogues and in the early church (cf. “Amen” as a response in Rev. 5:14).
    - (iii) Paul refers to the practice in 1 Cor. 14:16 (cf. also 2 Cor. 1:20), where his argument is that the assembled people cannot respond with “Amen” (and the implied “It is true”) if they do not understand what has been spoken in the prayer.
    - (iv) This practice of the congregational “Amen” at the close of the prayer shows the words spoken by one person to be a corporate act, the expression of the whole people.
- (3) Singing.
- (a) A theology of singing.
    - (i) Song is a way of preaching Christ.
      - 1. Christ is both the ground and the content of Christian song; the early Christian hymns that have been identified in the New Testament (e.g., Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16) have Christ as their content.
        - a. If the song is about God, it is about what God has done in Christ.
        - b. If the song is about the Holy Spirit, it is about the Spirit as the gift of Christ.
        - c. If the song is about instruction to one another, it is about the life in Christ.
      - 2. The characteristic feature of the earliest Christian hymns is that they were songs of praise to Christ; He is the standard for the content of songs in the assembly that meets in his name.
    - (ii) Song is a confession of faith made by the lips.
      - 1. Heb. 13:15 employs a word that can be translated “confess,” “acknowledge,” or “praise,” and that is often brought into connection with the word “sing” in the Psalms (e.g., Ps. 18:49, quoted in Rom. 15:9; 138:1).
      - 2. Singing is a way of acknowledging God – praising him and confessing faith in him.
    - (iii) Song expresses the indwelling Spirit and word of Christ.
      - 1. Eph. 5:18-19 associates singing with being filled with the Holy Spirit.
      - 2. Col. 3:16 parallels singing with the teaching and admonishing that express the indwelling word of Christ.
      - 3. Singing is the result of being filled with the Spirit and of possessing the word of Christ.

4. The Spirit and the word belong together, and vocal praise is a consequence of their presence.
  5. The singing, therefore, will be spiritual in nature and will accord with the word of Christ.
- (iv) Song as praise is a spiritual sacrifice.
1. The Old Testament has presented thanksgiving as accompanying sacrifice (Ps. 26:6), the equivalent of sacrifice (Jon. 2:9; Ps. 141:2), and a substitute for sacrifice (Ps. 50:14, 23).
  2. The New Testament connects singing with the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15) and speaks of “spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
  3. The singing of the church is a spiritual activity.
  4. It is one of the offerings that replaces for Christians the sacrifices of the Mosaic law; it is a sacrifice that is always available.
- (v) In song there is a sharing in heavenly, eschatological praise.
1. The heavenly beings are constantly singing praise to God – Revelation 4:8, 10-11, f:8-12; 14:2-3; 15:2-3.
  2. The church by its song joins this heavenly chorus.
  3. The barriers between earth and heaven, time and eternity, are temporarily lowered.
  4. Christian song is a heavenly activity, an anticipation of the activities of the end time.
- (vi) Song is for mutual edification.
1. The singing in the assembly is not only directed to God but also is directed to one another for teaching and admonition.
  2. 1 Cor. 14:26 enjoins that the psalms in the assembly, as everything else there, is to be for communal edification.
  3. Since edification requires understanding of what is said (1 Cor. 14:9, 16-17, 19), melody is secondary to the words (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15 for singing “with the mind”).
  4. The melody must support and deepen the message and not obscure it.
- (vii) Song exemplifies the unity of the church.
1. Paul urged the Romans that together they with one voice would glorify God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:6).
  2. Singing together expresses and symbolizes the unity of the church; they are united to God and to one another.
- (viii) Song involves the whole person.
1. It involves spirit and mind (1 Cor. 14:15).
  2. It involves the heart (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) and the lips (Heb. 13:15).
  3. Singing engages the heart, mind, and organs of speech; the intellect, the emotions, and the physical self are involved.
  4. The tongue is the instrument on which God is praised, and this is done from the heart, and intelligibly.

- (ix) Song expresses deep religious emotion.
  - 1. Are any cheerful, they should sing songs of praise (James 5:13).
  - 2. Nevertheless, singing in church is not for the sake of the beauty of the music.
  - 3. The quality of the music is to enhance all the doctrinal elements mentioned, not to call attention to itself.
- (b) Instrumental music.
  - (i) Musical instruments occur in the New Testament as part of everyday life (Matt. 9:23; 11:17; Rev. 18:22) and as illustrations (1 Cor. 13:1; 14:7-8), but they are never mentioned as part of the assemblies of the church or accompanying Christian religious music.
  - (ii) Their only appearance in a worship context is in the book of Revelation, where, drawing on the imagery of the temple, the voices of the heavenly singers are compared to stringed instruments (Rev. 14:2-3); the instruments symbolize singing (cf. Rev. 15:2-3) in the same way that incense does prayer (Rev. 5:8-9).
  - (iii) The testimony of early Christian literature is expressly to the absence of instruments from the church from approximately the first thousand years of Christian history.
  - (iv) The arguments in favor of instrumental music fail to carry the case.
    - 1. It was used in the Old Testament.
      - a. There it was an accompaniment of the sacrificial cultus (e.g., 1 Chron. 23:5; 2 Chron. 29:20-36), the abolition of which would have eliminated its accompaniments.
      - b. The presence of something in the Old Testament worship would legitimate many things in the church that no Christian group would want to practice.
    - 2. It is included in the words “psalm” and “make melody” (psallo).
      - a. This is true of one stage in the history of these words, but not of late Jewish and Christian usage where a vocal expression is all that can be affirmed.
      - b. If an instrument were included in the use of these words, then an instrument would be required, but few are willing to go so far as to say that an instrument must be used (especially in light of clear church history to the contrary).
    - 3. Its absence in the early church was a cultural matter, due to the association of instrumental music with idolatry and immorality.
      - a. This is an assertion lacking proof.
      - b. It is true that instruments were associated with idolatry and immorality, but this cannot be said of Jewish temple music.

- c. Moreover, these association applied to vocal music as well, and singing was not rejected in the early church.
  - d. Religious instrumental music was available to the early Christians if they had wanted to employ it.
- (4) Giving.
- (a) The readiness to give is a constant feature of the individual Christian life (Rom. 12:13; James 2:14-17).
  - (b) Giving is also done corporately through the church (Acts 4:34-35; 11:29-30).
    - (i) This activity finds specific expression in the Christian meeting.
    - (ii) 1 Cor. 16:1-3 related to a collection of contribution at the weekly assembly – church giving to meet church needs.
    - (iii) Such giving is to be:
      - 1. Periodic – upon the first day of every week;
      - 2. Personal – each one of you;
      - 3. Planned – whatever you prosper;
      - 4. Preventive – so that contributions need not be taken when Paul arrives; and
      - 5. Purposeful – to take your gift to Jerusalem.
  - (c) Giving is a:
    - (i) Grace (2 Cor. 8:1-9, 19).
    - (ii) Fellowship (cf. Rom. 12:13; Phil. 4:15; 2 Cor. 8:4; 2 Cor. 9:13).
    - (iii) Service (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1, 12).
    - (iv) Priestly service (2 Cor. 9:12)
    - (v) Blessing (2 Cor. 9:5-6).
    - (vi) Test or Proof (2 Cor. 8:2; 9:13).
  - (d) These points show the high spiritual value Paul assigned to giving.
    - (i) He sought to motivate by appealing to the fundamental principle of Christian faith.
    - (ii) Giving is related to the foundation of the gospel and is an expression of the appropriation of the very nature of the gospel.
    - (iii) The basic response to the gospel and foundation of all giving is first to give the self to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5).
- (5) Reading and Preaching the Bible.
- (a) The saving word (cf. James 1:21) that connects the redemptive event to the present and to the future must be alive in the church.
  - (b) Delivering and receiving the word of the Lord are part of public service to God.
  - (c) The content and goal of preaching and teaching are stated in Colossians 1:28.
  - (d) In the assembly, the word of God is dispensed (1 Tim. 4:13).
    - (i) The biblical texts containing the revelation and knowledge of apostolic times must continue to be proclaimed and taught.

- (ii) Even as the person who leads the congregation in prayer speaks for the people to God, the preacher of the word speaks for God to the people.
  - (iii) Accordingly, the preacher must always remember that he is a servant of the word, not its master.
  - (iv) The hearers have a responsibility too; note Jesus' admonition in Matt. 11:15.
  - (v) Hearing with understanding makes one aware of being in the presence of the Lord and so is a worship experience.
- (e) A sermon preached in faith, based on scripture, praising God's deeds, and showing consequent obligations and consolations is indeed an act of worship.
- (i) God is at work in the gospel (Rom. 1:16), and his word is living and active (Heb. 4:12).
  - (ii) The church is a preaching church.
  - (iii) It is a people that lives by the word of the Lord.
  - (iv) Because the church is a people who have heard the word and continue to listen to it and seek to be guided by it, the church is a worshipping people.