

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Lord's Day Morning Sermon Notes

9th October 2005

Read: Philippians 1: 1-14

Text: v.3

Contemporary 'Christian' Worship

The Protestant Reformation was a return to Scripture in all the essential areas of a true relationship with God, including the matter of offering acceptable worship. The Reformers embraced the principle that spiritual and sincere worship is comprised of Scriptural & understandable words, whether said or sung, presented upon the mediation and merit of Christ to the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

By reforming worship, the Reformers swept away the errors of Romanism. The Church of Rome over the centuries had developed and instituted a form of public worship that was marked by gross departure from the worship of the New Testament Church in three particular instances. And, of course, Rome continues to embrace and follow these three unscriptural principles in her form of worship.

However, what is tragic and alarming is the fact that these three erroneous principles that the Reformers rejected have become the basis within what is known as *Contemporary Christian Worship*. The trend toward this contemporary form of worship, or *new worship* as it is also termed, is widespread in many evangelical churches. Those who promote this "new worship" use the strategy of insisting that contemporary worship is only a matter of taste & style; thus they are quick to charge churches who will not embrace contemporary measures in worship with being the Pharisees of the 21st century Church, refusing to adjust to changing culture.

But again it must be noted that what is promoted as *Contemporary Christian Worship* is characterised by the very same principles as marks the worship of Romanism. Consequently, new definitions of worship have emerged which would never have been accepted not too many years ago; definitions and then methods of worship that erode and remove the central principles of Protestant Christian worship, causing churches to embrace the very thinking of Rome in the area of worship. Note these three principles rejected by the Reformers but now accepted and embraced in so much of the modern church.

1. **Aesthetic worship** – *aesthetics* is the study of beauty in art & nature, putting great emphasis on what is pleasing to the senses. In various areas of life aesthetics certainly may be interesting and useful, but it has no place in the worship of Almighty God. *Aesthetic worship* is the idea that worship is comprised of things that men may execute in a skilful manner and offer up to God. It is the principle that we worship God with the product of our minds and hands; and that God is an aesthete sitting in the heavens & looking down with pleasure at the skill & beauty that we may bring unto Him in worship. In a real sense this was the principle of Cain's worship: Gen 4: 3 – "*Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.*"

The aesthetic idea is the essence of Romanism. Rome, with her rich array of images, paintings, processions, lofty architecture etc, believes that she makes an offering of worship *by these very things*. Now this principle of aesthetic worship has infiltrated evangelical & Protestant circles – namely, that worship is offered by means of art, drama, dance, various physical movements, and the modern methods of praise.

2. **Ecstatic worship** – worship that is merely designed to stir and satisfy the emotions. In Romanism the so-called worship is an exercise in theatrics designed to impress, impact & stir the senses, the belief being that such a performance is more emotionally effective than a message in words. The tragedy is that we are back to this in so-called contemporary Christian worship. Pastors & leaders have the agenda of moving, pleasing, uplifting and entertaining the people through various worship procedures. The proclamation of truth is now deemed to be obsolete & irrelevant. The purpose & ploy in the contemporary worship scene is to manipulate the feelings & emotions of the people and thereby get the desired responses from them. Thus, in ecstatic worship the objective is to achieve a warm, happy feeling, even great excitement through making an emotional impact.

3. **Profane worship** – worship that treats the truth of God with the utmost contempt & disregard. On this point also Rome has not changed – her worship is profane in that its central act is the blasphemous mass. Rome's worship is an irreverent pageantry in which truth is utterly undermined & disregarded. In other words, Rome's worship is profane for it resists & opposes the will of God.

Again, in much of the contemporary worship scene the profane holds dominance in the form of rejection of the will of God & standards of truth. While the content of much modern worship is not comprised of the blasphemous practices of Romanism, it is nonetheless a profane worship in that it incorporates so much of the world's entertainment culture. The modern entertainment set is anti-God, anti-moral, anti-authority and anti-Christian, treating the things of God with utter contempt. Why then, would any church that claims to be evangelical borrow that profane culture, especially by incorporating its "music" into a worship service? Yet this development is most prevalent: the more mild forms of the world's methods are initially permitted, paving the way for the utterly profane in the form of so-called "Christian rock groups."

In identifying these erroneous principles that now in this day dominate so much modern worship, the Reformers were guided by the Scriptures of truth. What they sought to implement in their reform of public worship was guided by God's word such as lies before us in this text, Phil 3: 3.

The word for "worship" in this text refers to public worship. It is a word that basically means 'to serve' being translated in that fashion seventeen times in the NT. study indicating that the majority of the verses speak of serving God in an open, public manner and in various capacities, including the area of worship as it is here.

Obviously, Paul is dealing here with public worship that is to be offered by genuine believers – “the circumcision” the word denoting those who are truly the Israel of God; the spiritually begotten sons of God. Moreover, he shows the kind of worship that they offer – it is a spiritual worship: “*we worship God in the spirit.*” This is the same kind of language as is employed in John 4: 23, 24 that we have already considered. It is essentially stressing the spirituality of Christian worship – worship that is from the heart.

But worship that is spiritual or from the heart can only be so due to the operation & influence of the Holy Spirit within the heart, thus Paul is essentially speaking here of the Spirit of God when he speaks of worshipping “God in the spirit.” Paul is laying stress on the fact that the public worship of the Christian church must be controlled, directed, and empowered by the Spirit of God.

In our text today, we are shown two of the evidences of worshipping God in the Spirit in the arena of public worship: it is to “*rejoice in Christ Jesus...*” & “*have no confidence in the flesh.*” Here are two great principles that will govern our public worship when the Holy Spirit is in control, as opposed to the deviant & unscriptural features that characterize this *contemporary Christian worship*. Note these two principles.

I. NOTICE FIRST THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST IN NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Paul couples worshipping in the Spirit with rejoicing in Christ, which denotes the exaltation of Christ.

1. Note from this that the Holy Spirit exalts Christ in worship

Where there is spiritual worship the Spirit will not fail to magnify Christ. It is the Spirit’s work to exalt Christ. See John 16: 13 -- literally reads “*the Spirit of the truth.*” Could very well be read ‘the Spirit of Christ’ for Christ is the Truth, John 14: 6. He is the Truth in that He is the Word of God, the very personification of truth. He is the Incarnate Word through whom the inspired word is revealed. Thus John 16: 13 proceeds to say, “*He will guide you into all truth...*” i.e. all the truth about Christ. Hence “*He will not speak of Himself.*” Rather, He always speaks of Christ, v.14.

So much worship today has nothing of Christ in it so we know immediately that it is not of God. It does not lead to Christ, it does not elevate Him, it does not cause God’s people to be brought any closer to Christ, to become any more like Him, to enter into a deeper form of steadfast walk and service for Christ.

2. This exaltation of Christ focuses especially on the great doctrine of justification by Christ's righteousness

Worship that is in the Spirit will bring men to the only basis or ground of being just with God: the righteousness of Christ. Here in Philippians 3 Paul proceeds to point his readers to this very truth as he speaks of Gospel worship. This is the evidence that he was a Spirit-filled man. V.v. 8-10 -- he speaks of “*the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.*” He says that his desire is that he “*may win Christ.*” He wishes that he may “*be found in Christ,*” that he “*may know Him.*” But the chief statement of all in these verses is in v.9 – “*not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*” Here is the emphasis of worshipping God in the Spirit -- justification by Christ’s righteousness.

At once we note that what Paul teaches here is the antithesis of the error of *aesthetic worship* – that form of worship that believes that God is satisfied & pleased with the trappings of man’s religious performances; that we worship God by doing something, fulfilling some religious code. As noted last week, worship is acceptable only through the merits of Christ – the merits of His perfect righteousness and atoning death; and it is this that Paul has in view when he speaks of true worshippers led by the Spirit to exalt Christ. Because Paul exalted Christ he renounced everything that he had formerly trusted to have merit with God.

(a) He renounced his religious pedigree. See v.5, “*circumcised the eighth day.*” There was no doubt over Paul’s ancestry; otherwise he could not have been circumcised. He was “*of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews.*” But he learned that a religious pedigree could not save him.

(b) He renounced his religious position. He declares “*as touching the law a Pharisee.*” Had occupied that position at a young age, but he renounced it for Christ. Religious positions, without Christ, take men to hell.

(c) He renounced his religious pride. V.6, “*concerning zeal, persecuting the church.*” He could not stand the followers of the Nazarene. Judged them to be wrong - but there came a day when he discovered that he was wrong.

(d) He renounced his religious performances. V.6b, “*touching the righteousness which is in the law he was blameless.*” He had an impeccable record of performing duties but how vile in God’s sight.

II. NOTICE SECOND EXCLUSIVENESS OF CHRIST IN NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Paul says that the circumcision, genuine N.T. worshippers have “*no confidence in the flesh.*” In Gospel worship there is a renouncing of every bit of trust in the flesh or the sinful nature. It is corrupt; it is contrary to the Spirit; its works are iniquitous and defiled. It will never be anything else but the flesh: it may be baptized, it may be confirmed, it may perform all kinds of ceremonies and rituals, but it remains the same. Therefore, it has no place in N.T. worship; and will have none where Christ is exalted.

N.T. worship is exclusively Christ-centered so that the other two erroneous principles mentioned are excluded – *ecstatic & profane worship*. In either case there is a confiding in the flesh. But in New Testament worship when the Spirit leads us to exalt Christ there will be an excluding of all fleshly ecstasy & profanity.

The key then is to seek for worship that is directed and controlled by the Spirit of God. Let us seek the Lord with all our hearts for the mighty influence of the Spirit in our gatherings.