

The Worship of the Church that Jesus Built

(by Bob Pulliam)

The word *worship* literally means "to adore". And that is precisely what our worship of God is to accomplish. There has never been an age in which man has been left to devise his own worship of God. God has always told man what He wants man to do. Even in the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, we know that God had instructed man in the proper course. We know this because faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17), and Abel offered his sacrifice by faith (Heb 11:4).

So what is the church to do in worshipping God? It would seem that some think we can do whatever feels good. But these are nothing more than the doctrines and commandments of men (Mt 15:8f). We want to know what the worship of the first century church involved.

Items That Are Day Specific...

There are two items of worship that have a specific day for application. The saints in the first century confined themselves to this pattern (see lesson on [specifics and silence](#)), and we must also, if we are to be identified as the Lord's church. The first of these is the Lord's supper. What better day to memorialize the death of Jesus than on the day He arose from the dead? (Acts 20:7) The specification of the first day of the week pins down the frequency of this observance, just as honoring the Sabbath did in the Old Testament law. God did not have to tell Israel to observe every Sabbath. It was understood that every time the Sabbath came around, the command was to be obeyed. Every time the first day of the week comes, we should observe the example of the first century church. There are many practices in use today: Use of only one emblem; yearly, monthly, semimonthly observance; observance during the week. If we wish to resemble the first century church, we will observe the pattern revealed in the New Testament.

The second item that was specifically slated for the first day of the week was the collection (sometimes called the "contribution" or "offering"). Paul commanded it's exercise on the first day of the week (I Cor 16:1f). This is the only way God's word specifies for the church to gain money to meet obligations incurred in it's work. For example, the Philippians had fellowship with Paul in preaching the gospel (Phil 4:15f). This meant that the Philippians had sent support to Paul so he could devote his time to the preaching of the gospel (see also II Cor 11:8). Today, many practices are in use to gain money for "church projects": raffles; rummage sales; fairs; bingo nights. You'll never read of the church in the first century getting it's funds from the community by fund raising projects. The work of the church was supported by the sacrifices of her members.

Items That Are Not Day Specific...

Some items of worship have no specific day attached to them, and may be engaged in at anytime by the church or individuals. The first we might consider is singing. The first century church sang to worship God (Eph 5:19; I Cor 14:15). Paul and Silas sang in a prison cell (Acts 16:25), and James told early Christians to sing psalms when cheerful (Jms 5:13). (for more on this see Music).

A second form of worship is prayer. Such was engaged in by the church together (Acts 12:5, 12), and by individuals (Acts 16:25). Prayer involved petitions (requests), praise, and intercession.

Finally, early Christians held forth the inspired message of God by teaching and preaching. We ordinarily don't think of teaching as worship, usually because a very informal view of God's word has arisen in the religious world. When the church gathered together, Paul's sermon was a part of their worship (Acts 20:7).

Conclusion...

The church seen in the first century only engaged in specific acts of worship. These are our pattern for worship today. The church never engaged in many of the things you see going on today:

- Fund raising programs of various kinds (soliciting the unbeliever).
- Candlelight vigils for various concerns.
- Recognition days.
- Observance of annual holidays.

The church today must follow the New Testament pattern to be the New Testament church. The New Testament church engaged in five acts of worship:

- Singing
- Praying
- Preaching
- Collection
- Lord's Supper