

LET US DRAW NEAR - Biblical Worship and the Warming of the Soul - Part 13

Teaching #2094 - Sunday, December 16th, 2018, 10:00 a.m.

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NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY CHURCH (Part four)

If you remember, we began unpacking the principles for determining specifically which expressions of Scriptural worship are to be taken as permanently binding for the church today. We don't want to be measured by the ruler of **style** here. We all have our own highly fallible tastes. They have been shaped by many things from upbringing, temperament, past teaching in various churches of multi-stripped denominational backgrounds. Probably none of this is **bad**. But it's also not **reliable** for measuring what **God** requires from us in worship.

Isaiah saw a **throne** revealed in heaven. Thrones imply **kings**, and kings, not subjects, make the rules for worship. Then we studied **Uzzah**, who, with nothing but the best and loving of intentions, was struck dead by God for disobeying the worship instructions revolving around the ark of the Lord. Worship truly isn't regulated by human taste or sincerity. God, it seems, will go to great lengths to keep our thinking on track regarding how He is to be approached in worship.

Then, last week, we began narrowing our search for a theology of worship practice. We nailed down the foundational principle that the Old Testament must always be interpreted in the light of the completed revelation of the New. The New Testament isn't more **inspired** than the Old. It isn't more holy. It's just the completed story.

Finally, we began looking at this key principle in the second point of last week's teaching. It's a long, rather involved point. Here it is: **major on worship expressions that are seen to be permanently binding, either by being carried over from the Old Testament to the New, or are clearly introduced in the New Testament and presented as permanent additions to the worship of the church.**

Last week we wrapped up looking at the **last** part of that statement first - **expressions of worship introduced in the New Testament and presented as permanent additions to the worship patterns of the New Testament church.** You can view all of those things on line.

Today we will look carefully at the **first** part of that long point - look for **expressions of worship carried over from the Old Testament to the New Testament.** Many Old Testament practices - perfectly fine and righteous for their own time in God's plan - are never mentioned again in the New Testament. But others are taught and practiced over and over. Many are actually **commanded** in the New Testament as well as the Old. Those are the ones on which the church should fix her attention. I can think of several:

1) **THE LIFTING OF HANDS UNTO THE LORD - Psalm 63:4 - "So I will bless you as long as I live; *in your name I will lift up my hands.*"**

Anyone with a good concordance could find literally scores of references to the lifting of hands unto the Lord in the Old Testament. The sheer bulk of reference to it is really quite amazing. But that's not why we practice the lifting up of hands unto the Lord.

In the **New Testament** we find something else of even greater importance for the worship of the church:

1 Timothy 2:1-8 - "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [5] For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. [7] For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. [8] *I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling...."*

This is a very important passage of Scripture. Paul, and through Paul, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, takes this very common Old Testament practice of lifting up hands to the Lord - the very same practice David mentions so warmly in the Psalms - the same practice of Moses and Solomon - and urges the New Testament church - no, **encourages** - the New Testament Church - to make sure this practice is **perpetuated in its prayer and worship times.**

“Well, Pastor Don, I think that was just some **cultural instruction** Paul was giving to the church. I don't think it's really for today.”

This is why I took the time to set Paul's words about lifting hands in prayer in their surrounding context. What are we to do with the **rest** of the instructions in that **same** passage in Paul's letter to Timothy? Is **modesty** still a Christian virtue for the church today? Paul talks a lot about that in these verses. Is it still God's will we **pray for our leaders**? That's in the very same passage. Was that just for one culture? And what about when Paul says it is God's will that **“all people everywhere be saved”** (4)? Is that just a cultural tid-bit as well?

Clearly, the Apostle Paul wanted people everywhere to lift up holy hands in their corporate times of prayer and worship. And I'm going to spend one whole message in this series discussing why.

But let's look now at another worship expression that is **carried over from Old Testament to New**:

2) **BOWING AND KNEELING BEFORE THE LORD IN WORSHIP AND DEVOTION - Psalm 95:6 - “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!”**

Again, this is only one of many references to bowing before the Lord in worship. And the New Testament picks up the same theme:

Ephesians 3:14-16 - “For this reason **I bow my knees** before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being....”

Kneeling before the Lord befits both **intensity of desire in prayer** and **recognition of the greatness of God's glory**. Kneeling humbles the **creature** before the **Creator**.

There is something here we simply have to come to terms with in simple textual honesty and humility. God is **eternally** interested in expressions of worship from His people that involve their physical bodies. This only makes sense once we remember God **created** us as material, physical beings, not just hearts and minds. And this emphasis will continue on God's mind as long as God lasts. As his mind races toward the still unseen future, Paul says more about kneeling before our Lord. Only this time, he's writing of the **continuing physicality** of worship, even in the age to come around the throne of God:

Philippians 2:9-11 - “Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus **every knee should bow**, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Kneeling before the Lord so **transcends any culture** or period of time that Paul says the day is coming when **all of creation** will recognize its validity. God will have all of creation bow before the greatness of Jesus Christ. We kneel in our church both in **recognition** and **preparation** for that glorious day.

3) **SINGING PLAYS A VITAL PART IN SCRIPTURAL WORSHIP IN BOTH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS**

We've already considered this expression of worship in the story of Jehoshaphat. References in the O.T. appear far earlier than the Psalms of David:

Exodus 15:1 - “Then Moses and the people of Israel **sang this song to the Lord**, saying, ‘**I will sing to the Lord**, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.’”

This was Israel's response to the delivering power of the Lord on their behalf. They **sang** to the Lord. Song has always marked the thankful people of God.

Of course, no one talked about this more than King David:

Psalm 9:1-2 - “I will **give thanks to the LORD** with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. [2] I will be glad and exult in you; **I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.**”

Then the Scriptures clearly reaffirm the abiding place of song in the worship of the New Testament Church. Jesus, facing the agony of the cross, very deliberately took the time to sing a hymn with his disciples:

Mark 14:22-26 - "And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." [23] And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. [24] And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. [25] Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." [26] And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Jesus had a **reason** for doing this. He wasn't following some **order of service**. He knew there was strength in song for what this small group was about to face.

Some of the great moments in the early church continued to revolve around the singing of hymns:

Acts 16:23-26 - "And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. [24] Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. [25] About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, [26] and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone's bonds were unfastened."

I can't tell you the number of times people will come up to me and relate how God supernaturally touched their lives, not necessarily while I was **preaching**, but while they were involved in **singing**.

The Apostle James underscored the importance of responding to the different seasons of life with proper worship and expression in song:

James 5:13 - "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise."

Then we learn that the New Testament church learned to **divide** its pattern of song into three primary categories to suit different needs and purposes:

Colossians 3:16 - "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

In keeping with the desire of Apostolic leadership for the Word to remain central, the singing of **Psalms** appears first on the list. Scripture put to song has a way of being **retained** in our being. We can play the word back to music in our own minds and feed on its message.

Then the church continued after the pattern of Jesus Himself, singing **hymns**. These quickly became longer, more doctrinally oriented songs. They quickly formed much of the traditional creedal background for the early church.

Notice that the message of these songs was frequently directed **toward others in the Body of Christ** (**Ephesians 5:19** - "....addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart....") People needed encouragement and exhortation.

"Take Time to be Holy", "Trust and Obey", "My Faith has Found a Resting Place", "Blessed Assurance" - These hymns have been sung - **one to another** - in the church for many years. They have edified those who received their message with faith.

On a side note, this is why I don't particularly like it when writers of current worship songs feel free to **change** the words of these great hymns. I think we can all agree there are many, many great current songs available to bless the church of Christ. And writers are free to generate any lyrics they feel inspired to write.

But it's quite another thing to take what someone **else** has already written - especially if the whole church - around the world - has been nourished and blessed on these great hymns for generations - it's quite another thing for some modern composer of worship music to feel he or she is actually improving on these great hymns. If a hymn has nourished the worship of the church for two hundred years it probably doesn't need fixing.

Finally, the church sang **spiritual songs**. These would equate to many of the shorter worship choruses we sing in the church today. These are songs that heighten immediacy and closeness to our Lord. These songs open our hearts to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, in a sound, worshiping congregation **all three** forms of music should continue. No one form should be allowed to **replace** the other two. These particular musical structures of song have nothing to do with worship **style**. Worship should never be stacked up on the foundation of style. God has given a **theological, Biblical** foundation on which the basic musical patterns of church worship are to be formed.

There will, of course, be style **elements**. There weren't any piano's or organs in the early church - let alone electric guitars and drums. But the basic pattern for these expressions goes much deeper, and churches will haggle and fracture over worship **trends** if they neglect the deeper **theology** of worship. We need the balance of this New Testament pattern.

4) **BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS LIFT UP THE VALUE OF SPOKEN PRAISE AND WORSHIP TO THE LORD**

Psalm 34:1 - "Of David, when he Changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away. I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise **shall continually be in my mouth.**"

Psalm 35:18 - "**I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.**"

Then, we read these words, perhaps the best known of all from the Old Testament:

Psalm 63:3-4 - "Because your steadfast love is better than life, **my lips will praise you.** [4] So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name **I will lift up my hands.**"

Here again, what we're stressing is the fact that this emphasis on verbal praise offered to the Lord is picked up again in the New Testament:

Hebrews 13:15 - "Through him then **let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.**"

Let's take a moment to sum up these last two teachings. Their importance can hardly be over-estimated. We've looked at two principles for determining which Old Testament expressions of worship are carried over into the New and marked as permanent for the church today. They are, **first, practices carried over from the Old Testament into the New**, and **second, practices initiated and presented as abiding by the instruction of the New Testament Apostles**. These two principles form the heart of how we worship and why.

As most of you know, I'm really not as interested in getting worked up about passing fads in worship or manifestations that **have no biblical grounding in the clear teaching of the New Testament**. This would include everything from wave offerings, laughing in the Spirit, dancing before the Lord, and a host of other things which, while certainly not wicked in any way, are never once mentioned in the practice of the worship of the early church.

I think a great deal about Paul's words, though on a different subject, which still have strong application to the practices of the church in all things spiritual, when he cautions the people **"not to go beyond what is written"** (1 Corinthians 4:6).

People will always want something **new**. We all have enough spiritual pride to crave something **extra**. But if we can, in humble dependance on the Lord and His blessed Holy Spirit, **reject** things not taught in the Word, and **not leave out** anything the Scriptures encourage us to seek after, I have the feeling **we will be right where the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, wants us all to be!**

And it's always safe there. He will minister, by His Spirit, all the grace and life we need and crave.