

# Worship

## *Gives Life to your Life*

*Worship is a vital part of the Christian life. It is not the only part of the Christian life, but it is most central. Worship has been described as the heart of the Christian life, and I believe it is. From the gifts God gives in worship (the Word and Sacrament), emanate the forgiveness, power, hope and direction for Christian life. My hope is that as you read this small booklet on worship, that God's Spirit would inspire you in your worship life, and that the blessing of regular worship would be yours.*

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### **I. What is Worship?**

When we think of worship, we usually think about what we render unto God: Thanksgiving, praise and adoration. In a biblical sense, worship is not so much as what we render to God, but more about what God renders unto us. Worship is more God's action than our action. In worship, God is the giver, we are the receiver. Let's take a look at how this is evident in our worship service:

**INVOCATION:** God gives us his presence and Name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS:** It is God's work to forgive.

**KYRIE (LORD, HAVE MERCY):** It is God's work to have mercy.

**HYMN OF PRAISE:** God gives the Savior, we receive and respond with praise.

**LESSONS:** God gives us His Word.

**SERMON:** God's Word and Gospel is personally applied to our lives.

**CREED:** God tells us who He is and what He does for us.

**OFFERING:** With the gifts He has given us we respond to God.

**HOLY COMMUNION:** God gives us the Body and Blood of Jesus in the bread and wine.

**BENEDICTION:** God offers us His blessing.

The essence of worship is God giving, and secondarily, our receiving and responding. The title for our worship service is Divine Service, indicating God serves us. How great and wonderful it is that God cares and chooses to serve us with His precious Word and Supper.

## II. Brief Biblical History of Worship

The Bible is full of examples of people worshipping. I'll only cite a few. In Genesis 4, it was Abel's worship and offering unto the Lord that precipitated his death by his brother, Cain. In Genesis 8, after Noah was delivered by God through the flood, his first response was to build an altar and worship God. In Genesis 11, after Abraham was promised the land of Canaan, he built an altar and worshiped God.

In Exodus and the next three books, God sets up a system of worship and sacrifice for the Hebrew people to observe. He gives the Third Commandment for worship and rest: Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy.

In the history of the Kings of Israel, David desires to build a house for the Lord, but instead the Lord builds a house for him - being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Solomon builds the temple and elaborate worship services are described.

Psalms, the longest book of the Bible, is a hymnal of Old Testament worship and devotion. The Psalms continue to bless the New Testament Church in worship and spiritual life. The Prophets call people and leaders to cleanse and purify their worship unto the Lord.

The centrality of worship continues in the New Testament. The announcement of John the Baptist's birth comes to his father while he is leading the people in worship. At the Birth of the Savior, an angelic chorus sings out its worship and praise. The wisemen travel a great distance to present their worship and gifts to the newborn Savior. The only story with Jesus as a boy takes place in the Temple. The Gospels often portray Jesus going to the Temple, as was his custom. He also cleanses the Temple for true worship, so that it may be a house of prayer. He tells the Samaritan woman at the well that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

The disciples continued meeting in the Temple for prayer, praise and the proclamation of Jesus' Resurrection. When Paul entered a city, he went to the Temple to pray and proclaim. The Book of Revelation contains many scenes of worship and praise, reminding us in heaven, worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will continue eternally.

### **III. Why is Regular Worship Commanded?**

The Third Commandment insists on regular worship. It does not say "Remember every other Sabbath to keep it holy" nor "Remember the Sabbaths that you desire to keep holy". It is not the third suggestion, but the third commandment. Why does God make this commandment? Does he need or require our worship? No!

However, we need his Divine Service. We need the service of His Word of forgiveness. We need the service of His Word of guidance. We need the service of His Word of life. We need the service of the Holy Communion He offers in the sacrament. We need the service of His listening to our prayers. In addition, the heart of the Christian needs to respond to God for his manifold spiritual and physical blessings. We need to respond with prayer and praise, thanksgiving and adoration, song and hymn.

God knows the human soul - how it wanders and weakens. In the third commandment, He provides a time for renewal and refreshment of the soul and our relationship to Him.

### **IV. What Happens When We Ignore Regular Worship?**

Disregard for regular worship is not an insignificant matter, but like an onion, it has multiple layers of influences.

1. **Personal Spiritual Life** - Ignoring the Word and Sacrament can eventually choke out the faith. Jesus warns in the parable of the Sower (recorded in Matt. 13:22) that faith can weaken and die without spiritual nourishment. I have occasionally witnessed in other Christians, a gradual drifting away from the faith.

2. **Weakening of Loved One's Faith** - No man is an island unto himself. This is especially true in spiritual matters. Your action and attitude influences others - particularly those closest to you. When worship is casually skipped, you are conveying a powerful message to your children and spouse: Faith in God is not so important. Your actions in this regard speak much louder than your words.

3. **Weakening of the Local Congregation** - Jesus says a little leaven leavens the whole loaf. As one ignores worship, then another does, then another and so forth. This is human nature and the nature of sheep. Imagine for a moment if every member followed your same pattern of worship. Would there be a Lutheran congregation in Cairo? Would we worship every other week, once a month or would the church be bursting at the seams?

4. **The Salvation of Those Who Come After is Jeopardized** - If we are not worshipping, we usually are not supporting missionaries who are spreading the Word in other places, not supporting the Christian education program which makes disciples, not supporting the local witness of the Word. Others who may have responded to the Gospel call never get to hear it.

5. **The Existence of the Church in our Country is Jeopardized** - I recently spoke with a foreign exchange student from Denmark. Denmark was once a Christian nation. He told me that he doesn't know a young person in Denmark who goes to church. A few older people is all that remains of this once vibrant church-going nation. How did it happen? One person at a time. You don't have to look far to see a church barely alive or shutting down. How does it happen? One person at a time, who drifts away, unknowingly influencing others who drift away. The church on earth (humanly speaking) is always one generation away from extinction. Will we have a church to pass along to our children?

## V. Some Words from God about Church Attendance

I. "Thou shall sanctify the holy day" is the 3rd commandment of God's Holy Law. To break God's Law is sin. To break it purposely & repeatedly is to flout His mercy. In recognition of our desire to please God, we promised at our Confirmation "to be faithful in the use of the means of grace... and thus to attend church regularly." This is our appointment with God. To fail to come is to break His command & to give a silent vote to have the church closed.

2. "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations." Being in God's house helps support the great purpose of winning others for Christ. Our gifts help to win and reach others, but more crucial is our physical presence. The un-churched around us are given a great testimony of Christianity when we worship faithfully and live faithfully.

3. "Do not forsake the gathering of the assembly", "We being many, are one in the body of Christ". We owe it to our fellow Christians and fellow members to strengthen their faith. When we are absent for a season not pleasing to God, we perform a sort of painful amputation, cutting ourselves off from the rest of the body, causing it great harm. Your prayers and presence are needed by the rest of the body.

4. "Jesus was in the temple...as was his custom." "Be followers of me." The Holy Son of God, while on earth, attended worship regularly, though He had no sin and thus no need for forgiveness. He gave us all a matchless example. We are to follow His example!

5. "Blessed are they who hear the word of God & keep it." Sunday morning worship is a wonderful opportunity to hear the Word of God preached and taught. The message you miss may be the one you need the most. God promises rich blessings to those who hear His Word and live it out.

6. "They fell on their knees and worshiped him." The Bible is full of examples of the people of God worshipping Him. It is the responsibility of the local congregation to offer worship opportunities. Prayerfully consider God's commands, consider your spiritual needs, consider the Body's need for you, and then come and worship your Lord and Savior with the fellow members of the body of Christ.

By Rev. Guido Merkens

## **V. Some Words From God About Communion Attendance**

### **1. What is the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion?**

The Holy Communion is nothing less than the real presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus. He offers to us in a sacramental way the same body which He gave for us and the same blood which He shed for us. *"This is My Body"... "This I My Blood" (Luke 22:19).*

*"The Cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16)*

*"Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord." (1 Cor. 11:27)*

## 2. Why should we receive it as often as it is offered?

The Holy Communion is the one great worship act which the Lord commanded us to observe. There are some very real reasons why we should partake of it as often as it is offered:

A. The Lord commanded it.

*"This Do Ye." (1 Cor. 11:25-26)*

B. Forgiveness comes with worthy receiving of Holy Communion.

*"This is My Body which is given for you. This cup of the New Testament is my blood which is shed for you." (Luke 22:19)*

C. To sustain and strengthen our Christian life.

*"He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him, which died for them and rose again... If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." (2 Cor. 5:15, 17)*

D. Advertise the Christian Faith and Our Lord Jesus.

*"As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death til he come."*

E. We Strengthen Our Fellow Christians by Communing With Them.

*"We, being many, are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." (Holy Communion is that one Bread).*

By Rev. Guido Merkens

## VII. Can a Person Be a Good Christian and Not Worship?

There are always situations where Christians are unable to worship in a congregation regularly because of illness, distance, or work requirements beyond their control. In this section, I am addressing people who are able to worship regularly, but chose not to worship.

Note that if the question alone was: Can a person be a good person and not worship? The answer to that question is "yes", a person can be very kind, helpful, and considerate and caring toward others, and not go to church. We all know people like that.

Note that if the question alone was: Can a person be a Christian and not worship? The answer to that question is a qualified "yes". They may be a Christian, but regular disregard for God's Word and Sacrament will weaken their Christian faith, perhaps to the point of unbelief.

Note that if the question alone was: Can a person be a good Christian? The answer is “no”. No one can be a good Christian. We all sin - believer and non-believer alike. It is only the forgiveness of Jesus that can make a Christian “good” and “Holy” in the sight of God.

Let’s rephrase the question in two different ways:

Question # 1. **Can a person be a loyal Christian and not worship?**

Question # 2. **Is it sin to ignore worship?**

### **1. Can a person be a loyal Christian and not worship?**

Christians are called to gather in the body of Christ, with Christ as the head. It is disloyal to Christ and his body to ignore the gathering. Christians are called by Jesus to hear His Word and keep it. It is disloyal to disregard His Word. Christians are invited to the banquet of the Lord’s Supper. It is disloyal to skip it. Christians are called to support one another in the Body of Christ. It is disloyal to slight one another. Christians are called to help in the expansion of the Kingdom of God. It is disloyal to sit idle while Kingdom work goes unattended.

### **2. Is it sin to deliberately ignore regular worship?**

Yes it is. It is sinning against God by breaking the Third Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it Holy”. It is sinning against self by refusing what is vital to grow faith: Word and Sacrament. It is sinning against others as they stumble over your example, and future generations don’t receive the Gospel. Every deliberate breaking of the Third Commandment is ultimately a vote to silence the Good News of Jesus in your life and the lives of others and that is sin.

Can a person be forgiven for deliberately breaking the Third Commandment? Jesus Christ died on the cross for all sin, including the breaking of any commandment. In Him, we are forgiven, made clean and pure in the sight of God. Through His mercy and forgiveness, we are empowered to worship, praise and thanksgiving.

## **VIII. Turning Worship Obstacles to Worship Opportunities**

1. **Work:** Some jobs require people to work on Sundays. A few bosses may allow a worker to arrive after an early worship service. Avail yourselves of other growth opportunities: a Bible Study group, a Small Group, Advent and Lenten worship services. Keep the Sabbath Holy by using a special Sunday Devotion. God will in some way provide spiritual food and nourishment for the faithful hungry soul.

2. **Out of Town Guests**: What a wonderful non-verbal witness it is for your guests to know that God is first in your life, and that your Sunday morning appointment with the Almighty God will not be canceled. Perhaps your witness will lead your guests to worship with you. There is a double blessing!

3. **Vacation**: Vacation is a special time to remember the Sabbath day. We need to thank God for health, family, good weather, friends and finances which permit vacations. Worshiping while away on vacation sends an unforgettable message to children: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

4. **Too Busy**: If you are too busy to worship, you are too busy. God is in charge of the clocks of your life. Attending worship regularly is the first step to re-prioritizing your life according to God's plan. God's plan will reduce the stresses and strains of the most hectic schedule.

5. **My Children are Disruptive**: Young children can interfere with a parent's or a neighbor's worship. God made little children and Jesus says "Let the Little Children Come to Me". Children learn as they observe and listen (even if they appear to be in their own world). God will provide the spiritual nourishment for your soul, as you seek it. And your children will be eternally thankful!

6. **Family Feud**: Satan uses a family quarrel to separate a family from one another and from God. As we continue to worship, God will give us the power of his forgiveness, and the guidance of his Holy Word - two vital tools for resolving family conflict.

7. **I Don't Get Anything Out of It**: Talk with the Pastor. Perhaps he needs improvement in worship or sermon preparation. How will he know without your feedback? Perhaps he can help you in understanding worship dynamics or tradition. Jesus says, "Blessed is he who hears my Word and keeps it." Jesus promises that if you hear and live his Word, you will "get something out of it."

8. **The Church is Cold and Unfriendly**: Christians are forgiven sinners, but still are sinners. Sometimes they may say the wrong thing or may not say anything at all. Don't let human weakness and faults keep you from the Savior who died for your weaknesses and faults. Come and make the church a friendlier place.

9. **Too Many Hypocrites**: Jesus told us that there would be "weeds" among his "wheat". Even in his band of 12 disciples, there was one traitor. By staying home, we become a hypocrite as we confess Christ with our lips, but ignore his worship with our lives. Who knows - by your regular worship example and consistent Christian lifestyle, perhaps a hypocrite will be converted!

10. **My Spouse Doesn't Go**: Your spouse does not need you badgering him or her to worship. Your spouse needs an example of a Christian who worships regularly, and who tries to live a Christian life seven days a week - at home, at work, in the community and in the church. You can be the Christian example that your spouse needs!

11. **I Can Worship By Myself In The Woods**: Some people report a better worship by themselves communing with nature. Most often, this worship becomes merely adoration of the

God of Creation (the Father). The God of Salvation (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is overlooked. The blessings He desires to give through His Word and The Lord's Supper are not received alone in the woods. It is good to admire God's creation, but not at the expense of your salvation.

## **For Further Discussion**

Worship is an area where we all can grow in terms of understanding and practice. I don't look at this booklet as the final word on the topic, for I also am growing as a worshiper and a worship leader. Please feel most welcome to discuss your thoughts and comments with me as we grow in the Lord together.

***May the fruits and blessings of regular  
worship be yours.***