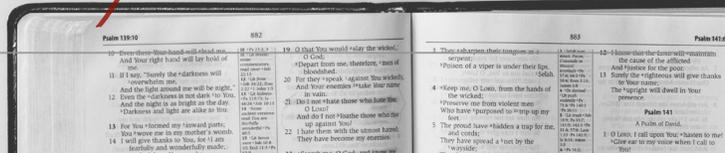


WORDS *of* TRUTH

“Worship”



Ladies Article

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Theme Articles

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Enter to Worship

Not everything we do in life is an act of worship to God. Nor is Sunday morning at ten o'clock within the walls of the church building while surrounded by our brothers and sisters in Christ the only time we worship. Worship is an offering. Worship is a state of mind. Worship is dutiful recognition. Only God is worthy of worship. Only God should receive worship.

As waters issue forth from a natural spring in the ground, so should worship bubble up and overflow from within our hearts. Praise and adoration should be second nature to us. The making of spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:5) should be the desire of our hearts.

Worship is a solemn exercise of mind and body (Lev. 23:36). The modern concept of worship is more akin to going to the movies. Entertainment and emotion seem to be the objective, as opposed to pleasing God. Worship can be offered in vain (Mat. 15:9). Let us strive to offer to God worship that is full of the spirit and according to revealed truth (John 4:24).

The Place of Preaching in Worship

Patrick Morrison

The privilege of worshipping God is one of the greatest blessings afforded man. The creature is given the opportunity to laud and extol the Creator. The corporate assembly of the church allows the "called-out" to express praise and adoration to the One Who amazes us because of Who He is and all that He has done and continues to do. In the average worship assembly, the preaching of God's word occupies approximately half of the time given to worship. That is a significant portion of the time we spend worshipping God that is spent listening to and involved in the proclamation of the gospel. Why do we give so much time in our assemblies to preaching? What place should preaching occupy in the worship of Almighty God?

It is altogether appropriate that the word of God become a focal point as we worship God. After all, the proper worship of Jehovah requires understanding of who He is that then stirs our hearts to gratitude and praise. The Word (John 1:1-5) chose to reveal himself to us by means of his word. All Scripture is breathed out of the mouth of God, and as such it is valuable for our instruction and discipline (2 Tim. 3:16). All the words of God are precious (Matt. 4:4) as they reveal to us the very heart and mind of the Almighty. As we give ourselves to meditate upon his revelation (Psa. 1:3), we find ourselves more and more in awe of our great God. Without this sense of awe and amazement, we cannot adequately worship. Without the word of God, we cannot understand and appreciate our God. Therefore, the word of God must have a high priority in any worship assembly.

Not only must the word of God have a high priority in our worship to God, but it must also be highly respected and revered. As Scripture is being read, the Father is speaking to us. The words that come from the very mouth of God are spirit and life (John 6:63). They deserve our utmost attention and reverence. As Ezra stood before the people to read the law of the Lord, they responded by standing for the duration of the reading (Neh. 8:5). Such action reveals the respect that they had for the holy word of God. We must manifest a similar attitude as we approach the hearing of the precious book divine. Our hearts should cry out, "Speak, Lord, for your servants hear" (1 Sam. 3:9). We should highly anticipate and look forward to every opportunity we have to hear God speak to us by means of his word, for His words are more to us than even our necessary food (Job 23:12). Anyone who would stand before us to break unto us the bread of life deserves our appreciation and our attention, because our God is speaking!

But, why preaching? Why do we place such a premium in our worship assemblies on this particular method of proclaiming the message of God's word? For one, we have biblical precedence for such. As the people of Israel assembled together for the purpose of worshipping God, "the Levites helped the people to understand the law" by reading clearly from the law of God and giving the sense of it so that the people understood the reading (Neh. 8:6-8). As Jesus began his earthly ministry, he came to Nazareth and entered into the synagogue. He then took the scroll of Isaiah and began reading in the presence of those who were gathered there. He then sat down and began to expose the text, such that they "marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth" (Luke 4:22). Paul followed a similar pattern as did Jesus, entering into the synagogue, reasoning from the Scriptures, and "explaining and proving" the message of the gospel (Acts 17:2-3). The public proclamation of the word of God, therefore, entails a giving of the sense of the passage being read and/or discussed. As God speaks to us in the preaching of his word, we must also seek to understand and to make application of these eternal truths to our lives. The preacher of the message serves as a mouthpiece for the sounding forth of the message, but he must also seek to bring greater understanding of the commands of God as well as teaching those within the sound of his voice what must be done with this understanding. But, there is still more involved in preaching the word of God than simply disseminating information and explaining it. Such could simply be summed up as teaching, but we are talking about preaching. After explaining that every scripture comes from the very mouth of God and is, therefore, profitable for all that we need, Paul instructs Timothy to preach that message (2 Tim. 3:16-4:2). No doubt Paul had in mind much more than private teaching or simple instruction. Paul wanted Timothy to "preach the word" to the assembled people of God. The word translated "preach" is the Greek word *kerusso*, meaning "to herald, as a public crier" (Strong's G2784). A crier would often go to the masses with a message from the king. His purpose was to capture the attention of the people so that they might truly hear the address of the king. "Hear ye, hear ye," was his cry. The same purpose and passion is to characterize the proclaimer of the message of the King today. The preacher is not merely there to teach the gospel, but to preach it. His intention is to gain the attention of the listeners so that they may truly hear the message of the Almighty. The one who would stand in the pulpit must passionately and fervently make known the message of the gospel. A sage instructor once told a group of young, would-be preachers, "If you cannot put fire in your sermons, then I suggest that you put your sermons in the fire!"

The preaching of the gospel message is an integral part of our public worship assemblies. There is great reason why this particular part of our worship is given such emphasis and occupies a major portion of our time together, for it is God speaking to us as one passionately exposes the sacred page. Let us make certain to long for and respect this precious aspect of our corporate worship assemblies. Let us exalt the name of our God, His Spirit, and the Lord Jesus as we fervently preach the word!

Overcoming Obstacles in Worship

Melissa Cain

The Sunday morning was marvelous and bright: blue sky, white fluffy clouds, and air that was perfectly crisp. It was the brink of spring, and it even showed as members of the Lord's body began to arrive at the church building to worship the Lord. Laughter, hugs, and special salutations could be heard throughout the foyer. The joy that began to fill the building was contagious. Among the familiar smiles was a new face, a truly special guest who was not likely to get lost in crowd of strangers, but who entered beaming with joy and happiness. Although invited by members, she had not come to see the people who met in this place, but merely to worship her Lord. Time drew near for the worship hour, and souls ushered into the auditorium, offering a few quick final greetings en route to their pews. As the announcements began and information from the bulletin was shared, the enthusiastic voices were understandably stifled in deference to decorum; unfortunately, the enthusiastic smiles were likewise replaced with stoic stares. Next there was an opening prayer, followed by the song leader identifying the opening song, and by the time the first note of harmony was sung, the joy and excitement that had filled the air moments earlier had all but disappeared.

Where did it go? Mothers were already struggling with their children. Latecomers were shuffling into the assembly, perhaps because of getting off work late or because the snooze button was pressed one too many times. Some were already rising to leave the assembly for one reason or another. Candy wrappers were unwrapped, songbooks were dropped, and members at home texted because they could not hear the livestream. Suffice it to say, things happen during worship that are sure to distract even the most focused minds in their praising, learning, petitioning, remembering, and giving. As things began to settle, the special new visitor came into the view: despite all of the distractions, there she was — intent, focused, engaged, and sincere. Members even noticed her attentiveness throughout the worship hour, particularly how much her heart was being poured into the songs she sung and how intently she listened as the preacher heralded God's message.

Obstacles abounded: for some it was the restless children, for others it was the rustling of candy bags, for some it was the constant rising, sitting, coming, and going of those exiting and returning to their pews. For several, the greatest distraction was the visitor who had obviously learned to worship God quite differently than the rest. Hindrances for souls in worship are various and countless, with disruptions coming not just from other souls around them, but also from their own thoughts within them: to-do lists, should-have-done lists, and so forth. Whatever the obstacle, no matter who may distract, and regardless of what challenging situations life may be presenting, faithful Christians can overcome obstacles in worship.

It has always been the case that God desires to be among His people and for His people to abide with Him. From the beginning of time God wanted man to be in His presence. "And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD called unto Adam, and said unto him, 'Where art thou?'" (Gen. 3:8-9). God did not go to the garden in person to merely look for His children. God went looking so that Adam and Eve could see where God was, and to see His care for them and His desire to be with them. From the very beginning of God's creation, all the way to the end of God's written revelation, God tells of His desire for man to be with Him. "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God'" (Rev. 21:3). Paul explained to the Ephesians the relationship between Christ's church, God's dwelling, and God's glory. "Unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages" (Eph. 3:21): God's glory *is in the church*. "In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22): God's dwelling place today *is the church*.

God's church is blessed with God's presence and God's glory. God has given His people the opportunity to approach to Him, but there may be obstacles. God has given His people the ability to approach to Him, but there may be obstacles. God has given His people the responsibility to approach to Him, even when obstacles must be overcome.

Overcoming any obstacle course requires three necessities: the right attitude, the right provisions, and the right direction.

Overcome obstacles with the right attitude. The Christian must have the right attitude when approaching God in worship. Realizing that this divinely ordained time of devotion is the pinnacle event of any week. God's people are expected to come to Him effectually, worthily, and with cause. All of these attitudes are opposite traits of what would be called vain worship (Mat. 15:9). Many have said that preparation for Sunday morning worship begins on Saturday night. How true that is! When saints arrive to the church building late, out of breath, dragging in the baggage from the previous day, how difficult it must be to come before God with affections set on things above. Saturday is pivotal in getting the heart ready for worship: imagine how less stressful Sunday morning is when Saturday includes a good night's rest and a jumpstart on getting clothes and children washed and ready.

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Worship: Authorized, Authentic, and Accepted

Scott Cain

God desires worship, yet the examples of worship which fails to meet God's desires are almost as old as the world. Whereas Abel offered a sacrifice of submissive faith that God literally beheld with approval (Gen. 4:4; Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17), Cain offered a sacrifice that God refused to behold with approval (Gen. 4:5). God authorized. Cain improvised. God turned His eyes. Cain's worship was unacceptable.

Today's world claims, "God doesn't care how we worship Him, as long as we are sincere." Is this true?

God authorized the authentic tree of life (Gen. 2:9): suppose man improvised an inauthentic tree and called it the "tree of life." Would it have given eternal life? God authorized the authentic ark of Noah (Gen. 6:15). If man had improvised an inauthentic vessel and called it an ark, would it have given salvation from the flood? God authorized the authentic worship of Israel under the Old Testament. When Nadab & Abihu improvised with inauthentic "strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1), was it acceptable?

No. An improvised, inauthentic tree of life would not give eternal life. An improvised, inauthentic ark would not have saved. And the improvised, inauthentic offering of Nadab and Abihu was not accepted, but rather it cost them their lives. "And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:2).

God never accepted improvised, inauthentic worship — not in the beginning, not at the Flood, not under the Old Law, nor under the New Testament. Jesus warned of the worthless worship of those who prioritized human tradition over God's precepts, saying, "But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mat. 15:9).

Fact: a soul's worship can be "in vain" — as worthless as Cain's. This prospect is terrifying.

Fact: a soul's worship can be pleasing to God — as accepted as Abel's (Heb. 11:4, 6). This prospect is inspiring!

How can a soul know whether his worship is authorized, authentic, and acceptable? Consider three questions drawn from two statements from the one Savior.

Authorized worship follows the "truth" principle: "Does God approve of this action?" Answering a question about worship, Jesus explained that the Father seeks "true worshippers" who worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). God desires this. God deserves this. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

To worship God "in truth" is to worship Him according to His will as expressed in the truth of His Word (John 17:17). Worshipping "in truth" cannot be achieved through ignorant worship, when worshippers are unfamiliar with God and His will (Acts 17:23). Worshipping "in truth"

cannot be achieved through willful worship, when men simply do what seems religious (Col. 2:23). Worshipping "in truth" is not achieved in denominating worship, when men allow their doctrines and traditions to eclipse God's will (Mat. 15:9).

Worship "in truth" heeds every detail of God's instructions. Nadab and Abihu changed one detail and were consumed (Lev. 10:2). Moses once obeyed God's instruction to strike a rock to bring forth water (Exo. 17:5-6), but forty years later when God instructed Moses to bring forth water by speaking to a rock, Moses struck the rock instead and was forbidden from entering the promised land for his lack of faith (Num. 20:7-12). God's words were specific, and His prior directions did not justify Moses' departure from God's current order. Just as Moses violated God's specific instruction to "speak" to the rock by striking it with an instrument, so worship today can become unauthorized, inauthentic, and unacceptable when the men decide to "play" when the Bible specifies "speaking" and "singing," or when people opt for monthly when the Bible specifies weekly, or when churches choose water when the Bible specifies fruit of the vine, or when congregations put women into roles the Bible specifies to be filled by men.

Authentic worship follows the "spirit" principle: "Does God approve of this attitude?" God desires worship to be "in spirit" as much as "in truth" (John 4:23-24). The two go hand in hand.

To worship "in spirit" requires sincere, heartfelt worship. Every authorized avenue of New Testament worship is connected to the heart. Prayer is to come from the heart (Rom. 10:1). Singing involves both grace and melody in the heart (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). The preaching of God's word is to be richly received by open hearts (Col. 3:16; cf. Ps. 119:11). A Christian is to give "as he purposeth in his heart" (2 Cor. 9:7). The Lord's Supper is to be observed as the heart and mind discern Christ's sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:26-29).

Worship not done "in truth" is unauthorized, inauthentic, and unacceptable; so is worship not done "in spirit." Apathetic worship is no less repulsive than apostate worship. When, instead of discerning the Lord's body, a man scribbles a last-minute check for the offering; when, instead of singing, a sister lip syncs while rehearsing the lunch menu in her head; when, instead of hearing the sermon, he recaps SEC football scores; when, instead of giving cheerfully, he grudgingly forfeits what little is left in his wallet after a weekend out; and when, instead of praying, she stares aghast at her sister's hideous blouse, then these brethren have turned worship into a mere routine instead of heartfelt service, and their acts of "devotion" are no more pleasing to God than the unacceptable sacrifice of Cain.

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Worship: Authorized, Authentic, and Accepted

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Scott Cain

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Sincere worship is as much a matter of intention as emotion, sincerely submitting to God's will. No matter how emotional or expressive he may be, a soul cannot rightly claim to worship sincerely when he follows personal preference while ignoring or refusing to consider God's will.

Accepted worship follows the "peace" principle: "Does God approve of my relationship with my brethren?"

This is perhaps the greatest threat to authentic worship among New Testament Christians. After warning against unjustified anger and belittling brethren with insults, Christ told His audience, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Mat. 5:23-24).

This could be life altering for many. Acceptance at God's altar requires altercations to undergo alteration. Before worshipping God (His altar), consider any dispute with brethren (altercation), and go change the situation by being reconciled (alteration), then come to worship. Regardless of how long the tension has hindered the relationship, regardless of how awkward the subject may be, regardless of how public or private the issue may be, Jesus said to "Agree with thine adversary quickly" (Mat. 5:25). In other words, "Brethren, work it out!"

Strained relationships between saints results in a strained relationship with God. This is especially true of trouble in the home, for Peter advised husbands to have understanding toward their wives, to treat them as fragile, and to be "heir together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet. 3:7). Unaddressed marital strain can hinder a married couple's relationship with God, jeopardizing their souls.

Just as tension in the home can hinder the prayers of the husband and wife, tension in the church can hinder the worship of an entire church. How many congregations have been offering checklist ritualism for years or even decades because disagreements among members have not been handled Christ's way? Such worship is unauthorized, inauthentic, and unacceptable. It is as vain as Cain, as fruitless as the Pharisees, and as damnable as the denominations.

Are Christians honestly applying the principles of truth, spirit, and peace today? Consider a few practical observations.

- If your strongest defense for any practice is based on familiarity: "This is how we've always done it," your worship might be worthless.
- If your allegiance to any practice centers solely on human relationships: "If this worship was good enough for Grandpa, then it's good enough for me," your worship might be worthless.

- If your idea of worship involves letting others worship while you just listen: "I had rather hear the choir than hear myself sing," your worship might be worthless.
- If you believe that worship should be centered around your preferences: "To me the songs sound better when there is a piano (or a harp, or a band)," your worship might be worthless.
- If you reject or redefine the authority of basic Biblical truths: "Yes, the Bible says to sing, but limiting it to singing is just Church of Christ traditionalism," your worship might be worthless.
- If you see worship as a mere list of obligations: "Well, I prayed, I sang, I endured the sermon, I ate the crackers and juice, and I dropped a five into the plate: God ought to be tickled that I checked all my boxes this week," your worship might be worthless.
- If you are at odds with your fellow Christian: "I'm in the assembly, but I'm not sitting near Joe and his conservative politics," your worship might be worthless.
- If you think ethnicity should determine where brethren belong: "Wouldn't those brethren be a better fit over at the white church?" your worship might be worthless.
- If you worry more about your parking spot than you do about brotherly love: "If Tom takes my parking spot again, we're going to have words," your worship might be worthless.
- If you value your "assigned" pew more than your fellow saints: "If Mary takes our pew again, I'm just going to plop right down in her lap," your worship might be worthless.
- If you turn the assembly into a fashion show: "Nobody has even noticed my new dress (or haircut, or suit, or shoes, or vehicle)," your worship might be worthless.
- If you strategize your seating position to hide your apathy: "If I get sit behind Geraldine's hair, the preacher won't see me napping," your worship might be worthless.

May each soul's love for the Lord and for His church tune our hearts to sing His praise, heed His will, and exalt His name in a manner authorized, authentic, and acceptable to Him.

Worship in Song

Robert Hatfield

New Testament worship is beautifully simple. Do not be mistaken; it is profound, but profundity does not necessitate complexity. Consider the beauty, simplicity, and depth of worship in song.

When guests visit the worship assemblies of churches of Christ, they often comment on our *a cappella* singing. This Latin term means, “without instrumental accompaniment.” In Italian, a cappella means “of the church.”

There is no question that the New Testament church sang in worship assemblies without the accompaniment of musical instruments. When the church engaged in “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19 ESV), they would do so by “singing ... to the Lord” with their hearts. This was a direct result of their allowing “the word of Christ [to] dwell in [them] richly” (Col. 3:16) as they sang from the heart to God.

When these brothers and sisters engaged in singing during public worship, they all participated (“teaching and admonishing *one another*,” Col. 3:16, emphasis added), engaging their hearts and their voices in worship to God. This is the New Testament pattern – the very pattern that was given by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, the pattern that churches of Christ seek to follow to this day.

To depart from this pattern would be to depart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit regarding singing in public worship. Many, it seems, are willing to do so in our present time, but such is not wise.

A cappella, congregational singing in public worship is beautiful! I do not make that statement as a matter of personal preference (though I do love a cappella singing), but as a matter of biblical principle. Such singing is beautiful because it is pleasing to God.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Mat. 5:6). Since all of God’s commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172), does not Jesus’ statement imply that we must train ourselves to love what God loves? It is a joy to know that we are pleasing to God. In the matter of singing in worship, a cappella singing in which every person in the congregation participates is pleasing to God (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

Singing is beautiful because the message of the songs is biblical. There is a time and place for patriotic songs or songs about our culture, but the songs sung in worship are to be “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Of course, the Psalms were Israel’s “song book,” Hebrew poetry that was set to music and utilized in worship under the Law of Moses. It is still appropriate to sing about the Lord being our shepherd (Psa. 23) or about our longing for God as the deer thirsts for flowing streams (Psa. 42). The terms “hymns” and “spiritual songs” further specify that the songs we sing in worship are to be focused on spiritual themes.

Note the emphasis on the *words* we sing. God is not concerned with how well you feel you can sing, nor is he

concerned with the melody or harmony of the song. The emphasis is on the words. Those words are directed “to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19), “to God” (Col. 3:16). He, of course, is the object of our worship (John 4:24; Rev. 22:8-9). Therefore, it is important that the words we direct to God in our songs are words that honor Him and are biblically accurate regarding Who He says He is.

Ultimately, Christians must find joy in singing because it is what God wants, not because we feel that we are particularly good at it. Consider three practical purposes that are born out of our worship in song.

Singing unifies us. There is something powerful about an assembled group of people singing sacred truths. Not long before Jesus was betrayed by Judas and arrested, he was singing with the apostles (Mat. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

In the wake of tragedy, it is not uncommon to see people gathered and singing. Who could forget the video of members of Congress singing “God Bless America” following the attacks on September 11, 2001?

In a world in which Christians are in the minority (Jesus said it would be this way — Mat. 7:14), it is powerful for a group of Christians to assemble on the Lord’s day (Rev. 1:10; cf. Acts 20:7) and sing songs like, “Our God, He is Alive!” or “Soldiers of Christ, Arise!” or “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us.” There is a unifying power in singing.

Singing humbles us. Have you ever felt vulnerable in singing? Maybe you have been embarrassed to sing? It is humbling to employ our voices as “a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name” (Heb. 13:15). Perhaps this is one of the very reasons why we are commanded to do it – to humble us before God who is worthy of our praise.

Singing focuses us. The songs we sing are rich in doctrine! Thus, in singing, Christians encourage and exhort those with whom we are worshiping. Paul says that, when we sing, we are “addressing one another” (Eph. 5:19) and “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16). Once again, the words are of utmost importance. Songs have a way of etching majestic truths onto our hearts through beautiful rhyme and melody, a form of teaching that is readily memorized and retained.

Christians have reason to sing! James says, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise” (Jam. 5:13). Christians have a joy that is unique, a joy that transcends life’s circumstances because it is rooted in the victory that comes through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57). So, we sing! We sing because the word of Christ dwells in us. We sing because our hearts are filled with gratitude. We sing to teach and warn one another.

As you enter the worship assembly this Sunday, you have every reason to sing, and to do so with all of your heart!

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The wrong attitude in worship can be overcome by working on the attitude, not just on Saturday, but daily. Devotion to God throughout the week is as pivotal as getting prepared the night before worship. When a soul has not opened her Bible since the last Bible class, her indifferent attitude toward Holy Writ will not likely produce the proper reverence toward God, and it will be evermore difficult to overcome the distractions that inevitably arise in worship.

The right attitude toward God includes a right attitude toward His church. When the Israelites prepared for worship, they were not merely going to a church building, and they certainly were not “going to church.” They were going to be in the presence of the one true God, Creator of heaven and earth. How many obstacles could God’s followers overcome today in preparing for worship if they stepped away from the denominational view of “going to church” and began looking at God’s bride the way that He does; “a glorious church” (Eph. 5:27)?

Overcome obstacles with the right provisions. Once God’s children fully realize the importance of being in God’s presence, they can come before God with much more to offer. They offer attention, respect, and the sacrifice required to be in His presence. Sacrifice begins with attitude. If one prepares for worship saying, “It’s time to go to church,” does she truly realize the magnificence of getting ready to appear before the throne of God? When children hear, “We’ve got to go to church,” instead of, “We get to go worship God,” Sunday after Sunday and Bible class after Bible class, can they even comprehend the magnitude of being able to gather with the saints and bow before their God in true worship (John 4:23)? When the right attitude is instilled in the heart of a child, her reverence for God, His people, and His praise will be clearly seen from the pew.

Israel’s worship of God required provisions, and God provided. God supplied their needs, and He still supplies the needs of His people today. When God told His people to appear before Him, He not only told them what to bring, but He provided what they needed. “Every man shall give as he is able, according to the *blessing of the Lord thy God which He hath given thee*” (Deu. 16:17). Having what is needed for worship can seem like an obstacle when blessings are taken for granted. Superficial distractions can include unattractive flower arrangements, missing pieces of carpet, or terrible lighting. Saints may get upset when the AC unit fails, the pew is splintered, or the sound system is not just right. This focus on the physical is dangerous: allowing the focus to be on the provisions Christians *want* must be set aside by focusing on the provisions that Christians *need* and that they *have*! Even on the remotest of islands make-shift houses of worship can be found. In the most humid of climates a tattered songbook will be used. In the poorest of communities, an old mattress

might be used as a table for the devoted Bible student. There may be an occasion when raisins are placed in a water bottle to make juice for the fruit of the vine. The Father gives the provisions no matter how grand or how undignified they may seem to the human senses in various cultures. It is without doubt that God can and will provide for those who desire to worship Him.

Overcome obstacles with the right direction. Keep God’s pleasure as the goal, not man’s pleasure. Paul told the Roman brethren about what it meant to worship God when he said, “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). God’s mercies should motivate His children to overcome obstacles in worship. As used in Romans 12:1, according to Strong’s, service is a “ministration of God, that is worship: (divine) service.” When the Christian lives each day as a living sacrifice, a set-apart servant, an acceptable servant, then any obstacles that are placed on the path during worship will be temporary and easier to overcome.

“And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And He that sat was to look upon like a jasper and sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold” (Rev. 4:2-4).

What would happen to the worship assemblies of Christ’s church if for only a moment those in attendance would take a deep breath and devote a moment of reflection to think on the precious privilege of coming before God’s throne? Imagine likeminded brethren dressed in white gathered to offer worship saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Would the church sing a little louder and a little clearer? Would the Christian put away any peripheral thoughts that cloud this sacred service? Would more effort be placed on teaching children how to approach God in spirit and in truth? Would the attire be different for such an occasion? Would things that seem like obstacles become obsolete as thoughts of God’s glory filling the assembly fill the minds of those in the audience? Could obstacles become less obstinate if the focus of worship was on things above and not on things on the earth? “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2-3).

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ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: I've been married for 24 years, but I've not always been the best husband, and I want to be better! What can I do?

ANSWER: Right now, read 1 Peter 3:7. This verse is for husbands ("Likewise, you husbands"). Now, look at the remainder of the verse. **FIRST**, "dwell with her." Your wife should never question your commitment! She needs to know you will always be there for her. Read Genesis 2:24. **SECOND**, "according to knowledge." Learn more about your wife than height, weight, favorite food, hair, and eye color. Know her fears, goals, desires, and dreams. This takes time and effort! Few things give a wife more security than knowing her husband REALLY knows and understands her. **THIRD**, "giving honor unto the wife." Honor means "praise." Tell her, "Thank you," "I love you," and "I appreciate you!" Praise her because she is precious. She has been carefully crafted and beautifully constructed by her Creator. **FOURTH**, "weaker vessel." Women are weaker physically, not mentally, morally, or characteristically. Men, you are stronger than her, so you can pull her close and protect her. Christ died for the Church (Eph. 5:25); be willing to defend your wife to the point of death. **FIFTH**, "heirs together of the grace of life." God promises eternal life to those who are "born again" (John. 3:3,5; 1 Pet. 1:1-4). Your wife needs you as her partner in reaching heaven ("grace of life"). Read the Bible, worship God, grow spiritually, and most of all, go to heaven together. **SIXTH**, "that your prayers be not hindered." Pray FOR her and pray WITH her. The Bible is God speaking to us; prayer is when we talk to God. It is true, "The family that prays together stays together." If you want to be a good husband, practice The Golden Rule every day (Mat. 7:12).

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The words of *Truth*

The Words of Truth

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The Words of Truth

is sent free to all upon request.

If you would like to submit an article for consideration, please send via postal mail or fax, or (preferably) in electronic form (e-mail or on disk or CD).

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