

2 Unique Features of the N.T. Church

Worship

Introduction:

1. In a previous lesson I began a study of some of the unique features of the church of the first century.
2. In that lesson we observed that the church of the first century was different from many of the religious organizations that we know today.
3. Although we did not develop these themes, I suggested that it was different in its worship, in its work and in its organization.
4. Those differences I believe are traceable to their loyalty. These were people who gave themselves first to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). They recognized a God of kindness and so had given themselves to trust completely in Him. They respected the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Each one confessing Him as the Son of God gave himself in obedience to His will. Their loyalty was not to some religious organization. It was not to some modern religious leader and it was not to some denomination. They were completely and total resigned to the Lord and His will.
5. This resignation affected every area of their life, but it is particularly reflected in their worship, their work and the way they organized themselves to accomplish this work.
6. In this lesson I want to examine with you their worship.

Discussion:

- I. Their worship was founded on their loyalty, sprang from their gratitude and resulted from their renewed minds.
 - A. Worship is due God because He is our creator, but not everyone created by God worships him. But those of the first century church honored Him as God.
 1. Their perception of Him is revealed in Paul's sermon to the Athenians in Acts 17:24-31.
 - a. Creator.
 - b. Lord.
 - c. Not limited by temples.
 - d. Not served as though he needed anything.
 - e. He gives life and breath and all things.
 - f. In him we live and move and exist.
 - g. He rules.
 - h. We are his offspring.
 2. He has intervened in the history of man (30-31).
 - a. In kindness (Titus 3:3-7).
 - b. In Jesus Christ.
 - B. The people in the first century church responded with gratitude (Heb. 12:28).
Contra those in Rom. 1:21.

- C. They responded this way because of renewed minds, repentant minds (Acts 17:30; Rom. 12:1-2).
 - 1. These were people whose perception of God was changed.
 - 2. No matter how they had seen him before, whether as one needing to be served (Acts 17), whether like the creation (Rom. 1), whether like the Jews—stuck on types and shadows, thinking they were good enough and uncomprehending, now their minds were changed.
 - 3. They saw what God had done and now their stubborn wills were crushed by the realization of what God had done.
- E. For these reasons they worshiped Him.

II. Their worship consisted of lives given to God (Rom. 12:1-2).

- A. Worship throughout history has been characterized by the giving of life.
 - 1. Pagans offered their children to the gods in sacrifice.
 - 2. Jews offered animals in sacrifice.
 - 3. In both the victims gave up some form of life in worship.
- B. The worship of the first century Christians involved living sacrifices of their own bodies given in service to God.
- C. Their worship was always God-ward, never man-ward.
 - 1. Their worship did not honor themselves.
 - 2. It did not honor other men.
 - 3. It was always God-directed.
 - 4. Their worship was not about doing what they wanted, but about doing what God wanted (Rom. 12:3-15:13).
 - a. Using gifts in God's service (12:4ff).
 - b. Serving others (12:9ff).
 - c. Extending blessing (12:14ff).
 - d. Being subject to authorities (chap. 13).
 - e. Subjecting self (chaps. 14-15).
- D. This meant that their worship was not always convenient. It was self-sacrificial. Like David they were unwilling to offer gifts to God that cost them nothing (2 Sam. 24:24).
 - 1. This does not mean that they did not enjoy serving the Lord. They did.
 - 2. They served willingly and joyfully (ex. 2 Cor. 8:5).
 - 3. Indeed they rejoiced even though distressed by various trials (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

III. Their worship expressed itself in various actions including “5 acts,” but not limited to them alone.

- A. Some confuse “worship” with “public worship assemblies.”
 - 1. “Worship” is more general and broad than things done in public assemblies like this.
 - a. As we have already seen from Rom. 12:1ff it includes lives given to God.
 - b. It includes various actions. See Rom. 12:3-15:13.
 - 2. Public assemblies need not be restricted to “5 acts,” as if only 5 actions

constituted (or equaled) worship.

3. Some in earlier days spoke of 5 acts of worship in a shorthand way to represent the worship of first century Christians. I don't think they meant that we should interpret such shorthand as to think there were only 5 actions that constituted worship. I don't think that they meant for us to restrict worship to actions done publicly.
- B. To be sure first century Christians were worshiping when they prayed (Acts 4:24-31); when they sang songs of praise to God (Acts 16:25); when they gave consideration to the word of God (Acts 20; Acts 15); when they observed the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20ff); and when they laid by in store (1 Cor. 16:1-2).
 1. These actions should not be approached as though they were works done to get one's ticket punched so he can say, "I worshiped God today."
 2. Brotherly kindness, thanksgiving, and winning the lost are all acts of worship.
 3. No worship cannot be reduced to some low common denominator, for worship consists in lives given to God. A life given to God cannot be reduced to 5 acts.
 4. But neither is one to diminish praying, singing, consideration to the word, the Lord's Supper and laying by in store, for these are expressions of a life given to God.

IV. So much of the so-called worship of religious organizations today is about the desires of the worshipers and not about God.

- A. Singing has become less about praising God, teaching and admonishing one another and more about what I like and what pleases and entertains.
- B. Consideration of the word has been remodeled into self help advice and entertaining speeches.
- C. Worship assemblies are considered as interruptions of what I wanted to do.
- D. Is such worship? Seems to me the worship of the first century church was about honoring God, not about pleasing the worshipers. Indeed those worshipers were pleased to honor the Lord.

Conclusion:

1. The worship of the first century church was first vertical and only secondarily horizontal.
2. For some today their worship is first horizontal. Horizontal worship may please the senses. Horizontal worship may be enthusiastic. Horizontal worship may be emotional. But horizontal worship is vain and useless, because it does not consist of hearts given to God (Matt. 15:8-9; contra 2 Cor. 8:5).