

The Covenant with Moses Part 2: Worship Service of a Holy Nation

Scripture Readings: *Exodus 19:4-6; 24:5-8; Acts 2:42-47*

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Dear Congregation of Christ: Here's an interesting quote from a Filipino woman "pastor" of a Pentecostal church: "Worship is action. Worship is not lazy, boring and sad. Worship is zealous, famous and joyful." She says that worship is all action, zealous and joyful such as dancing, clapping, and shouting. According to her, Biblical worship is lazy, boring and sad because it involves reverence before God, confession of sin, and long prayers. If she visited our church, she would find our divine worship as such.

Here's another quote, this time from Reformed pastor-theologian R. C. Sproul: "We have totally revised corporate worship services to be sensitive to 'seekers.' If worship were to be tailored for seekers, it would be directed exclusively to believers, for no one except believers ever seeks God," referring to Romans 3:10-11. Therefore, the worship service must be directed exclusively to believers, and if there were unbelievers present, then they would also hear the true gospel read and preached, and by God's mercy, be saved.

These last several Sundays, we have been studying God's covenants with man. We began with God's covenant of works with Adam, which he violated, plunging all mankind into sin and death. The whole world became so wicked that God destroyed all mankind with a great flood. After the flood, God covenanted with Noah never to destroy the whole world with a flood. God then revealed his covenant plan to bless all the nations with believers through Abraham's faith. And last Sunday, we began a two-part study of God's covenant with Moses and the Israelites. In this covenant, God established his special, chosen nation Israel and gave them his moral, ceremonial and civil laws. Their tenure in the Promised Land hinged on their obedience to God's laws. Note that I said, "Their *tenure in the Promised Land* hinged on...", not, "Their *salvation* from sin hinged on..."

The ceremonial laws were regulations for worship in the tabernacle, including the priesthood and the sacrifices. We learned that all throughout the Old Testament, worship followed a basic pattern. First, God calls his people to worship. Next, they offer sacrifices for sin. Then they hear God's word read and explained. After this, they make a solemn vow to be faithful and obedient to God's word. Finally, the covenant is confirmed with the people eating and drinking before God.

However, most churches today ignore this Biblical pattern because they regard the Old Testament as obsolete. They are also ignorant of the basic principle of the New Testament interpreting and fulfilling the Old Testament. Therefore, their worship services are full of godless "innovations and devisings" of man, as the Westminster Confession of Faith calls them.

So today, in **Part 2 of God's Covenant with Moses: Worship Service of a Holy Nation**, we will learn that our worship service today is informed by Old Testament worship. We will study mainly Acts 2:42 and a brief summary of heavenly worship in the Book of Revelation under four headings.

“The Apostles’ Teaching”

In just one short verse, the New Testament summarizes the basic elements of a worship service: “*And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*” (Acts 2:42). The apostles’ teaching is the word of God, what we read in the New Testament, the second volume of God’s holy Scriptures.

In the Old Testament, we read that Moses proclaimed God’s law to Israel at Mount Sinai. In 2 Chronicles 6:5-11, Solomon proclaimed how God saved Israel from Egypt and fulfilled his promise to David that he would build a temple for worship. After God restored them from exile, Ezra and the other priests of Israel read and explained God’s word to all the people (Neh 8:1-8).

Jesus did the same thing during his earthly ministry. Every Sabbath, he attended worship services in the synagogues. In Luke 4:16-21, in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus read and preached from Isaiah 61:1, 2, declaring that he is the Messiah whom Isaiah foretold. In John 6:59, he declared that his Father sent manna to their forefathers in the wilderness, but he came as the true bread of life who gives eternal life. Paul and all the other apostles then preached the true gospel to all the nations. They trained other men to be ministers of the word, one of them Timothy, whom he instructed, “*Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching*” (1 Tim 4:13). Therefore, the public reading and preaching of God’s word was integral to the worship of God.

Today, most churches do not preach the apostles’ teaching, and many people watch greedy televangelists who preach prosperity gospel. Here is a sampling of the health and wealth prosperity they teach: Joel Osteen—“If you are struggling financially, then you have not got the victory”; Creflo Dollar—“Some people say it's about peace, joy and love. NO!! It's about MONEY!?”; Joyce Meyer—“God is the God of abundance, and He wants us to live abundant lives filled with thanksgiving and joy.” If you watch televangelists who preach this, change the channel! They are leading you to hell.

Why not listen to sound Biblical teaching and preaching by R. C. Sproul, Robert Godfrey, and a host other pastors and theologians on Ligonier Ministries? Why not read the Nearer to God Devotionals which is given free to everyone here? And if you can’t attend the worship service for any reason, why not watch and listen to the YouTube sermons and services of our church, and many other churches of our United Reformed federation of churches?

“The Fellowship”

The next word in Acts 2:42, “*fellowship*,” is often misunderstood. When we hear “fellowship, we often think of cookies, cakes, donuts, finger foods, coffee, tea, juice, and even potluck. But what “fellowship” mean in Acts 2:42? The Greek word is *koinonia*, often used by Christians, such as Koinonia Christian Church, Koinonia Seminary, etc. The word means “sharing, association, communion, close relationship. In the Lord’s Supper, it is a “*participation in the blood... and body of Christ*” (1 Cor 10:16; also Phl 3:10), which means being united to and sharing with Christ in his death. In Romans 15:26, Paul says the churches have been “*pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.*” In this verse, *koinonia* means a “gift” or “contribution” towards

the poor in the church. In 2 Corinthians 8:4, Paul again commends the poverty-stricken Macedonian church for sharing or *“taking part in the relief of the saints”* in Jerusalem

In Acts 2:42, it is this meaning of sharing, participating, or contributing to the needs of other Christians. Verses 44–45 says, *“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”* Many liberals cite these verses to promote socialism and communism. Again, as they do with many Scripture verses, they twist, distort and pervert these verses. In the early church, sharing possession was not state-mandated. Nor did the church seize their possessions to be distributed to the poor. Rather, it was all voluntary, since most of them still had homes and other possessions.

This is why we have offerings every Lord’s Day. These offerings are for the maintenance of the church and if there are leftovers, our church generously shares or contributes to the needs of the poor inside and outside of our congregation. And when did the early church gather their gifts for the poor in the church in Jerusalem? We read the answer in 1 Corinthians 16:2, *“On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper...”* This is one evidence that Sunday, the first day, is when the church must gather for worship.

“The Breaking of Bread”

The next words in Acts 2:42 are *“the breaking of bread.”* In a Bible study a few years ago with people who had been attending church for years, I asked them, “What does ‘breaking of bread’ in this verse mean? Some answered that it refers to snacks or potluck after the worship service. I was shocked that they did not know the deep meaning of “breaking bread” in the Bible. How then should we understand this term, “the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42?

The term “break bread” is found in several texts, many of them when Jesus ate with his disciples. When he instituted the Lord’s Supper on the night before he was crucified, he *“took bread and after blessing it broke it and gave it to his disciples”* (Mark 14:22; see also Matt 26:26; Luke 22:19). In Luke 24:30, the two disciples recognized the resurrected Jesus only after he *“took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.”* And in Acts 20:7, Luke wrote *“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...”*, another evidence that Sunday is the day the apostles gathered the congregation for worship. Therefore, “the breaking of bread” is interpreted by many pastors and theologians as referring to the Lord’s Supper.

However, some also interpret this “breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42 as a common meal shared by Christians in their homes. They showed hospitality to their brothers and sisters in Christ. We find similar words in Acts 2:46, *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.”* Some call this a love feast or *agape* feast (in Greek), because through sharing meals together, they showed love for one another. Sharing meals is one of the best examples of the communion or fellowship of saints, as we do every fourth Sunday of the month.

You might not have noticed that in verse 42, “breaking of bread” is preceded by a definite article “the” (Grk *te*). In verse 46, there is no definite article, just “breaking bread.” Why the

definite article “the”? This article “the” is often used to refer to something that is unique or superlative. We don’t refer to Joe Biden as “a President of the United States,” but as “*the* President of the United States.” And we refer to Angel as “*the* youngest person in this room this morning.” In the same way, “*the* breaking of bread” in verse 42 is a unique “breaking of bread,” the Lord’s Supper. And “breaking bread in their homes” happens whenever they shared meals in their homes.

“The Prayers”

Lastly, the disciples devoted themselves to “the prayers.” What did the early church pray for? In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to begin and end our prayers with praise and thanksgiving to God, “*Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*”; then, “For thine is the kingdom and the power and glory forever” (see Eph 1:3-4). They prayed for forgiveness of sins, also in the Lord’s Prayer, and in the prayers of sinners such as the tax collector, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” (Luke 18:13).

In John 17, Jesus prays for the church in all nations. Paul exhorts all believers to pray for ministers and for all the saints (Eph 6:18-19; Col 4:2-3); and also for the church, giving thanks to God for their faithfulness (Phil 1:3-6; 1 Thes 1:2-3). Paul even urges us to pray for the conversion of all unbelieving people and rulers (1 Tim 2:1-4, 8); and for the afflicted (1 Tim 2:1-8; Eph 6:18-19; Jas 5:14-18; Phil 1:9-11). Praise and thanksgiving; confession of sin; for the church; for ministers and all saints; for unbelievers; for unbelieving rulers; and for the afflicted: this is merely a basic prayer list. There are many more things we must pray for in our Lord’s Day worship service, as well as in our private prayers.

As in “the breaking of bread,” there is a definite article “*the*” in “the prayers.” What does this mean? This could most likely mean that the early church used *form* prayers, prayers that were carefully and diligently written down by the ministers based on Scriptures. So, from the early church to the 16th century Protestant Reformation, the churches used almost exclusively form prayers patterned after the Lord’s Prayer. However, in the 17th century, the English and Scottish Puritans disagreed with the exclusive use of set prayers, and encouraged the Westminster Assembly to approve of extemporaneous prayers.

This has led to the present evangelical extemporaneous prayers that are devoid of Scriptures and done willy-nilly and haphazardly. We often hear of pastors who are unprepared and are not gifted in free prayers mumble and repeat the same words, often using “Lord” or “Father God” every other sentence. Their excuse is that they are “led by the Spirit,” but the Spirit of God is a Spirit of order (1 Cor 14:33, 40). To avoid this disorderly prayer, a minister must balance between form prayers and extemporaneous prayers. Using Scripture, he must carefully and diligently write or outline his prayers according to Scripture, especially the Psalms, which are prayers that were sung by the Israelites. This is why we say we read, sing, pray and preach the Scriptures.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: Here then is a lesson we learn from God’s covenant with Moses and Israel. Not only is God’s law given to God’s redeemed people for righteous living, not for salvation. But the worship service at Mount Sinai is a

pattern for Biblical worship both in the Old and New Testaments. The same elements of worship are found in both Testaments.

One last Scripture that reveals to us how we are to worship is found not in a few verses or chapters in the New Testament, but in the whole Book of Revelation. Time will not allow us to study this in detail, but a brief outline will suffice (see Peter J. Wallace article in Sermon Notes).

In 1:10, John was in exile in the island of Patmos when he was taken by “*the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*” to witness heavenly worship. In 4:8, John sees and hears the heavenly host assembled for worship and praising God, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.*” In 5:12, the Lamb who was slain is praised by the heavenly host because he is the only One worthy to open God’s word, “*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*” Because God’s people are forgiven of their sins through the death of the Lamb, they can now come into the presence of God. Then in Chapters 6-19, God’s word is read and preached. These chapters repeat the same pattern as salvation history was fulfilled from the First Coming of Christ to his Second Coming. The heavenly hosts pray for and give thanks to God (7:12) for his wrathful judgment against their enemies by fire, hail, darkness and earthquakes all throughout this age.

But in verse 9 of Chapter 19, God gives his blessing to the saints with an invitation to a great Wedding Feast of the Lamb, “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*” In a terrible contrast in verses 17-18, God destroys his enemies and invites the birds of the air to “a great supper of God” in which they will feast on the flesh of his enemies, “*Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and with a loud voice he called to all the birds that fly directly overhead, ‘Come, gather for the great supper of God, to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men...’*” These two feasts are the confirmation of his covenant with his blessed people and also with his accursed enemies.

Finally, in Chapters 21 and 22, God blesses his people with an eternal new heaven and new earth where they will have everlasting peace, joy and communion with God. In 21:1–3, John writes, “*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.’*” The paradise in the Garden of Eden will come full circle in this new heaven and new earth where they will forever partake of eternal life from the Tree of Life which is our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 22:14; 2:7).