

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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AN IDEAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Of the many spiritual blessings available to the faithful Christian from God, in this life, worship is the greatest. Let us thank God that He has given us the necessary instructions to enable us to offer unto Him the true worship, that which pleases Him.

Let us begin with the definition of the word "ideal" as we will be using it in our discussion. Webster gives the following definition: "a standard of perfection or excellence." We are choosing the term "excellence" rather than "perfection." In worshipping God, we should strive for excellence, that is, we should worship Him in the very best way that we possibly can. This involves a number of things. For example, we must know what is most pleasing to God. This we can learn from His word, which demands that we study it in a most serious manner. Ideal worship involves things other than study, which we shall mention later.

Pursuing excellence in worship rules out most of the worship offered by man in our time. Christ gives us a fair characterization of much of the worship practiced today when He said, "But in vain do they worship, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9). Men freely add to the worship of today much which

is not acceptable to God, and therefore is not ideal or excellent in the true sense.

In our discussion, we intend to consider various perspectives on *ideal* worship. We are primarily concerned with what is taught in the Word. We also have the benefit of experience, which has shown that whereas some give serious attention to striving to worship so as to please God, others manifest a lack of seriousness, even to the point of going beyond what is revealed. Assuming that personal sincerity or good feelings are the goal, God's instructions are often ignored or taken lightly. Let us, then, be concerned with ideal worship as that which God has revealed and which only pleases Him. All other "worship" is non-ideal and without any reward.

The more we study, greater is the possibility that what we see as ideal is that with which God is pleased. This is true of other subjects as well. If we do not strive for the ideal, we are failing to experience the spiritual growth →

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which God expects and demands of us. Our ability to serve God is a responsibility.

I. TRUE WORSHIP DEFINED.

Striving for the *ideal worship service*, it is needful to have a good understanding of the meaning of WORSHIP. So much today passes for worship that it requires some study in order to know what true worship is. The word worship is mentioned many times in both the Old and New Testaments. We will not attempt to deal with every instance where the word worship is used. We will limit our attention to the most often used Greek words, which are translated into the English "worship."

In *Vine's* (p. 1258), the Greek word PROSKUNEO "is the most frequently used word. It means, "to make obeisance, do reverence to (from *pros*, towards, and *kuneo*, to kiss)...It is used of an act of homage or reverence (a) to God, e.g., Matt. 4:10; John 4:21-24..." In Matt. 4:10, Christ said, "Get

the hence Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." It is the word Jesus used when He said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jno 4:24). This is ideal worship.

Another Greek word translated as worship, is the Greek word SEBOMAI. *Vine* defines it as: "to revere, stressing the feeling of awe or devotion, is used of worship (a) to God, Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 16:14: 18:7, 13." It is the word Jesus used when speaking of the hypocrites sayin, "Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mk 7:7). The word *worship*, then, may be used of true worship and false or vain worship. The context in which a word is used often makes it clear as to the meaning of a word. There are many instances in the New Testament where the same word is used in a good sense and also in a bad sense. A practical working definition of worship is "an act of reverence paid to God by man."

We shall be giving attention to the five acts of worship found in God's word, but before we do that, let us consider some general conditions which should characterize ideal worship.

II. THINGS WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BEFORE WORSHIP BEGINS

The minds and hearts of the worshippers should be prepared if the the goal of the ideal worship service is to be achieved. True worship is not something where one just turns on the switch and then turns it off. Tibetan Buddhists send forth prayers by turning a prayer-wheel. Whether the mind of the worshipper is focused before the wheel is turned, we cannot say. It would make no difference with the Tibetan, since his prayer is to some pagan god. But our point is that our minds should be tuned to God and the great blessing we have by being able to worship Him, the only true God. We now call our attention to some things which should be before the beginning of the worship service.

The Need to Be on Time. People are more apt to be prompt for activities to which they attach

greater importance. It is often the case that those who are seldom on time, have a habit of being late. When we lived in Taiwan, we noted that being late for worship was a common thing. Perhaps it was carried over from their former false religion where worship was purely a matter of personal convenience. In Ukraine, members of the church were often late for worship. On one occasion, preaching in Kiev, Ukraine, I emphasized being on time. I asked what would happen if they were late for work. Their response let me quickly know the example did not fly. Their response was, “We are often late for work.” I learned that when one was fired at one place, that one just went some place else to work. This habit of tardiness is also fairly common among christians in America.

When one can be prompt for a ball game, a fishing trip, or what have you, but late for worship, there is a need for examining one’s priorities. Christ said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness...” (Matt. 6:33). This principle would have a bearing on being on time for worship.

Dress Properly for the Occasion. It used to be, more than it is now, that people dressed properly for the occasion. When I grew up on a two-horse farm in Tennessee, we always had a “hog killing” when the weather was suitable in the Fall. On that occasion, people dressed in work clothes, because that is what they were going to do. It used to be that people dressed in “Sunday meeting clothes” when attending a funeral, a marriage, or some other serious event.

In recent times, people commonly come improperly dressed to worship the God of Heaven. This involves both men and women, and even children. Dressed as if going to a sporting event, it is not uncommon for men to come, and even stand before the congregation, wearing slouchy unkempt attire.

Some women do that and, sadly, more. More and more, women are taking off more and more off, and showing more and more flesh. This had its beginning to a great degree when the “mini-skirts” were the rage with women. The trend did not stop there. In addition to thighs, it is the custom of many females to bare their midriffs. One does not have to go to roadhouse or honky-tonk to see intimate flesh; any place will suffice, even at “church.” Some women will go to church wearing “party dress,” and that for parties to

which godly women would not want to be seen. And now, there is the fashion of cleavage-flaunting dress, which clearly has nothing to do with staying cool. While on the subject of dress, mothers (and fathers) are often dressing their young daughters to empathize their sexuality. This immodesty started out in the world and has slowly crept into the attire of worshippers.

A Mind Centered on Spiritual Things. As the time for the beginning of the worship service draws near, thoughts should be turned to the purpose for which we have assembled. Some congregations have the custom of having a moment of collective silence prior to the beginning of worship. We typically — especially we men — gather in the foyer and chat about casual things; this is good. We must take care, though, to make the transition from the casual to the serious, from things of the world to the worship of God. Worship should be a rich experience making us stronger, better able to face the issues of life, and serve God acceptably.

Good Clear Announcements. In preparation for beginning the ideal worship service there is also the matter of making announcements. The announcer should speak clearly and be aware that some do not hear as well as others, your editor being a case in point. In fact, all who take any public lead should be sure to speak clearly and with sufficient volume.

Let us now proceed to discuss the five items of our Lord’s Day worship assemblies: singing, praying, eating the Lord’s Supper, giving, and hearing and assenting to God’s word. There is no set order as to arrangement of these items. This is a matter of judgment as to which order seems to be best. In many congregations the first item of worship is singing.

III. SINGING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

Singing is the only music authorized in the worship service. Paul characterized our worship assembly music as: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19); and, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in →

your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:19).

Scripture only authorizes a *cappella* music in our worship assemblies; there is no warrant for the addition of mechanical music. Our worship, as with all of our lives, must be governed by the principle: “...whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all the in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:7). In our worship assemblies, only “singing,” and thus “speaking...psalms...hymns and spiritual songs” can be done “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” that is, by His authority.

Our worship in song is directed to God, but does involve “teaching and admonishing one another.” We grant that there is an aesthetic aspect to singing, but our singing is not primarily about pleasing ourselves. In many cases, brethren have lost sight of the fact that singing is: Primarily to praise God; secondarily to teach and admonish ourselves; and a way distant third, please ourselves. A failure to understand this, has led to things God never intended. Our hymnals contain songs which are not really conducive to worship: jazzed-up, peppy songs, patriotic songs, and songs about sentimental things. Some songs have nothing spiritual about them. I recall a preaching appointment years ago, in which assembly before the Lord’s Supper, the congregation sang “God Bless America,” or some other patriotic song. An ideal song service will included only psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. In addition, such an ideal assembly will have no innovations like: solos, duets, quartets or various types of group singing. The entire congregation should sing. Singing is not only a responsibility, but also a great privilege.

It is fair to say that an ideal song service needs an ideal song leader. He should be one who takes singing seriously. He will in advance select the songs he will be leading, familiarize himself with the lyrics and the tune, and make sure he can do a good job in leading. Although sometimes unavoidable, it is not ideal for the leader to flip through the book at the last minute.

The leader is responsible for setting the pitch and the tempo of the song. When songs are sung “too low and too slow,” it can dampen the enthusiasm of the assembly. If we sing “In the Morning of Joy,” as if it were entitled “In the *Mourning* of Joy.” This can

especially make it tough on the preacher who needs an attentive and enthusiastic assembly of hearers.

All who are able to sing, even those who think they cannot sing well, should join in the singing. To do otherwise would be to reject worshipping in song as we are commanded. The song service is not a time for a conversation between those in the audience, or other things which interfere with singing. Another thing which is of great importance in singing is that we mean what we sing and not sing a lie. When we sing “Trust and Obey,” we should intend to be people who trust and obey.

We could further our desire for and pursuit of an ideal song service by tying to learn about music, about singing. It is helpful for a congregation to have someone teach some of the rudiments of music. Another thing which improves singing is for the audience to pay attention to the leader. The leader should announce the song number clearly. Like your editor, there are those who have poor hearing.

Much more could be said about an ideal song service, but we need to turn our attention to another item of worship, which takes place before or after a song, and that is prayer.

IV. SCRIPTURAL PRAYER AS WORSHIP

Prayer is one of the greatest privileges enjoyed by a true Christian. God’s word has much to say about prayer. Perhaps the first thing we should consider is that only a true Christian is authorized to pray. One who is not a Christian cannot address God as “Father.” Peter says, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil” (I Pet. 3:12). Christ says that we are either with him or against him (Matt. 12:30). The blind man who was healed by Christ, was not an inspired man, but his understanding was that only worshippers of God were entitled to pray. The blind man said, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth” (John 9:31). Paul said, “Pray without ceasing” (I Thess. 5:17), was Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians. Of course he did not mean literally all the time, but on a regular basis. This applies to us today as it did to the Thessalonians. ↓

What we typically call the Lord's Prayer is not an actual prayer but a model to be followed when we pray. Note the words, and especially the concepts comprising this prayer pattern:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever, A-men (Matt. 6:9-13).

Perhaps a better example of an actual prayer, which is indeed the Lord's prayer, is found in John chapter seventeen where Christ prays to the Father for unity among those who believe in Him.

In an ideal worship service, the man leading the prayer will speak loudly enough that all can hear. I am hard of hearing, and many times I do not know what the leader of the prayer has said. I'm not the only person who has a hearing problem. When the leader of the prayer cannot be understood, we cannot say "Amen" to the prayer.

Prayer is to be from the heart in all sincerity. That is, trite prayers do not seem to be from the heart. Neither should the leader use flowery words to impress the audience. A true prayer from the heart need not be a long prayer. I have heard prayers in which the leader seemed to be preaching a mini sermon. Christ said of those who wanted to impress men, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7).

An ideal prayer is one that is directed to the Father, not to the audience. When the leader talks *about* God rather than *to* God, the prayer is being directed to the people, rather than to God.

IV. PREACHING, TEACHING, STUDY OF GOD'S WORD AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

When we hear God's word with a sense that God himself is addressing us, and respect it accordingly, that in itself is an act of reverence paid to God by man; in other words, it is an act of worship. The ideal in this respect involves both the teacher and the hearers. We shall consider the hearers first.

Christ said the truth will make one free (John 8:32). He also said "...when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth..." (Jno. 16:13). In Jesus' prayer to the Father for the apostles, He said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (Jno. 17:17). We can be assured that God's truth has been revealed to us in the Bible. Therefore, as hearers we must make sure that what hear is the truth. In the New Testament we are warned several times of false teachers that would teach things which are not in harmony with God's word.

The hearers have a responsibility to learn God's truth, that they may know what is truth and what is not truth. This includes that which is "meat" and not "milk." The writer of Hebrews has some stern warnings with regard to this matter. He points out that that when the Hebrews should have been teachers of others, they had become "such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat" (Heb. 5:12- 14). The writer goes on to say that users of milk were unskilled in the word of righteousness, and were babes. Again the writer says that "strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, and are able to discern both good and evil. The condition of the Hebrews could be applied to some members of the church today.

The pursuit of this ideal act in an ideal assembly is sometimes thwarted because, now, like then, some hearers do not want to hear all of God's truth. Hearers are sometimes offended, even outraged, if in the proclamation of the word certain doctrines are emphasized, or "names are called." Yet, if one merely read in our assemblies the epistles of Paul, it would be impossible to avoid either. Paul's inspired writings called the names of people in error, and ideal preaching and teaching today cannot fail to do the same.

In some cases, there are those who want to continue on the milk diet, and are even critical of those who emphasize the need for strong meat. In other words, they want to continue as babes.

The teacher of God's word has great responsibilities. The teacher should emulate Paul when he said to the elders at Ephesus, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Some teachers will not emphasize all of God's truth, even to the point of placating →

the ones being taught. Endeavoring to please men instead of God, is a serious problem.

Within the past few decades this problem has increased greatly. Several factors are involved in this, and we shall note a few of them. Some preachers appear to be more concerned about pleasing men than they are about pleasing God. The continuation of a place to preach may have a bearing on this tendency to water down the gospel, rather than taking a strong stand for all the counsel of God. I have heard preachers say that they would only go so far on some subjects, because some would be displeased.

The objective of some preachers is to have the praise of men rather than the approval of God. John speaks of those chief rulers who “believed on him,” but would not confess him because of the Pharisees. “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (Jno. 12:42-43). From this example we see that some of the problems seen in the first century are also seen today.

Preachers who are men pleasers are not the only ones who stand to lose, those who are drawn by them will suffer the same fate. I have not seen such a time as this, when members of the church are so often drawn by the preachers who will not speak out boldly against error. That this is happening often in our time is simply a matter of fact. Larger congregations are sometimes able to siphon members from smaller outlying congregations, appealing to them with non-distinctive preaching and teaching. Brethren do not always appreciate having duties and responsibilities pointed out. This is one thing that is often lacking in the larger congregations. People are often inclined to go where the least is expected of them, and where their conscience may be salved.

There is also the entertainment factor. Entertainment has become a big drawing card. Decades ago brethren did not see the providing of entertainment as a work of the church. Now that is different. The number of congregations offering entertainment in different forms is growing. In some cases, if the preacher does not go along with this, he is “on the road again,” looking for a place to preach.

Money can be a factor in the kind of preaching done by some. A cousin, who is a preacher, told of being counseled by elders of the congregation where he was preaching about preaching anything which might not go well with the big givers. He did not continue with that congregation. Some preachers could be rightfully classed as hirelings. A college teacher once told us that if a person would preach “for the money,” he would not preach “for the money.” A preacher who has moved many times over the years, once asked about congregations needing a preacher. He was quick to further ask, “How much to they pay?”

V. GIVING AS AN ACT OF WORSHIP

The ideal worshipper gives as God has prospered him. This is made clear by Paul’s command to the Corinthians, when he said, “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him...” (I Cor. 16:2). Paul gives further instructions to the Corinthians, and all givers, saying, “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). These two statements should serve as a guide in our giving, if we would pleasing to God.

The time of our giving is clearly “upon the first day of the week.” Early Christians were forbade from “forsaking the assembly” (Heb. 10:25). The assembly, among other things, presents the opportunity to give as well as engage in other acts of worship.

Giving is not a haphazard matter. We are to purpose with regard to our giving, not waiting until the worship hour to make a decision. We also notice from Paul’s instructions that giving is not to be done in a grudging manner, or out of necessity. When something is done with a willing heart, it is more likely that it is being done in a way that pleases the Lord.

There are those who do not hesitate to obligate themselves to make payments on a house, automobile, or other material things, yet they dare not purpose in their giving to the Lord’s cause. The Lord does not expect us to give when we

do not prosper, but when we do He demands that we give accordingly.

We are not taught by the New Testament to give a certain percentage of our earnings; it is left up to the individual as to how much one gives. It is sometimes reasoned that since the Jews were required to tithe, — give ten percent of their income — then we should give at least that much. We appreciate the sentiment, but, it should be noted that the Jews gave much more than ten percent when all their giving was considered.

It is not our intention to set a percentage that we are to give, but we do believe there is something that will help us greatly when considering our giving. Since God loves “a cheerful giver,” the extent of our love for God will help us determine how much to give. I have heard people say that we should give until it hurts. It seems to me that we should give until it makes us feel good to have God’s favor as a cheerful giver.

Last but not least, is the fact that our Savior gave his life for us (Heb. 2:9). We can never give as much as our Savior gave, but we can at least reciprocate by giving freely of what we have prospered. This shows our love for God, and demonstrates that we want to have a part in supporting the cause of Christ.

The ideal worship service is made up of those brethren who freely give of their means as they have prospered. They are those who sincerely covet the love of God, as a cheerful giver.

VI. THE LORD’S SUPPER AS WORSHIP

History has no memorial to compare to that of the Lord’s Supper. Never has there been a memorial which calls to mind anything which is of such great value as is the Lord’s Supper. All items of worship, for that matter, are important since they are acts of reverence paid to God by man. They are special blessing and privilege for the servant of God, which are not granted to the unbeliever.

In observing the Lord’s Supper our minds should go back to the time and circumstances under which the Supper was instituted. Jesus, knowing that His time was at hand, gave instructions relative to the Passover; and so, “When the even was come, he

sat down with the twelve” (Matt. 26:20). One of the twelve, Judas, had already made an agreement with the enemies of Christ, to betray him for “thirty pieces of silver.” As Jesus and the twelve were eating the Passover, Jesus said “one of you shall betray me.” In response to the question of who the betrayer was, Judas said, “Master, is it I?” In response Jesus said, “Thou hast said.”

Just imagine the sorrow that must have prevailed among the disciples, with the exception of the traitor, Judas, as they were eating. Under those sad circumstances, the Lord’s Supper was instituted. We should reflect on that as we observe the world’s greatest memorial. The description of the supper is seen in the following:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom. (Matt. 26:26-29)

The apostle Paul, later alluding to this event and the Lord’s words, says of the Supper:

Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.... This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (I Cor. 11:24-25)

We call attention to the fact that in breaking the bread and drinking the cup, Jesus said, “this do in remembrance of me.” This clearly sets forth a valid reason for observing the Lord’s Supper. But do we concentrate on this as we should? Are all worldly thoughts purged from our minds? When our minds are strictly on what we are doing, then other thoughts are not likely to appear and interfere.

We have been privileged for years to personally partake the memorial of the Lord’s Supper, to teach many lessons on the subject, and to observe a variety of approaches to and behaviors regarding the Lord’s Supper. Some times it appears that those observing the supper have their minds →

directed in the right way. That is, considering the seriousness of the occasion. There is nothing in the area of worship that should touch our hearts more deeply. We cannot know what is in the mind of people when they observe the Lord's Supper, but there are things which seem to suggest the seriousness we attach to the Lord's Supper. Let us consider the following examples.

Our first example is that of attaching great seriousness to the event. It was a privilege to recently assemble and worship with a congregation in Wasilla, Alaska. The person in charge at the table made some very fitting remarks, designed to draw our attention to the solemnity of what we were about to do. After those fitting remarks the brother read a fitting passage from the New Testament. After this, a prayer was offered before the taking of the bread. The same thing happened when taking the fruit of the vine. The memorial was reverent and touching.

We have had, however, other quite different experiences. On one occasion, at the congregation where I preached my second sermon, the brother in charge of the Lord's Supper said, "Now ye know what this is 'fer,' and if you want to take it stand up." Bless his heart, he did mention the *purpose* of the Lord's Supper. In some instances that I have observed, nothing is said with regard to the Lord's Supper, before the prayer for the bread. On some occasions, though, something is said about the purpose of the contribution, but not one word is said before the supper.

One might say, "What difference does it make?" It might cause brethren to think that the act is just a ritual that we do every Lord's day. This act should surely touch our hearts deeply; yet, some times the words which Paul received from the Lord — "This do in remembrance of me" — are not even mentioned. Something being said before the Supper, relative to its purpose, will help to draw our minds where they should be. Reading a passage of scripture concerning the Lord's Supper, is allowing the Lord to speak to us, and we should want to hear His word.

Another reason for conducting the Lord's Supper in a timely manner is that there may be visitors in the audience who are not familiar with the Lord's Supper as revealed in God's word. Before I obeyed the

gospel, I attended a Catholic service on one occasion. Different things happened about which I knew nothing. A bell would ring and people would do various things. I can imagine a person attending the services of the Lord's church, and not fully understand the significance of the Lord's Supper, when nothing is said before the observance begins.

There is a flip side. While partaking of the Lord's Supper is a most solemn and serious occasion, it is not the only act of worship. It could be that the Lord's Supper is given so much attention that the other acts of worship are not properly considered. Preaching in a meeting in Ontario several years ago, so many brethren made comments before the Supper, that I had only about fifteen minutes to preach. I took the whole thirty minutes, and fortunately they did not seem to mind.

Some brethren seem to have the idea that only the Lord's Supper is important in worship, or that it is the most important act of worship. It is not uncommon to see brethren of this persuasion come in, take the Supper, and then absent themselves from other acts of worship.

CONCLUSION

Our intention in this discussion has been to draw our attention to improving our worship services. There is hardly anything we can do by way of serving our Lord that does not have room for improvement. We believe the Lord's word teaches us to be the best we can be in all areas of life, and in worship specifically.

In more recent times, it seems that we generally are not approaching our worship services as seriously as we ought. This lack of serious and reverence can be seen in our treatment of the Lord's Supper, as well as the other acts of worship. This lack of seriousness is, we believe, reflected in many of the problems now confronting us. We are not now demanding that only God's word be taught in its fullness, as we once did. God's law on fellowship has lost its meaning with many, as the man-made inventions are more acceptable. What a pity it is if we do not strive for the ideal in our worship services; that is, as the Lord would have them to be.

—Editor

“We Don’t Make Instrumental Music an Issue”

Marvin L. Weir

The July, 2008 issue of *The Christian Chronicle* ran an article by Ted Parks documenting teachers quitting at Columbia Academy (a Christian school near Nashville) rather than signing an agreement “not to participate in instrumental worship.” The “Good Friday service” one of the teachers attended “featured a drama with pauses during which a musical group at the church [Maury Hills congregation] performed with instruments.” An elder at Murray Hills also taught at Columbia Academy and resigned from the school after this incident. The *Chronicle* reports Domkowski (an elder) as saying: “The congregations weekly practice is a cappella singing [and] instruments appear only during special events scheduled outside Sunday worship times.” This statement is then followed by this revealing quip from Domkowski, “We don’t make instrumental music an issue.”

There are an ever-growing number of brethren who reveal their spineless stand on doctrinal matters by saying, “We don’t make that an issue.” The *Chronicle* notes that the church web page “specifies that worship at Maury Hills is non-instrumental.” May this writer translate and say, “Maury Hills is not prepared **at this time** to lose those who would leave if they used an instrument during worship on Sunday.” Now before too many appear shocked that I have prematurely judged the leadership of this congregation, let us continue to read from their website. A revealing explanation of the statement that “worship at Murray Hills is non-instrumental” says: “This is by **choice**, rather than doctrine. We find **nothing wrong** with instrumental worship, but believe that the voice alone is a simple and beautiful way to worship God” (emphasis mine, MLW). May I again translate and say, “By not condemning the instrument in worship, we hope we do not alienate those who prefer it. Perhaps advocates of the instrument in worship will respect **our choice** to use only the voice and place membership with us.”

Is it not amazing that whether it is politics or religion, when God’s word is no longer believed or heed-

ed the words **choice** and **change** replace **follow** and **obey**? Did you notice that the elder at Maury Hills said, “We find nothing wrong with instrumental worship?” The entire world found nothing wrong with staying at home when Noah and his family boarded the ark. God tells us that there was plenty wrong with the world’s decision (Gen. 7:23). Nadab and Abihu in the preparing for the sacrifice found nothing wrong in offering “strange fire before Jehovah, which he had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:1). God found plenty wrong with their choice of fire and sent forth fire and devoured them (Lev. 10:2). Naaman, desiring to be cured of his leprosy, found nothing wrong with dipping in the waters of the Abanah and Pharpar in Damascus (2 King 5:11-12). Naaman’s choice contradicted God’s will and Jehovah found plenty wrong with such thinking. Naaman was not cured of his leprosy until he dipped seven times in the Jordan as God had instructed (2 Kings 5:14). King Saul found nothing wrong in making a burnt-offering to entreat the favor of Jehovah (I Sam. 13:10, 12). God found plenty wrong with the sacrifice that Saul was not qualified to make, and Saul was informed that his kingdom would not continue because of his disobedience (I Sam. 13:14). These examples will suffice to prove that acts of service and worship to God are not approved just because man finds nothing wrong with them. We need authorization from God’s word to worship with the instrument - something that Domkowski and the Maury Hills congregation do not have.

Another red flag of liberalism is boldly stated: “We don’t make instrumental music an issue.” Did it work for the world in Noah’s day to declare, “We don’t make getting on the ark an issue?” Were Nadab and Abihu spared by saying, “We don’t make offering strange fire to God an issue?” Was Naaman cured of his leprosy as he said, “I don’t make the location of a river an issue in curing my leprosy?” Did King Saul retain his kingdom because he wisely quipped, “It is not an issue whether I or a priest offers the burnt offering.” The answer →

to all these questions is more than obvious.

Brethren, it is not just the instrument that unqualified men masquerading as elders are not making an issue over. Those who never did or no longer respect God's Word do not believe in making an issue over women leadership roles in the church, the social gospel, recreation and entertainment, drama, skits, "feel good" stories instead of scriptural sermons, activity of choice replacing Bible study, social drinking, inspiration of the Scriptures, lying, morality and marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Do not lose your soul by substituting choice for obedience. —1272 Bonham St. Paris, TX 75460

Make Your Plans

to attend the

2009

Banner of Truth Lectures

June 29 — July 2

Reservations have been made

Speaking of lectures, the the following is an assessment of the 2008 lectureship from from one of the speakers, Paul Curless:

It was great being able to speak on the 2008 lectureship. All the speakers were faithful gospel preachers and the lessons were all Bible based. It is sad that many Christians chose not to take advantage of the wonderful opportunity to hear some much needed lessons for this day and age. Hopefully many of the tapes will be purchased form brother Jim Green who recorded all the sermons.

Some Obversations and Comments

BROTHER CURLESS NOTES THE FRUSTRATION that so many will not take advantage this wonderful opportunity to hear some much needed lessons. We are upbeat, optimistic and impressed by the number of devoted attendees; yet, facts are facts. So many Christians are not thirsting for spiritual food as they once did. This only shows how much we need the lectures and the preaching of sound doctrine. We have never seen a time when the need was greater than now.

Recordings (DVD or VHS) of the 2008 lectures may be purchased from Jim Green. His phone number is: 931 486-1364. Several have said that the lectures this year were the best of all that have been done.

BOT IS AFFECTED BY INFLATION. Within the past couple of years postage rates have spiraled. To mail a one pound bundle (15 pieces) now costs more than \$10.00. Mailing here in the U.S. has increased at least twenty percent. All foreign mail is now sent first class. There is no less expensive alternative.

Today I ordered paper. The increased price of paper was a shock to me. A couple of years ago we could get 200,000 sheets for \$1580.00. Today the price is \$1580.00 for 100,000 sheets. That means that the cost of paper has doubled within two years. But we are confident that our brethren will continue to supply the means to get the paper out. From the response we receive from our readers in the U.S. and foreign countries, we believe BOT is still worth the cost.

PLEASE ACCEPT BY APOLOGIES FOR BEING BEHIND. A combination of things: serious computer problems; just over a week of planned vacation; and, other time consuming problems beyond my control, have put me far behind. We apologize and beg your forbearance. I am working to catch up as soon as possible. On top everything else, I move more slowly than I used to. —Editor

NOT A “CHRISTAN” SCHOOL

As many of you know, I get asked almost every weekend about our “Christian” schools by anxious parents who about to send their children off to college. They want to know which ones are still faithfully teaching the Truth. My standard response has been: “I’m not sure of any that are not compromising in some areas, and as such, it is vitally important to make sure your children have a strong foundation for their faith beforehand. I would select a school that is strong in the area they want to major in and alert them that they will be surrounded by wolves.”

Want an example of wolves in sheep’s clothing? **Randy Lowery**, president of **Lipscomb University** was heralded as the [Tuesday] guest preacher for a “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” (Jan. 19-25, 2008) at Second Church in Nashville. [Announcement in <http://ooutandaboutnewspaper.com/article.php?id=2265>]. **And, if the announcement itself were not enough, the newspaper clip appeared in “Tennessee’s Best GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) Source for news.”** Nice! Here is another account from *The Tennessean*, www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/2008119/NEWS06/801190336. The announcement says, “Dr. Randy Lowry, president of Lipscomb University, will preach, and a choir of singers from all the sponsoring congregations will offer special music.”

Those who know me well know I am not a watchdog or an alarmist. Having been wrongly “written up” myself by brotherhood watchdogs in the past for things I did not do, I wanted to make sure I got the facts straight in this instance. So I made two calls: 1) Randy Lowry’s office; and 2) Second Presbyterian Church. “Jennifer” in Randy’s office verified that he did in fact preach there. And the secretary at Second Presbyterian verified it as well going so far as to emailing me a copy of the program. He and those “special choirs” joined hands and prayed for Christian unity.

Friends, I feel strongly that we should strive for Christian unity. But those people Randy fellowshiped with are NOT NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANS! Do we need to teach the lost? DEFINITELY! I try hard to

do this every week! One of the reasons we started “Think” was to evangelize the lost. But I don’t do so by reaching out in fellowship and praying for unity with them. I try hard to teach them the TRUTH about what it means to be a New Testament Christian! The article says this special day is “urging all Christians” to join Christ in praying “that they may all be one.” Before they can be one they must put on Christ in baptism. **Have we completely forgotten the uniqueness of the one truth church? Part of the reason the church is in the position it is today is because several generations have slowly embraced the idea that the church of Christ is just another denomination. IT IS TIME TO CHANGE THAT MENTALITY!**

Like it or not, his position as president puts Lowry in the spotlight. He is the highest representative for that school. And as such, his actions speak loudly for the entire university. If this is the direction he has chosen to take the school that is his choice. He has that right. But we also have the right to write off Lipscomb University as a “Christian” school. I, as a New Testament Christian, don’t have to support him (or the school) and I strongly urge you to consider doing likewise. **Isn’t it time we either take our schools back or write them off completely (and financially).** If you know of board members, please call them - today - and ask them to bring things back to the Old Paths! Hold the board accountable. If Lipscomb wants to wear the name Christian, then it must be willing to make that distinction through its actions and not name only. **Randy, I for one am holding you to a higher standard.** What’s your response?

Sincerely, in Him

Brad Harrub, Ph. D. 1600 Westgate Cir, Suite 125, Brentwood, TN 37027

NOTE: This article is via *Seek the Old Paths*, Feb. 2008; Garland Robinson, editor. How sad that Nashville, which used to be such a strong area for the Truth, has now come to be such a strong area for the propagation of error. It is highly unlikely that Lipscomb will ever change for the good. Liberalism usually only grows stronger.

Fellow-Helpers
March- July 2008

Barbra A. Kist	130.00
Anonymous	100.00
Anonymous	200.00
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Billy Proctor	65.00
Bill King	10.00
Cash (name misplaced)	5.00
Cash (no name)	10.00
Leonard Tripp	50.00
Cash (no name)	<u>20.00</u>
Total contribution March-July	4,579.00

Financial Report
March – July 2008

Mailing BOT	\$3,437.47
Stamps and foreign mailing	531.74
Paper	1,045.00
Copier toner	112.99
Travel expense	30.00
Church Directory	14.95
Phone	14.90
Mailing labels	<u>132.60</u>
Total Expenses	5,306.65
Total on hand March	16,898.45
Total contribution	4,579.00
Total funds available	11,477.45
Less Expenses	<u>5,306.65</u>
Balance on hand July 31,2008	6,170.80

NOTE: With this mailing the balance above will be lowered by more than a thousand dollars making our balance on hand lower than normal. We, nonetheless, are so thankful that our financial needs are supplied, and will be. Our thanks go out to each individual and congregation which has a part in making BOT possible. We wish for time to send a personal letter of gratitude to each of you; perhaps later in the year. 2008 has brought many hindrances to our BOT work. We ask for the prayers of our readers to the end that we may be able to continue for years to come.

We are blessed that the Hickory Grove elders have given us the go-ahead both with BOT and the BOT lectures next year. We are truly living in perilous times with many enemies of the truth,

Welcome to Our New Readers

Each month we have new additions to our mailing list. This includes those who ask to be on the list, and also names which are submitted by other readers. If you are a new reader and find the *Banner of Truth* worthwhile, we ask you to send us the names of others who would like to be on our mailing list. We believe the printed page is still the most effective means of getting the word out to those who want it and need it. God-fearing people crave spiritual food.

Readers' Response

<walternaomi@bellsouth.net> *Glory to God for the good publication you have been sending us. It has been of great value to us, and those who have been receiving it through us. Some have even baptized. In Christian love, Bernard Kagaga Kalamindi, Church of Christ – Kenya.*

Walter and Naomi, Thank you for everything you do! May God bless you richly in your work in this life and in the life to come, Jake & Rose.

Please add me to your mailing list for Banner of Truth Booklet. If there is a charge please let me know how much and I will send it to you. Thank you. Mrs. Pearlie Hurst – AL. (BOT is free, being made possible by gifts of individuals and congregations, Editor).

Dear brother Walter W. Pigg, New Year Greetings to you in the precious name of Lord Jesus Christ. My family members, the brothers and sisters at TOTAMOOOLA CHURCH OF CHRIST and neighbor congregations, my fellow workers and our friends wishing you all with a productive, healthy and prosperous New Year 2008. The Lords work is slowly progressing. We have many upheavals in the Lords ministry. We pray for you and your family, ylur health and your work in the Lord continuously. Thank you and appreciate you fro sending monthly printed page 'BANNER OF TRUTH' since long years. I thank you very much again and again. I have been a regular reader of your printed material. It is very glad to me to read the printed page. They are lucid with Greek diction, original tex, accuracy with the scripture, deep information and very useful. They are very useful to me and many others learning and growing in Bible knowledge, handle the scripture fairly and rightly, making difficult subjects easy to understand. Leading many people into a better life. Very helpful in handling Bible class, church services. As a matter of fact that they are good source to us to defend the truth and answer to the denominational preachers and others. As you know there are many religious that need to be taught the truth. We appreciate you because of your love, cooperation and encouragement in the Lord. We do remember the people who love us with their great efforts and services. Keep us in your regular mailing list. Our family members, brothers and sisters in the church, Bible Study students, fellow preachers and our friends convey New Year greetings to all. Convey my salutations to the elders at "Hickory Grove Church of Christ" in KY. I conclude with my fervent prayers to be with you and asking the same for us – Totamoola Church of Christ, K.M. Ratna Kumar/ Evangelist. – South India

I want to thank you for such a spirit filled publication. I spent many wonderful moments reading your articles. It's been a very uplifting experience to my soul to be a devoted

reader. God bless you and yours. Here is my change of address....I don't want to miss any publications. I will be moving back to my home state of North Carolina. Also I will do all I can to spread your publication and support you any way I can. God speed in all we do, Tommy B. Jones. – NC. Greetings dear brother. Hope this finds you doing well. We appreciate so very much BOT. Thanks for standing against the wrong and for the right. God bless and we will be praying for all your efforts/works as you serve the master Your Bother and Friend, Ken Butterworth." – AL. (Good to hear from you a fellow-soldier who will stand for the truth , as one who loves and appreciates the truth and are willing to stand for it with all your might. We need many more like you, Editor).

I'm including a check to help pay for printing and mailing the publication 'Banner of Truth.' I have personally subscribed for several years and also receive a 25 bundle addressed to the church at Richwood for distribution there. The work you and Hickory Grove congregation do warrants our continued support. We have moved to Abilene, TX and would like to change our address. Please continue to send the bundle to the new address and we will make them available to the Abilene 5th and Grape congregation where we now worship. I plan to resume my work at E-Mail Truth, on Yahoo Groups, very soon and will operate under the oversight of those elders. May God continue to bless us both with strength and vigor to do His work in combating there error that is so prevalent in the Lord's church, Joe F. Travis. – TX. (We appreciate so much your help, both in finances and by receiving and distributing bundles. Thanks, Editor).

Please take my name off your mailing list. I still have several that I haven't read yet. Reading is hard for me now, due to my age Ruby Bagwell. – TX. (I can relate to "getting older." Things begin to fail. I'll be 83 in September, but I'm thankful that I can carry on as well as I do. May the Lord richly bless you in the future, Editor).

Dear Walter, It's been some time since you heard from me. Your "PAPER" is a God blessing. We pray you can keep up your good work. Your BOT's came today. There is a set of tapes of your lectureship for \$35.00. Could you please send me a set. I can't come to KY, so sure need to hear good speakers, Billy Proctor. – AR.

I have been receiving Banner of Truth for a number of years. I would like to make a contribution to the work. I appreciate the articles and the effort you are giving. God be with you, Chad Futrell.

I would like to receive Banner of Truth, Robert Swingle. – OH.

Faith and Fact *Versus* Faith and Feeling

At the head of a family of Greek words is the word *peitho* whose basic meaning is “to convince” or “persuade.” Related words are: *pistis*, “faith”; *pisteuo*, “believe”; *pistos*, “trustworthy, faithful, trusting, believing”; *pistoo*, “rely, convince”; *apistia*, “unbelief”; *apisteo*, “disbelieve”; *apistos*, “unbelievable, faithless, unbelieving.” The distinct theme here is: the idea of one party convincing or persuading another that he ought to believe, trust, commit to, or rely on the first party and thereby act accordingly.

As to **how** or by **what** one party seeks to convince or persuade the other; this is “reason” or “evidence.” Such reason or evidence takes various forms: *Demonstration* — as in, “show me” —; *testimony* — as in, “I saw,” or “He saw” —; and, *deduction* — as in, “if this, then that” —; and so on. As to whether the reason or evidence accords with reality, and is sufficient to warrant trust, that is another question. *Lenski* says it well,

Faith is never its own basis. “Faith,” “confidence,” “conviction” are correlative terms; faith rests on somebody or on something outside of me and *not* on itself. Somebody, something outside of me inspires faith or trust in me, otherwise I have no faith. It is this outside ground that shows whether faith is true, i.e., justified or false, i.e. unjustified.

Faith is an act of personal will, and like all acts of will, it may, or may not, accord with reality. Reality is what it is regardless of whether I care about it; what I think about it; or, how I react to it. For example, Jacob concluded, “Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces.” He believed the spurious “testimony” and “evidence” presented by Joseph’s brothers, and concluded his precious son had been killed by an “evil beast” (Genesis 37:20, 31-33). What he believed was contrary to reality. It is ironic that years later, when Divine providence brought Joseph and his brothers back together, the brothers went to their father and said, “Joseph is yet alive.” This time Jacob “believed them not” (45:26). In both

cases, what Jacob “believed” was wrong.

Nevertheless, aside from the fact that belief where mere mortals are involved can be a tricky business, these incidents serve to show that belief — in whatever, or whomever — in its purest sense inherently involves reason or evidence.

Where human relations are concerned, God says that “love” should compel us to “believe...all things” (1Corinthians 13:7): that is, take people at their word, consider their motives pure unless there is compelling reason to do otherwise. Whereas, this can lead to unfounded trust where humans are concerned, such is not the case where God is concerned. Just as we do — and should — believe in people and things of the temporal realm, so are we to “believe in God,” and as Jesus said, “believe also in me” (John 14:1). But, now we move into the arena of Divine perfection, and this belief on the basis of reason takes on a different light.

Since “faith” inherently involves reason or evidence; to claim as do some that there does not exist “absolute” or “unequivocal” evidence as to God’s being, and as to His will for man, calls into question both His power and His benevolence. To view “faith” in God and His word as a gamble or a leap in the dark has some very unsavory implications. It’s one thing to say that Jacob, in the absence of unequivocal proof, “believed”; there were forces at work beyond his control, namely the, the deceit of man. But, “God is not a man” (Numbers 23:19).

Every aspect of faith in God involves evidence. God demands that we be concerned about evidence. Evidence is that which warrants a conclusion. We are to “prove” (1Thessalonians 5:21); “know” (John 8:32); “give answer [*apologia*: make defense for]” to those who ask us “a reason [*logon*: accounting] of the hope” (1Peter 3:15); and, “contend” for what we believe (Jude 3). As pertains to the realm of “life and godliness” (2Peter 1:3), the notion of any aspect of that life involving faith without compelling evidence flies in the face of clear Bible teaching. —AA

We Need More Like Nicodemus

It was early on during the time when Jesus began his itinerant preaching. One night, a man by the name of Nicodemus came to seek answers from Jesus about the kingdom of God. No one knows why Nicodemus came at night. The Bible does not explicitly say, neither does it imply the answer. It would do us all good if we could learn that when the Bible does not say something about a matter, neither should we; neither should we presume to act in the absence of biblical say-so.

Let's see. The Bible — specifically, the New Testament, or Will of Jesus — says nothing about Popes, Nuns, rosaries, holy water, and so on. It says nothing about salvation by faith only; nothing about a future thousand year reign of Jesus on this planet. The New Testament says nothing about worshipping God with musical instruments or choirs; it does say, however, that we are to sing, and thereby to teach and admonish “one another” (Colossians 3:16). The crucial question is: Is the Bible to be viewed as God's say-so and therefore human obligation; or, is it merely to be viewed as somewhat God's say-so when it pleases me, plus whatever I decide to add on the basis of God's silence?

We know that Nicodemus was a Jew, specifically a Pharisee, just like the much-later-to-come apostle Paul. Another marvelous characteristic of Nicodemus which separates him from the average person is that he was an intellectually honest person and willing to investigate facts, even when the conclusions warranted by the facts ran counter to popular opinion, or strongly held views. Later, in John chapter seven, when animosity had grown to the point that Jesus could not walk about openly for fear of the Jews killing him, it was Nicodemus who stuck out his neck saying, “Doth our law judge a man, except it first hear from himself and know what he doeth.” When it comes to religion, many, if not most, people, are completely unlike Nicodemus. They make their judgments and decisions, their beliefs and practices without hearing what the Bible has to say. We ought to be like the Bereans, who rather than just reject Paul's teaching out of hand,

“received the word with all readiness of the mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). It is not uncommon to meet quite a number of people who have a built-in bias toward churches of Christ; yet, rarely do they allow their biases to be examined in light of Bible teaching. Nicodemus was not that way; his was the attitude that one ought not to make judgments in the absence of evidence and a fair hearing. Yes, we need more like Nicodemus today.

Nicodemus was also quite a discerning man. Not only was he willing to hear a matter fully, but, he was also a person who was compelled by evidence. For example, when he first approached Jesus, he said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). He recognized a miracle when he saw one, and concluded that no one could do a miracle except God be with him. In other words, he traced the act back to God, and consequently, desired to know what God had to say about matters.

A miracle is an act performed by God through certain individuals. Said act, as far as this physical world is concerned, is supernatural in nature, and thereby impossible to have been accomplished by natural means. There are many people today who make claims about miraculous acts, but they are short on proof. Miracles, were clearly performed in the First Century. They were performed for the purpose of immediate proof that the performer was from God, and therefore what he had to say was what God had to say. For example, “tongues are for a sign...to the unbelieving” (1Corinthians 14:22). Today, no one on this planet can perform a miracle. We know that for several reasons: (1) If they could, they would; but they cannot, so they do not. They merely make claims; unlike such as Paul who said, “Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1Thessalonians 1:5). (2) Only the apostles could pass on miracle performing power to others (Acts 8:17-18), and the apostles are all long since dead. Besides →

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all that, we now have at our disposal “that which is perfect” — God’s final word and will — and Paul flat out says, when “that which is perfect is come,” then supernatural, miraculous gifts, will be “done away” (1Corinthians 13:8-13). Well, it has, and they are — done away, that is.

What a man, this Nicodemus. He had many pre-suppositions about religion, about Jesus. He was an important powerful man, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, kind of like their Supreme Court, yet he was an honest and discerning man who would be lead by the truth, and not by his feelings, nor what others thought. Give us more like him. —AA

SAVING STEPS OF FAITH

“walk in the steps of that faith” (Rom. 4:12)

Hear the Gospel

Jn. 20:30, 31; Rom. 10:17

Believe

Rom. 1:16; Acts 18:8; Heb. 11:6

Repent

Lk. 13:3; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 17:30

Confess Faith in Christ

Rom. 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37

Be Baptized

Mat. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:47, 48; 22:16; Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 2:12; 1Pet. 3:21

Be Faithful Unto and Until Death

Mat. 25:21, 34; 2Pet. 1:1-11; Rev. 2:10; 1Jno. 1:6-9

FOR YOUR ADDRESS BOOK

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