



**Worship – Part 13**  
**Acts of Worship – Part 1**  
**His Church**  
**GCSP – 08/04/2007**

What are some thoughts that come to your mind when you hear the word church? For some the word church brings to mind a small building, a magnificent cathedral, a rented hall, or the living room of a home where people meet on Sunday morning. Others may immediately picture the faces of those they worship with, sparking feelings of love and affection and joy. Still others may envision Jesus Christ and recall several of the many Scriptures speaking of the passion and love He had for the church.

Sadly for many, the word church ignites feelings of bitterness, indifference, jealousy, betrayal, hatred, and even intense anger.

I have spent the last 3-4 months preaching through a series of sermons on the topic of worship. And although I could probably spend the rest of my life on this topic without exhausting every aspect of it, I want to start heading toward a finishing point. So I will wrap this series up with several sermons called the "Acts of Worship." And even though I mentioned a finishing point, this will most likely cover another two months or so. The Holy Spirit obviously has free reign to interrupt and/or change the direction of my plans at any time, but I mapped out the next 7-8 weeks with specific acts of worship to help us put some practical application into action in light of what we have learned so far concerning true and genuine worship.

This could also be a series that could take years and I undoubtedly will skip over some very important acts of worship, but the ones the Holy Spirit has directed me to thus far are how we treat His church, prayer and fasting, public and private praise, servanthood, the handling of God's Word, and the giving of our treasure and material wealth. If all goes according to my plan, we will complete this series towards the end of September – but I need to warn you right now, I rarely see my sermons go according to my plan, and we can all praise God for that fact. I pray every week that the Holy Spirit would have complete control over my thoughts and my words, and if that is the case, I have no business in setting limits on how long a series or even a sermon is to last.

Connie and I attended my cousin's church in Minnesota this past weekend, and it was probably the first time I have attended this church and left with a sense of truly being in God's presence. The church is much farther on the charismatic side than I have been through the years and in the past I almost sensed something evil more so than something godly. A lot of those past feelings could well have just been my own resistance to charismatic theology and my own self-righteousness asserting that the way I worship is the only right way, but I was at times very uncomfortable in this church.

This time was different. This time God opened my eyes to a church that was alive and thriving and truly seeking God's presence, God's leading, God's blessing and God's will. We worshipped the Lord unashamedly and without self-imposed restrictions. We shouted "Amen" and "Praise the Lord" and "Hallelujah" and "Preach it to us brother", and we clapped in approval as my cousin opened the Word of God and preached.

The Lord showed me another part of His church. And while I still struggle with and disagree with some of their theology and understanding of Scripture, they are indeed part of the Lord's church and they are indeed my brothers and sisters in Christ if they are truly saved by confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and believing in their heart that God raised Him from the dead.

And so I want to begin this series on the "Acts of Worship" by taking a fresh look at this organism and organization we call the church.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **1 Corinthians 12**.

**1 Corinthians 12:1-31**

**"Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."**

**"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills."**

**"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many."**

**"If the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."**

**"Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way" (NASB – from <http://www.biblegateway.com/>).**

Let's pray.

I want to focus on **verses 12-14** this evening and use them as a launching point, instead of word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase exposition, for our understanding Christ's church – which includes this body of believers that currently meets in this rented hall that we at times mistakenly call "our" church. Let's read these three verses again.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-14**

**"For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many" (NASB).**

There are many ways we can perform acts of worship to our God, and we will obviously be looking at several of these ways in the coming weeks and months, but I submit to you that your worship will never be complete without a proper view of, a proper understanding of, and a proper respect for, the Lord's church. And this is where so many countless Christians grieve God's heart – by lacking in their respect for His church.

When we talk about and think about the church of Jesus Christ, we must be careful to apply what the Scripture says in two ways. We must apply God's words to the local body of believers we are a more active part of (His local church) and we must also apply God's words to His universal church – the whole of true Christianity.

*We lack respect for the Lord's church when we are critical.*

I confess to you this evening that I am horrendously and repeatedly guilty of the sin of criticizing the Lord's church. From this very pulpit I have committed this sin and I am afraid that I have led you into the same sin in the process. I have asked God to forgive me and I now ask you to forgive me as well. Let me explain.

There is a difference between calling out sin and criticizing. It is a fine line that I cross all too often when it comes to the church of Jesus Christ. I call out the pervasive sin of replacing the preaching of God's Word with talk show style chats and interviews, and true worship with entertainment driven concerts and skits – a sin that is sweeping over this country like a tsunami – but I cross the line in my attitude toward the leaders and people of these churches. And I cross the line in thinking I am better than them.

I am guilty of having a critical spirit and a proud spirit when my thoughts and words move beyond calling out the sin. So please forgive me if I have led you down that path.

For all of us who are genuine born again believers – all of us throughout the earth – we are one body. The same Holy Spirit has baptized us into this fellowship of believers, the same Lord and Savior died on the cross for us, and the same God chose us to be brothers and sisters – heirs of His glorious salvation and joint-heirs with His Son.

When we are critical of His genuine church, we are in essence being critical of Him. The church is called the body of Christ. Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cruel Cross of Calvary for the church. Jesus rose again for the church. Jesus has prepared a new heaven and a new earth for the church in order to fellowship with Him and with each other for eternity. The church was established by Him, is empowered by Him, and exists solely and wholly for Him.

And while we may not always agree with the way many local churches operate, and while we may not agree with some of the things they teach, and while we may not even agree with them being a part of a particular denomination, if there are genuine born again believers in that

church, we had better be very careful with our thoughts and our words toward that church. They may very well indeed be off track in some of these areas, but we only have the right and the responsibility to lovingly and prayerfully call out the sin. We do not have the right to be critical or have any ill will toward the Lord's church.

So we lack respect when we are critical of other churches and other members of these churches – and we won't even go into the aspect of being critical of your brothers and sisters within your own local church. Maybe we will look at this a little more when we talk about servanthood.

*We lack respect for the Lord's church when we are too casual in our attendance.*

Turn with me to **Hebrews 10**.

### **Hebrews 10:23-25**

**"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near"** (NASB).

Church attendance is really not an option for those who name the name of Christ as their Lord and Savior. I am not going to harp on the vacations and the family functions and the social gatherings that all of us deal with to one degree or another, especially since our church service is currently on Saturday evenings, but I will ask you to pay close attention to what God is saying in this passage, and I will ask you to consider how your missing a service affects the rest of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

The primary characteristic of the church when the Holy Spirit was allowed full reign is found in **Acts 2:42**. Hold your place in Hebrews and turn to **Acts 2**.

### **Acts 2:42**

**"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer"** (NASB).

If we had no other verses of Scripture to turn to regarding the functioning and the characteristics and the model of what the church of Jesus Christ is designed to be, this would be sufficient enough for us to get the picture. We have example enough here to be a biblical Spirit-led church. In this short verse we have the required attitude and the required actions.

They **continually** did these things. They **devoted themselves** to these things.

They **continually devoted themselves** to sitting under the **teaching** and preaching of God's Word. This is not staying home and having your own personal devotions; this is joining together to hear God's Word taught and preached.

They **continually devoted themselves** to **fellowship** with one another. Fellowship is not possible apart from joining together. You don't fellowship with yourself. Fellowship requires gathering together for a common cause and a common experience and a common love and a common respect.

They **continually devoted themselves** to **the breaking of bread**, or the Lord's Supper, or the Lord's Table, or Communion, depending on the tradition you are more familiar with. "This do in remembrance of Me", says Jesus. Partaking of the Lord's Supper requires your presence with the rest of the church.

They **continually devoted themselves to prayer**. In the context of this verse it is also speaking of gathering together for prayer, not your private prayer time at home.

Beloved, many of us would be found lacking in these things if called to account tonight. And I guess I shouldn't say if – we are being called to account tonight. I am being called to account tonight. You are being called to account tonight.

How often to you skip sitting under the teaching and preaching of God's Word? How often to you neglect gathering together for fellowship? How often do you miss partaking in the Lord's Supper with your brothers and sisters in Christ? How often do you join together in prayer with the rest of the church?

I will take my share of the responsibility in not better facilitating some of these areas, but I cannot take responsibility for you being in your place every time it is possible. There are times when you will miss a service, but there are many more times when your schedule could be rearranged to make sure you are where God wants you to be.

I think being continually devoted to these things is a foreign concept to the church today. By and large too many Christians are simply not continually devoted to the Lord's church.

And let me say this: If you cannot find a church that teaches and preaches the Bible accurately, close to your home, then you drive as far as it takes each week and find one. Don't settle for a watered down approach to the Bible and to your Christian life. It is much too important to settle for less than excellence in this area of your life.

Back to **Hebrews 10**.

#### **v. 23**

**“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”**

The implication in the context of this passage is that we are in serious danger of seeing our hope, our faith, and our spiritual existence waver when we willingly choose to miss the gathering of the church.

So when you do go on a vacation and you are away from this church for whatever reason, find a church to attend. Don't allow your faith and your hope to waver. Don't give Satan an opportunity to form the habit of not attending church in your life. One of Satan's most common and most devious ploys is to speak into your mind that missing one service won't hurt you.

**DON'T BELIEVE HIM! DON'T LISTEN TO HIS LIES!**

Beloved, we have to eliminate the casual attitude we sometimes have about church attendance. We have to understand the danger. We have to comprehend the damage we are doing to our spiritual lives and the damage we are inflicting upon the church!

And in case you are asking how you not being here, causes damage to the church, let's read on.

#### **v. 24-25**

**“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”**

The writer of Hebrews commands us to **consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds**, and then he immediately gives us the answer: Assemble together! Be there when the church gathers! You can't encourage one another and you can't stimulate one another to love and good deeds if you are there!

This aspect of worship is so obvious and yet so neglected. We allow such little and insignificant things keep us from attending church.

- The pastor didn't speak to me this week – I'm not coming back!
- We have company over for dinner and we don't want offend them.
- I haven't had a chance to stain the deck until now and the conditions are perfect.
- I've had a rough week and really need some rest.
- My son or daughter has a game.
- I was invited to a party.
- Fill in the blank.

Beloved, you cannot be replaced. You were uniquely created and designed with a special demeanor, a special set of characteristics, a special combination of spiritual gifts, and a special purpose and word from God. God does not send you a personal agenda each week so you know exactly when you will be needed for a specific situation. You can't check your email and see that your presence and your words will be the difference in a soul accepting Christ tonight. You are not going to have a voicemail alerting you to the fact that your life experience is just the ticket to keep someone from going over the edge with the problems they face.

You are unique. And who is to know if this very night or any other night when the church gathers, that you were not born and placed here for such a time as this. The impact of your presence and the impact of the words the Lord gives you to speak can have a tremendous impact on the eternity of a soul or the course of a wavering Christian's life.

I firmly believe one of the primary reasons the church of Jesus Christ is so weak and so worldly today is the great lack of understanding your importance in the body. You cannot be replaced. God may insert a substitute at some point, but it will not be you – and nobody else is you.

Beloved, I know portions of this sermon were uncomfortable. I would guess that some of you might even be upset at some of the things I have said. There may even be some who have been offended to the point of wanting this service to end so you can get out that door for the last time – never to return.

Please don't miss this final point. You have been uniquely created and designed by God. The experiences you have are unique, the trials you have endured are unique, the victories you have experienced are unique, and the mountains and valleys of your life are unique. And God has given you and allowed you to go through all of these things for His glory and for the encouragement and edification of His church.

When you are not here and when you are not actively involved and not open to the Spirit's leading, you are missing an opportunity that can never be repeated to worship God at this time and in this way.

Let's pray.