



How Did Local Churches Worship In The New Testament?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Q&A NUMBER: 56

www.GodSaidSo.com/QA56

How did local churches of Christ in the New Testament worship God in their assemblies? If we are interested in holding fast the pattern of sound words God has revealed in the pages of the New Testament (2 Timothy 1:13) and doing all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), we will be interested in knowing the answer to this question. For, there is a pattern given concerning local churches of Christ in the pages of the New Testament. And, this pattern includes the activities that constitute worship accomplished by local churches of Christ. Let's consider.

Gospel Preaching

Acts 20:7 records some things concerning Paul's stay in Troas and his time with the church there: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." Along with the Lord's Supper, one of the things accomplished in this assembly of the local church was Paul's teaching. Now, consider the fact that the language in this passage indicates a formal discourse (not an informal conversation). So, Paul was speaking before the congregation on this occasion. I believe that implication would force us to conclude that he was speaking to them concerning the word of God!

As another example of public teaching in the assemblies, consider Paul's statement to the Colossians in Colossians 4:16: "Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea." These two letters were to be read in both of these congregations. Again, in this time the New Testament was being written, this was one way in which they could publicly teach God's word (when the apostle Paul would write a letter to churches).

Consider a few additional facts about gospel preaching as an act of worship in the local church. First, the gospel's message must not be changed or altered in any way. Galatians 1:6-9

(and other passages) condemns the practice of making any changes to the one true gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, Matthew 15:8-9 demonstrates that teaching (or, by implication, listening to) the commandments of men as doctrines from God will cause your worship to be in vain (worthless). Third, the public teaching of God's word necessarily implies that there are individuals who are listening to the teaching – and both are necessary elements to this act of worship. Fourth, the public gospel preaching that takes place in the worship assemblies of the local church must be led by men *only* (see 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Giving

There is one passage in the New Testament Scriptures that identifies how a local church raises funds to accomplish its God-given work. This is through a freewill offering of its members. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is the only passage that gives instructions concerning when or how this is to be accomplished: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

The necessary inference in this passage is that it concerns the assemblies of the local church (particularly notice the reference to the first day of the week). Also notice that the instructions given in this passage were not only given to the church in Corinth, but also to the churches of Galatia. This freewill offering of the members of the local church is the only God-authorized way for a local church to raise money to accomplish its God-given work.

Consider a few additional facts about giving as an act of worship in the local church. First, realize that this is the only New Testament passage on the subject about how a local church gains its funding (there is no authority for a church to gain funding by a bake sale, rummage sale, or any other kind of fundraising activity). Second, this collection is only to be taken up on the first day of the week (there is no collection authorized on any other day of the week). Third, this collection is a freewill offering of the members in accordance with the prosperity of each one (there is no required percentage or amount). Fourth, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 gives additional detail concerning attitudes and some additional principles for the collection – including the fact that God loves a cheerful giver (see 2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Lord's Supper

Matthew 26:26-29 records Jesus' instructions to His disciples regarding the institution of the Lord's Supper: “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.’” Therefore, upon the commandment of the Lord, His people must partake of this supper in memory of Him –

using the two elements identified in this text. These two elements are unleavened bread and fruit of the vine.

As we noticed earlier regarding the teaching of God's word, Acts 20:7 records an example of the church in Troas assembling together and partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." Specifically note the phrase "break bread." This phrase is used in Scripture to identify both common meals and the Lord's Supper (see how Jesus used the phrase in Matthew 26:26-29). The context of the whole church assembling together on the first day of the week would indicate that the phrase is clearly being used in this verse to identify the Lord's Supper.

Consider a few additional facts about the Lord's Supper as an act of worship in the local church. First, the Lord's Supper is to be taken in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). The Lord's Supper is not a common meal (as the Corinthians seemed to have changed the Lord's Supper into). Notice what is said in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 34. Second, the Lord's Supper is to be taken on the first day of every week. The Lord's Supper is not just to be observed once per year/month/etc. It is to be observed weekly by those who are able (Acts 20:7). Also, there is no other day authorized for the Lord's Supper besides the first day of the week. Third, the Lord's Supper contains only two elements (as seen in Matthew 26:26-29): The unleavened bread (established by the fact that is the type of bread Jesus would have been eating for Passover), representing Christ's broken body; and, the fruit of the vine, representing the blood of Christ (the blood of the new covenant).

Prayer

1 Corinthians 14:15 says, "What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Note that 1 Corinthians 14 deals with times the whole church assembles together in one place – see verses 23 and 26.

Acts 12 also provides some points to consider concerning this. Verse 5 states that Peter was kept in prison and "constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church." Though this passage does not necessarily mean that the church was assembled together when it was praying for him, verse 12 does help us to see that "many were gathered together praying" for Peter at Mary's house (perhaps this was when the church assembled together for worship).

Consider a few additional facts about prayer as an act of worship in the local church. First, recognize that prayer is a tremendous blessing that is full of power that has been made available by God to the Christian (James 5:16). Second, consider the blessing of joining in prayer with brothers and sisters in Christ. Third, our prayers are to be offered/addressed to the Father (i.e. Matthew 6:9). Fourth, our prayers are offered through the name of Jesus Christ, our Mediator and

Advocate with the Father (Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2). Fifth, our prayers must be offered in faith in order to be effective (James 1:5-8).

Singing

Once again, 1 Corinthians 14:15 says, “What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.”

Ephesians 5:19 says, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Notice the “one another” aspect of this passage – which would apply to the singing in the assemblies of the local church. Similarly, Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Consider a few additional facts about singing as an act of worship in the local church. First, all of the passages in the New Testament (the law we live under today) on the subject of how we are to worship God show the action of singing – never playing a mechanical instrument of music (read Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:30; Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13). Second, the only instrument that is to be used is specified in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 – the heart! Third, there is *zero* authority to use a mechanical instrument in worship to God (either in public or private worship)! The Scriptures are silent with regard to such – and we must not violate the silence of the Scriptures. Fourth, the songs we are authorized to sing are psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – not secular or popular culture songs.

Conclusion

These are the only five activities God has authorized in the pages of the New Testament concerning the collective worship of the local church in its assemblies. Therefore, if you desire to practice true New Testament Christianity and have Bible authority for everything you do, you should join yourself to a local church that is only engaged in these! Furthermore, let us never be content with perversions being made to these God-authorized expressions of worship within the assemblies of the local church, lest we be guilty of being in fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (as condemned by Ephesians 5:11)!

Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: QA56

Written by Eric Krieg

Copyright: Copyright © 2018 GodSaidSo Press. Please use this material to God’s glory and honor. Feel free to copy and distribute this material in any way that will bring God glory and help souls to be saved. However, you may not take any of the material out of context or change the material in any way. Please provide the author with the proper credit for the material.

Scripture quotations: Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.