

Lesson Nine: Worship in the Early Church

WORSHIP IN THE PAGAN RELIGIONS

Pagan worship involved many gods and many different kinds of rituals. Usually there were animal sacrifices, sex acts performed by temple prostitutes (both male and female), music (both instrumental and vocal) and feasts that were eaten in honor of the god. Both men and women were prominent as priests and priestesses of the gods.

WORSHIP AMONG THE JEWS

There were two kinds of worship practiced among the Jews of the first century AD.

The first was Temple worship which involved coming to Jerusalem to the Temple at appointed times to make animal and grain offerings, to eat meals in honor of Jehovah, to give tithes into the Temple treasury. There was a lot of pomp and ceremony. Instrumental and vocal music was prominent dating back to the time of David. The priesthood was all male as the Law of Moses directed.

The second kind of worship was synagogue worship. There were thousands of synagogues which the Jews had established throughout the world. Every Sabbath day the Jews in a particular area would assemble for prayers, reading of the Law, singing of psalms and hymns to Jehovah (without instrumental accompaniment), and teaching from the Law. Men and women sat in separate areas. Men led the synagogue assembly.

WORSHIP AMONG CHRISTIANS

Although the actual details of a Christian worship assembly is not a big subject in the New Testament, there is enough teaching to establish what the early church did in their assemblies of worship.

THE CHURCH AT TROAS

In Acts 20 the Apostle Paul and his missionary companions sail from Philippi (Europe) to Troas (Asia Minor). They meet up with other missionary workers in Troas and wait till the first day of the week so that they can worship with the church at Troas. From **Acts 20:6-7** we learn three things about the Christian assembly of worship:

1. They met on _____.
2. For the purpose of _____.
3. The _____ of God was preached.

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Ephesians 5:17-19 is not strictly a worship passage but commands Christians in Ephesus to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs **to one another**. This singing **to one another** is not something that can be done alone. It requires a group setting like a worship assembly.

_____ was undoubtedly a part of the worship assembly of the Ephesian church.

I Timothy 2:1-3 and 2:8-15. Paul writes to Timothy who was working with the church in Ephesus. Chapter Two begins with instruction about prayer. The prayer is limited to men (2:8) which means this was a public prayer as opposed to private prayer. In the early church public worship was led by men; women were directed to be silent, to let men lead. (2:9-15)

This is a wide-ranging teaching: **men in every place.** (2:8) In other words this is not just to be practiced at Ephesus, but in every congregation, wherever that congregation may be.

_____ were said in the worship assemblies of the church.

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Colossians 3:16. The Ephesian letter and the Colossian letter were written by Paul at the same time. The two letters are “twins” of each other in many places. Colossians 3:16 is the “twin verse” of Ephesians 5:19. See above.

THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

I Corinthians 11:17-14:40 The fullest account of a Christian worship assembly in the New Testament is found in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church. The worship assembly of the Corinthian church had become divisive and chaotic. This was seen in their observance of the Lord’s Supper and in the misuse of miraculous spiritual gifts in the worship service, especially speaking in tongues. In the course of correcting the church’s worship service, Paul tells us what kinds of things the Corinthian Christians were doing in worship, what he approved and what he disapproved. The things he left in place have the apostolic stamp of approval.

I Corinthians 11:17-34. _____

I Corinthians 14:13-19. _____

I Corinthians 14:26-29. _____

I Corinthians 16:1-3. _____

It should be added that when Christians met on the first day of the week they also set aside some of their money to help people in need. Whether this giving was a part of their public worship assembly is unknown. It definitely happened on the first day of the week.

I Corinthians 14:34-35. Repeats the same thing which Paul said to the women in Ephesus about remaining silent in the public worship of the church.

COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS:

The items above are the visible aspects of worship in the early church. Let us recognize that a cold heart makes any act of worship an abomination to God. The essence of worship is a heart overflowing with love, praise and thanksgiving to Him. John 4:24

Some dismiss the restriction on women in leading in public worship by saying that Paul was simply following the ways of his culture and time. What does Paul say are the reasons for limiting the role of women? I Corinthians 13:34 and I Timothy 2:13-14. Is it true that women of the 1st century AD never led or officiated in worship?

Why do some churches observe the Lord’s Supper on a quarterly, biannual or annual basis rather than weekly? Could the same thing be said about prayer or preaching or singing?

What advantages does singing without the instrument have over singing with the instrument?