

God Has Spoken

Tract Series

Should We Be Doing This ?

Confused Worship

In one church I visited the congregation was required to kneel at certain times, stand at certain other times, and sit at yet other times. Does God want all churches to do this?

In a couple of places I've seen candles lit at the beginning of the assembly, and snuffed out at the close. Should we maybe be doing this?

In many churches I've seen the leader wearing some sort of robe, often with colored ribbons sewn on or worn over his shoulders. Is this what we ought to be doing?

I've seen entire congregations clapping as we commonly do at a play or a sporting event. I've heard preachers whistle in their proclamation of praise of God. I've heard pianos, organs (both electric and wall-to-wall pipe organs), guitars, trumpets, drums and cymbals. And I've heard speakers referred to as worship leader, preacher, pastor, minister, priest, rector, apostle, elder, deacon, and father.

If these are all taught in the Bible one might justifiably conclude that the preacher was right whom I heard tell a church regarding a certain part of the Bible, "Don't read that; it will only confuse you." Certainly one can be greatly confused by the various conflicting doctrines and practices he encounters from church to church. One can hear preachers arguing for or against any or all of these terms and practices.

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

But is it really the Bible that is confusing? Does the Bible provide support in favor of these differences between churches? Many years ago I had occasion to live in what many would term “a developing nation.” There was a religion there unique to that country. Investigating the history of it I heard the following story. Frustrated by the conflicting doctrines taught by American missionaries a man decided to go to America himself to study religion until he found the truth. His method was to study all he could about as many churches as he could. He compiled a list of the doctrines and practices that seemed common to the greatest number of them. Satisfied that he had found the truth – because most agreed on these points – he took that body of ideas back home and established this church. Try as he might to find truth and unity, he still had a mish-mash of doctrines and practices of man’s preferences. There was no objective standard.

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We cannot deny that at least some of these varying practices are recorded in the Bible. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and others personally killed and burned animal sacrifices to God. But then we see that the kings and the prophets had to bring their sacrifices to a priest who would offer to God on their behalf. Yet again, when we come to Peter and Paul, we don’t see such sacrifices at all. Aaron wore robes and burned oil lamps and incense. Abraham is never seen with any of these but he is called “the friend of God” (James 2:23; II Chronicles 20:7). Just what does God want of us when we come before Him? Does He care? May we adopt any practice we see in the Bible because, “God accepted it from them, so He will surely accept it of me”?

Rejected Worship

“Cain was a tiller of the ground” (Genesis 4:2). When his harvest came in he “brought to God of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.” So far as we can tell from the record his heart was sincere toward God. He brought what he had. He returned to God from the blessings that God had given him. Yet, verse five says of God: “unto Cain and his offering He had not respect.” Many would say today that God was unfair.

Cain sacrificed to God what he could have kept to himself. He honored God by recognizing (1) God's worthiness of man's worship, and (2) that God was responsible for the growth of the crops. Why would God not accept a person's sincerity?

Jeremiah went to the temple to watch the people (Jeremiah 7). He saw God's chosen people come there to worship (verse 2). He saw people dedicating to God some of their personal possessions (verse 4). But God told Jeremiah not to pray for them, "for I will not hear thee" (verse 16). Why would God not accept His own people coming into His own house to worship Him according to His own law? Why would He not hear prayers for them?

Directed Worship

God had told Cain and Abel exactly what to bring in worship. Abel offered "by faith" (Hebrews 11:4). "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of the Lord" (Romans 10:17). God said it, Abel did it, "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering" (Genesis 4:4). God said it, Cain did differently, "unto Cain and his offering He had not respect" (Genesis 4:5).

Though Jeremiah watched what the people did in the temple, God remembered what they had been doing outside of their worship time (Jeremiah 7:5-7). They were stealing, killing, committing adultery, lying, and worshiping idols (verse 9). The right motions in worship were not accepted because the right heart and life were far from what must be in a person who comes before God.

Accepted Worship

What we have observed in all this is that God has told us how to worship Him, and He will accept nothing else (John 4:23-24). It is also apparent that he has given different directions at different times. The temple and its system of worship began with Moses (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). Abraham and Abel knew nothing of it. It ended with Jesus (Colossians 2:14). It applies to no one today.

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:24-25). We are under a new covenant.

“In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Hebrews 8:13).

To offer to God now such things as animal sacrifices, lamps, incense, or instruments of music – to come before Him in special clothing or special places – is to perpetuate trappings of the old covenant that has vanished away. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

As God has given specific directions for worship in every age, we should expect to find specific directions for our worship today. The New Testament reveals these specifics:

Eat the Lord’s supper - I Cor. 11:23-29

Study and learn the word - Acts 20:7

Pray - Acts 12:12

Sing - Ephesians 5:19

Contribute to the work - I Cor. 16:1-2

Except for the command to assemble on Sunday, where, when, and how we do these things God has not specified, but to add anything else – or to delete any of these – would be once again to offer confused worship.

I Corinthians 14:21 records the lament of the Holy Spirit by the pen of the apostle Paul: “In the law it is written, ‘With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord’.”

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Colossians 3:17).

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