

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."
(Jeremiah 6: 16)

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"SMALL GROUP" WORSHIP – IS THERE A DANGER?

Dan Sikes

It is six o'clock on Sunday night. The regular evening worship assembly has just begun at the church building with a prayer and a song led from the hymn book. The preacher is getting ready to deliver his message of the hour, but the assembly is noticeably smaller on this particular occasion. Conspicuously, most of the younger couples and their children are not present because at several other locations not far away, in the homes of some of the members, special assemblies are underway. These special assemblies are not as "formal," nor are they as "regimented" as the "old fashioned traditional worship" to which most members of the church of Christ are accustomed. Some of the older members do not like change, especially when it comes to worship – that is why the elders decided it best to offer them the option of staying at the building and having the evening worship assembly in the routine fashion. The small groups are called Home Cell Groups but some call them by other designations such as *Life Groups, Fellowship Groups, Cell Churches, or simply Home Churches.*

According to a recent article that appeared in the Jackson Sun (Smith, Tonya. "Fired Up." *Jackson Sun* 12 May 1995 Religion p.5B), the Cell Church con-

cept or worship and teaching originated in Seoul, Korea about 35 years ago at the Yoido Full Gospel Church which boasts of having 750,000 members and is reportedly the largest single church in the world. Since its inception, the Cell Church has grown into an increasingly powerful movement that is spreading through many denominational churches including the Baptist, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic and Seventh Day Adventist. Apparently, many established congregations among these various denominations are reorganizing into Cell Churches following the pattern of the mother Yoido Full Gospel Church. Amazingly, only 5 years ago there were no Cell Churches in the United States, but today there are close to 300 denominational congregations that have adopted the Cell Church concept and more are being added every day. The focus of the Cell Church is to form intimate personal groups of between five and fifteen people for the purpose of worshipping God, expressing love and fellowship to the members, and teaching newcomers the Gospel in a way that supposedly can not be done as effectively by the local church acting as a whole. One local leader of a cell church is quoted as saying, "...as we communicate with individuals who do not

know the truth about Jesus Christ, we're not going to have the opportunity...unless they see a dynamic of closeness and caring for others around them. That is best seen through a small group type ministry."

SMALL GROUPS IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST?

Some have asked, "What about the advancement of the small group ministry and worship in churches of Christ?" Many supposed "authorities" on church growth and champions of change in the worship of the Lord's church are advocating the concept of these small, home cell, life group assemblies as the wave of the future – the model of the church of the twenty-first century. One author suggests that because America is becoming "increasingly urban, fractured, and hurting...radical changes that affect the very core of our thinking about the nature of the church" are needed (Bishop, Steve. "Prepare Your Church For The Future – Review." *Wineskins* July 1992: 24). These radical changes include changing our minds about "how ministry is to be done" and of "the form in the infrastructure of the church" toward the small cell group. Conceptually, these cell groups are described by their proponents as

“the most strategically significant foundation of spiritual formation, assimilation, evangelism, and leadership development” (Bishop quoting author Carl F. George, “Prepare Your Church For The Future – Review.” *Wineskins*, July 1992: 25). It logically follows that since worship is a part of the “foundation of spiritual formation” (John 4:24; Heb. 10:22-26) that cell groups are intent on changing its form as well.

The defenders of the Home Church concept cite scriptures showing that the early church often met in the homes of Christians such as at Ephesus in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), Nymphas (Col. 4:15), and others. However, the issue is **not** whether worship assemblies can scripturally be held in homes as opposed to church buildings, but instead, is there another motive – a hidden agenda – behind the move from the church building to the home cell church? Perhaps there is more to the home cell group church than meets the eye. Maybe this is the reason some preachers who approve of the concept are not forthright about the nature of the activities at the small group meetings. One preacher reportedly was asked if the congregation where he preached had *house* churches to which he responded with a resounding and definite “no!” When asked more specifically, “**Is it true that some of your members assemble in various homes for study and worship?**” he then responded, “**Oh, you mean do we have *home churches!***” What was it about the home church this preacher wanted to hide by splitting hairs over the words *house and home*?

No one who respects the Word of God would deny that early Christians met in homes to participate in worship assemblies, nor would they disagree that it might be expedient under certain circumstances to do so today. For years, brethren have conducted home Bible studies and cottage meetings in the homes of families aimed at win-

ning souls and strengthening the faith of fellow converts. In addition, we all recognize the need to encourage, support, edify, and uplift one another both on a personal level as well as in the worship assembly as we offer homage to God. However, the Cell Church is no ordinary home Bible study, cottage meeting, or friendly visit to a brother's house! It is a restructuring of the basic design, intent, and function of the local church. Let us consider the following dangers associated with the cell group concept.

POLARIZING INTO SMALL GROUPS IS DIVISIVE

The concept of small cell groups within a local church amounts to the formation of a number of small congregations within a congregation. Organizers and outside observers of Cell Churches have actually referred to the cells as “sub congregations.” Among churches of Christ, there may be a correlation between the divided assembly controversy that arose in the brotherhood in the last decade and the new movement by some “change agents” in the Church to advance the Cell Church concept. Only a few years ago, advocates of divided assemblies argued that small children could be more effectively taught in classes that were conducted while the regular worship assemblies were underway. Opponents warned that if young children could be taken out of the worship assembly (along with their teachers) for parallel Bible classes conducted at the same time as worship, the next step would be further division of the assembly based on other demographic considerations such as age, race, education, social status, etc. Thus, the very nature and intent of God's command to assemble is perverted. Christians in a congregation are to “*come together into one place*” for the purpose of worshipping God and edifying one another (1 Cor. 11:18,20,33; 14:23,26; Heb. 10:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Thess. 5:11).

WHERE IS THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITY?

Cell Church promoters argue there is New Testament authority for the formation of Cell Churches. One advocate of the concept cites the story of Simon of Cyrene carrying the cross of Christ as a New Testament example of how Cell Churches are to help one another in small groups. Another individual states that like the Apostles and early Christians, the modern day church must “go where people are and speak to them in a language they can understand.” Still another proponent points out that like the human body has cells that divide and grow, so the spiritual body of Christ has cell groups that divide as growth takes place. However, **none of these arguments establish New Testament authority or a biblical pattern for the formation of Cell Churches!** In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul uses the physical body to illustrate how *each Christian* makes up the parts of Christ's spiritual body, the Church. It is significant that the smallest division among the body mentioned by Paul is the individual member represented by the various organs and limbs such as the eyes, hands, and feet! Nothing at all is said in the passage about sub-dividing the local church into Cell Churches. Actually, the Cell Church structure is destructive and not advantageous because it has the effect of introducing an outside organism or virus into the spiritual body of Christ that is foreign to its chemistry! As for the example of Simon of Cyrene, the Apostles, and early Christians, spiritual help and teaching of the gospel can be fully accomplished in the local church structure as it has existed for centuries before the Cell Church concept was ever thought of (Eph. 3:21; 4:16; 1 Tim. 3:15).

DIVIDING UP INTO SMALL GROUPS MAY ENCOURAGE DISHARMONY

The small group is fertile

ground for gossip and backbiting to occur. In the Corinthian church where small groups were formed as a result of following certain of their religious teachers, there was *"envying, strife, and divisions"* (1 Cor. 3:3). Please keep in mind that they were taking one another to law over the smallest matters (1 Cor. 6:1-6) and demeaning Paul's apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-3). In addition to perverting the Lord's supper at Corinth by making it into a common meal, they were also showing partiality in the distribution of the food (1 Cor. 11:21) demonstrating an unloving attitude (the very opposite of what promoters of small groups claim as an advantage of them). Experience shows that where congregations become cliquish and form circles of association among its members, the elders of the church are undermined, preachers are maliciously maligned, and Christian unity is a low priority in violation of apostolic admonitions to *"keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace"* (Eph. 4:1-3). Rather than worshipping in Cell Groups, the New Testament depicts members acting within local congregations where *all* Christians have *all things* common (Acts 2:44; 4:32). Paul condemned sectarianism and division among brethren (1 Cor. 1:10). Also, faith and salvation are common to all believers without separating into Cell Churches (Titus 1:4; Jude 1:3). Brethren are to love, edify, and encourage all other brethren, not just those in their Cell Group (John 13:34; 1 Cor. 12:25). In Ephesians 4:11-12, Paul said *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ..."* (no mention of Cell Groups here), and in verse sixteen he said, *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love"* (notice -

"every joint" and "every part" refers to "ye" individual Christians according to verse 17 and not to *cells*).

SMALL GROUPS PROMOTE SPREAD OF FALSE DOCTRINE AND UNSCRIPTURAL PRACTICES

In the late 1970's and early 1980's the Lord's church was seriously subverted by the Crossroads/Boston Discipling Multiplying Ministries Movement. This movement utilized small groups within local churches (especially the youth and young adults) to gain a following and take over whole congregations of people. Subtly, campus ministers working with bus children and college students taught error and promoted rebellion against the elders of the church as well as the parents of young people. Many times, elders and preachers were excluded from small group events so as to keep them in the dark about what was being taught. Elders are to be *"overseers"* of their own flocks (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), but no one eldership can adequately or scripturally oversee a dozen or more house churches which raises the problem of local autonomy. Acts 14:23 teaches that elders are to be ordained in *"every church,"* but apparently first century Christians were unaware of the need for elders in sub-church cell groups!

CELL GROUPS MAY ADVANCE MISGUIDED EMOTIONALISM IN WORSHIP

The Jackson Sun article previously mentioned, bears out the fact that emotionalism is a key feature of worship in the Cell Church. A former Baptist preacher who participated in an 8,000 member Cell Church in Dallas, Texas, said concerning the meetings, *"It's love...It's live-wired. I've never seen anything like it..."* and a picture of a girl playing a tambourine appears with the caption stating that she "feels the Spirit during the kickoff for the

new Cell Church." Another writer comments that the Cell Church *"...has the potential to cause a dramatic shift in the way we view the roles of elders, deacons, women and ministers. It allows for the creative expression of the Holy Spirit through individual lives by freeing the church from 19th century forms of ministry to ones that are more personal and compelling for the 21st century."* One is made to wonder when he reads testimonials by the "change agents" in the church how the church of Christ in the first century ever managed to preach the Gospel *"to every creature under heaven"* (Col. 1:23) or worship God acceptably without having knowledge or understanding of such concepts as the sub-congregational Cell Church. Since the Cell Church concept only surfaced 35 years ago, it ought to be clear that its roots are not in the New Testament (though some try to make appeals to the New Testament for authority for such). It is not the church that needs restructuring into Cell Churches, but instead, it's the minds and hearts of the individual members of the church that need to be changed to conform to the *"form of sound words"* (2 Tim. 1:13). The church of Christ as designed by God and built upon Christ and the Apostles doctrine (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20) is totally sufficient to accomplish its divine mission and offer praise and adoration to God without man-made substitutes and additions that subvert and undermine the very foundation of the Christian faith. When brethren are content to *"mind the same thing and be guided by the same rule"* (Phil. 3:16) they will demonstrate love for the Lord, love for the truth, love for lost souls, and love of the brethren so that Cell Churches will fade into obscurity like other passing fads and the scripture will be fulfilled, *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen"* (Eph. 3:21).

*Sharon church of Christ
P.O. Box 187
Sharon, TN 38255*

A BROTHERHOOD PROBLEM

Lack of Understanding How the Bible Authorizes

Gilbert Gough

I have been asked to write an article on hermeneutics which is the science of interpretation. This request is a rather large request for an article or two would not and could not possibly cover hermeneutics in depth. There are some excellent and trustworthy works available on this subject and we would recommend the following: **When Is An Example Binding**, written by Thomas B. Warren, **Ascertaining Bible Authority**, written by Roy C. Deaver, and two volumes edited by Terry M. Hightower entitled **Rightly Dividing The Word** which are lectureship books of the Shenandoah church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas.

Many people have serious problems in understanding how to ascertain (determine) Bible authority. Some say the Bible only authorizes by command while others believe we must have an example also. Let us deal with some basics of Bible authority that hopefully will help.

Everything we learn from the Bible is either learned from **direct statements, approved actions** which constitute examples or by **implication**.

1) **Direct statements** are explicit words authorizing us to perform certain deeds. Not all direct statements which authorize are commands. Imperative statements are included in direct statements of the Bible, but there are other kinds of statements in God's Word which authorize.

2) **Examples** are patterns to be followed, imitated or emulated. When a certain action is approved by God, that action is authorized and constitutes an example. When a certain action is not approved by God, it is not an action to be imitated.

3) **Implication** is something

not stated in explicit words, but is implied and understood to be true. For example, if I tell you Andy is taller than Bill (explicitly stated), and I tell you Bill is taller than Cody (explicitly stated), then I can draw from these premises another truth even though not explicitly stated. You can know that Andy is taller than Cody without me ever saying so. That's implication. [Sometimes brethren use the expression "necessary inference" to refer to implication. Technically, to say "necessary inference" is incorrect. The Bible implies, and we make inferences from what the Bible implies. Also, it is unnecessary and redundant to say "necessary" because if a truth is implied it is automatically necessary.]

Let us set forth some basics about direct statements, approved actions constituting examples and implication.

DIRECT STATEMENTS

First, there are **imperative statements** which are commands. When Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), He gave a command to His disciples. It was an imperative for the disciples to go and preach. When the inspired Peter stood before the lost house of Israel in Acts 2, he commanded, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." (v.38). Two obligations are explicitly expressed which must be obeyed: "repent" and "be baptized."

Second, there are **declarative statements** which declare truths to be obeyed. When Jesus said, "He that believeth and is

baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16), He declared to all the conditions of believing and being baptized for salvation. The inspired Peter declared, "The like figure wherunto even baptism doth also now save us..." (I Peter 3:21). Declarative statements authorize certain actions.

Third, there are **interrogative statements** which are in the form of questions. Romans 6:1 asks, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" The obvious answer from the context of this verse is "NO." Rhetorical questions have implied answers, and they explain authorized and unauthorized actions.

Fourth, there are **conditional statements** which are indicated by the word "if." Colossians 3:1 says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Based upon the condition of being raised with Christ (in baptism), then the required consequence would be for the Colossian brethren to "seek those things above," thus authorizing certain actions.

Fifth, there are **hortatory statements** which are indicated by the expression "let us." The Hebrew writer uses this kind of statement often. "Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection..." (Heb. 6:1). These statements are statements of encouragement, exhorting others to do what is authorized.

Sixth, there are **wishful statements** in the optative mood which express a wish or desire that there are actions we must do. Romans 6:2 says, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" The desire of the inspired Paul was for the Roman brethren not to live in sin.

EXAMPLES

Sinful actions do not constitute examples. When Peter denied the Lord three times he did not set an example for us to

follow. When Judas betrayed the Lord he did not set an example. When men crucified the Lord and Savior on the cross they did not set an example. In such actions there is no pattern with God's approval to be followed.

There were actions which were **temporary** in nature and were not intended to be a part of permanent Christianity. After the church was established, circumcision as an obligation ceased. It was not a permanent action for the church to follow. However, Paul circumcised Timothy. Why? So Timothy would not be a stumbling block to the Jews. Did he have to be circumcised? No. It was optional and temporary. Early Christians were told to "desire earnestly spiritual gifts" (I Cor. 14:1). This command was obligatory, yet it was temporary. Soon, spiritual gifts would fulfill their purpose and would cease (I Cor. 13:10-12). This action does not constitute an example for us to follow today.

However, there are actions which are **permanent** in nature in the Bible. Men must observe these actions. Some of these actions are absolutely necessary to obey. Baptism in water, the act of immersion, is an example because the action meets the divine approval of God (Acts 2:41; 8:38-39). The Lord's Supper is to be commemorated each and every first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Here is an act of worship that is necessary for the church to observe and practice when they come together on Sundays.

Determining what action constitutes an example must be determined by considering the totality of Bible teaching on the subject being discussed.

IMPLICATION

In Genesis 12:10-20, Abraham journeyed into Egypt, for verse 10 says, "And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there: for the famine was grievous in the land." Nowhere does the Bible mention that Lot, Abraham's nephew, went down into Egypt, but we know that he did.

We are not wrong, in fact we speak the truth to say Lot went down into Egypt. How can we know that is the truth? By implication! After a time spent in Egypt, Genesis 13:1 relates that "Abram went up out of Egypt, he and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him...." Lot "went up out of Egypt." Now, we can know he went down into Egypt, though the Bible does not explicitly state so, because he came up out of Egypt. One cannot come up out of something without first going down into it. That's implication.

We can know what God authorizes by implication. In Acts 18:8 the Bible says, "And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all of his house...." The Bible nowhere explicitly states that Crispus heard the Word of God, but we know he did. Romans 10:17 says "faith cometh by hearing" and Crispus could not have believed (had faith) unless he had heard the Word. We can know by implication he heard the Word of God.

We can know Saul of Tarsus repented before he was baptized even though the Bible does not explicitly state such. If Saul of Tarsus were baptized (and he was, Acts 22:16), then he had to repent because repentance precedes one's baptism (Acts 2:38). We know by implication he repented.

The Bible condemns, by implication, many things which are evil and wrong. For example, Galatians 5:19-21 lists some "works of the flesh." One of those works is lasciviousness. This word means "indecent bodily movements; unchaste handling of males and females." One can know from the meaning of this word that this work of the flesh includes modern dances. The inspired Paul wrote "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (v.21). "Such things" are the actions implied by the meaning of the words describing fleshly works. Modern dances are certainly "such things" as lasciviousness. This idea is not a popular

notion, but it is the truth! Modern dances are wrong because the Bible implies such is wrong. No, the Bible does not explicitly state "Thou shalt not dance." It does forbid modern dances by implication and that is as true as if it were explicitly stated. Paul wrote the young evangelist Timothy and said, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, as a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing (handling aright, ASV) the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

To a great extent the brotherhood at large is in serious trouble with false teaching and erroneous practices because of the ignorance of brethren and their being gullible to false teachers. Dear reader, do not be discouraged if the congregation you attend misunderstands how the Bible authorizes. Keep on teaching the truth about God's authority. **TRUTH WILL PREVAIL!**

250 CR 550
Ripley, MS 38663

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“WHEN” SHOULD WE WORSHIP GOD?

Charles W. Leonard

All students of the Bible recognize that it is imperative that we worship God (John 4:24). That being true, **when** and **how often** should followers of Christ worship God? Is each one left to answer this question personally or does the Bible reveal the answer to this question?

While the Law of Moses was in effect, God's people observed the Sabbath (the seventh day or Saturday) as their day of worship. The Law of Moses containing the law of the Sabbath was given only to Israel (Deut. 5:3). The Sabbath was not a sign between God and all nations, but was designated as a special sign between God and Israel (Exodus 31:13). Those who violated the Sabbath were to be put to death (Exodus 31:14). The penalty attached to breaking the Sabbath caused God's people to be very careful in the observance of every Sabbath day.

The Law of Moses is no longer in effect and the Sabbath is no longer binding as a day of worship. There has been a change in the priesthood and also a change in the law (Heb. 7:12). The priesthood has been changed from the Levitical priesthood to the priesthood of Christ and the law has been changed from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The Law of Moses was designed to bring man to Christ and when it did so, it was taken out of the way (Gal. 3:23-25). When Christ died on the cross, he delivered man from the law and the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross (Rom. 7:4-6; Col. 2:14). When Christ came, he fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17). To observe the Sabbath as a day of worship today is to fall from grace by going by an old outdated law (Gal. 5:4).

Since the Sabbath is no longer binding, we now have a different day of worship. While John was in

the isle called Patmos, he said he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (Rev. 1:10). Which day did he refer to when he referred to the Lord's day? In a sense, every day is the Lord's day because it belongs to him, but which day is John referring to? Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1). Jesus met with his disciples on the first day of the week following his resurrection (John 20:1,19). The church was established on Pentecost which always fell on the first day of the week (Acts 2; Lev. 23:15-16). The Holy Spirit came on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-4). The Gospel was first preached in its fullness on the first day of the week (Acts 2). The Lord's day refers to our day of worship, the first day of the week.

Is there a time when the church is expected to come together in one place (1 Cor. 11:20)? The early church met for worship on the first day of the week and not on the Sabbath day. In Troas, the Apostle Paul met with the disciples on the first day of the week to break bread or partake of the Lord's Supper and preached until midnight (Acts 20:7). If they were meeting for worship on the wrong day, would not the inspired Apostle Paul have corrected them? Paul also instructed the Corinthians to give as they had been prospered on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The material discussed above on the Lord's Day, the apostolic example of meeting with the disciples, and the command to give on the first day of the week should be adequate to establish authority for the day of worship. The day of worship is specified, but not the time of day. On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were preaching at nine o'clock in the morning (Acts 2:15). At Troas, Paul continued his speech until midnight, but we do

not know what time he started (Acts 20:7). According to some, he would have to have started preaching at eleven thirty! It is quite possible that the meetings of the early church were considerably longer than our services today.

Does one have to assemble for all of the services of the church? The New Testament teaches that we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb. 10:25). The word forsake means to leave behind, to desert, or quit. To question how many services that one must attend demonstrates a wrong attitude. Christians should look forward to worshipping God as David did (Psa. 122:1). God's people should have a strong desire for the word of God and hunger and thirst after righteousness (1 Peter 2:2; Matt. 5:6). If Christians do not enjoy being in the house of the Lord now, how can they enjoy being in the house of the Lord forever (Psa. 23:6)? Christians should not permit material things, recreation, hobbies, travel, picnics, company, families, jobs or any other thing to come before our opportunities to worship God. When Christians deliberately miss services of the church, they sin and also hurt the church. The Lord teaches that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, can one do that and miss services of the church (Matt. 6:33)? If we know to do good and don't do it, we commit sin (James 4:17).

When should we worship God? On the first day of the week and as often as the church meets. We might be surprised to know how many Christians have deliberately missed services and have covered it up rather than confessing sin. Reader, are you covering or confessing sin? There is forgiveness only when we walk in the light and confess our sins (1 John 1:7-9).

471 CR 513, Rienzi, MS 38865

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF WORSHIP

Ed Casteel

Many times in the world today we both see and hear people as they express the idea that they received no benefit from a worship service at all. They will say something to the effect of, "I didn't get anything out of worship today." If you were to observe these same individuals during the worship service you would probably notice they are putting forth no effort while sitting in the worship assembly. All they are is another number on the attendance board. They are putting nothing into the worship, and as a result, they are getting nothing from it.

Young readers who are still students in school have often heard their teachers encourage them to study, work hard and do their work assignments. They are admonished that if they do not put anything into their lessons they will receive no benefit from the study. While some students take this admonition to heart, others just attend class and struggle with the tests. When it is all over they comment, "I didn't get anything at all from that class. That teacher sure is a sorry teacher." The truth of the matter is, they put nothing into the class, and as a result, they got nothing out of it.

Whether we are talking about school work or worship to God we will get out of it the same proportion that we put into it. When we put forth little or no effort, we receive little or no profit. When we, on the other hand, give our best to the Master in worship we are abundantly blessed. Therefore, let me ask, how can I get the most out of worship?

I MUST PREPARE FOR WORSHIP

We do our best to prepare for important things in our secular life but fail to make preparation for spiritual matters. We send our children to school because we want

them to learn how to make a living. We allow the same children to forsake worship where they can learn how to live. Young people who are thinking about getting married often will read books on marriage and the various roles and responsibilities that are associated with it. But, many of these same young people have not read the Book of Books to see what instructions they can find therein concerning marriage.

Preparation for worship begins before we ever arrive. It may well begin on Saturday night as we retire early enough to be rested and alert for worship. When we are out late and fail to get adequate rest, we are not prepared for worship. Our minds will not be clear and fresh. Preparation will begin as we are certain to arrive before the starting time of service. When we rush in at the last minute or even after the service has begun our mind cannot be clear and free from the cares of the world and ready to worship God. We all need to make it a habit to arrive well enough in advance to prepare our minds for worship.

What are some good ways in which to prepare our minds for worship? Before we leave home we could pray for the worship service. Pray that the song leader can direct the songs to help lift our voices in proper praise to the Heavenly Father. Pray that the preacher might say the right words to touch the heart of some wayward soul. Before the worship begins we could read a hymn, read a scripture, meditate on the importance of worship, or once again offer a silent prayer before the throne of God.

We cannot rush into worship expecting to get the most from the service and at the same time expecting that God will be pleased with the worship we offer before him. Let us all determine to make proper preparation for our worship

before God.

I MUST BE PRESENT FOR WORSHIP

It goes without saying that if I am not present I cannot profit from the worship assembly. We are children of God and are encouraged to "*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*" (Matt. 6:33), and part of that effort will be faithfully attending the worship of the church. We can preach sermon after sermon on Hebrews 10:25 where Paul warns us not to forsake the assembling of the church; but, the truth of the matter is, if a person has no real love for the Lord (Matt. 22:37) and no real appetite for spiritual things, those sermons mean very little to him if any at all.

Over the years I have heard a variety of excuses as to why people did not attend the services of the church. Some have had company and had to stay home and entertain them. Could those individuals not have been invited to the worship of the Lord's church? If these were true friends they should have known that you would be in worship at service time. I remember one lady who missed the services of a gospel meeting and later told me she had to paint her house that week. Could not the paint be applied the following week? Was forsaking the worship of the church, and sinning by doing so, worth a dab of paint on the walls? Some people have worked late, even overtime, and then were too tired to attend the services of the church. Some have left on vacations or other trips with no intentions of attending the services of the church. "No one will know us here. What difference does it make?" On and on we could go. People with this type of attitude toward worship will not get much from it even when they are present.

I MUST PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP

Because I am sitting on a pew in an auditorium does not mean I am worshipping God or that I will receive anything from that worship experience. All Christians must be participants in worship. I will get more from the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) if I pick up a book and join in the singing. When the song leader says, "let's all sing" he is encouraging everyone in the assembly to participate. I cannot fulfill my obligation to sing in worship if I do not sing. It is not enough to suggest that the congregation sing. I must participate in order to please God and to get the most from the song service.

I can only get the most from the sermon when I have my Bible in hand and study with an open mind trying to apply what is taught to my life. If I am talking to my neighbor, reading a bulletin, writing notes, etc., I will not profit from the sermon that is being presented. After I have done these things instead of listening attentively to the sermon being presented, is it fair to say I didn't get anything from the sermon?

I can only get the most from the partaking of the Lord's Supper if I partake of it with my mind centered around the cross. The partaking of the Lord's Supper becomes commonplace to many because they are thinking about where they will go for lunch, what they will do that afternoon, or wondering how much longer the service is going to last. As a result of their wandering mind they get little if any at all from the observance of the Lord's Supper. Participation is more than digesting the proper emblems. If my mind is not where it should be I am not participating properly. I can only get the most out of my giving when I am giving with a happy, cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:8). If there is a begrudging attitude I am not going to get anything from that worship experience, and giving is a part of our worship. When we give and can visualize the various works of the church that we are a part of, it makes that gift seem so very important. But, when I give without such a vision, my offering means nothing to me.

If I am going to get the most from any worship experience I must prepare for worship, I must be present for worship, and I must participate in worship. When I, from the heart, have done these things, my worship will be more meaningful, more beneficial to me, and more acceptable before the throne of God.

950 Hwy 145 S
Baldwyn, MS 38824

A review of the Lectureship will appear in the September issue. Needless to say, it was a great success! We appreciate so many who came from far and near. Books and tapes can still be ordered. The book (160 pages) is \$3.50 plus postage, 1 copy \$1.30, 2-3 copies \$1.85, 4-5 copies \$2.35, 6-7 copies \$2.85, etc. Cassette tapes are \$1.25 each or \$25 for the whole set. Make your check to Old Paths Publishing. Video tapes (\$60 for the set) should be ordered from James Green, Rt. 1 Box 427, Dunbar, PA 15431, ph. (412) 628-4762.



SEEK THE OLD PATHS

"I enjoy reading it very much. May God continue to bless the work" ...*Atlanta, GA*. "I really do enjoy this paper" ...*Larry Shoemaker, Clay City, KY*. "We have been reading your paper with interest. Regrettably, many members want to be entertained. Your paper cannot be considered entertainment. Please keep it that way" ...*CA*. "I appreciate the effort put into the publication of S.T.O.P. as well as the manner in which it is published" ...*Doris Mullins, Pensacola, FL*. "Don't dare take my name off. Great paper! Wish every one would read it" ...*Ethel Blewins, Shady Valley, TN*. "I appreciate the good work that is being done" ...*Michael Shepherd, Mobile, AL*. "I am thankful for your good work in the publication of S.T.O.P. It fills a very important place in my reading agenda" ...*Hal Redmond, Maury City, TN*. "I appreciate the material contained in the paper. One cannot always say he 'enjoys' reading about some of the things some brethren are teaching but there is a necessity to be informed. Thanks" ...*Roy Wright, Vernon, AL*. "Thanks so much for seeking the old paths. I enjoy it so much it keeps me up to date on what is happening in the churches of Christ" ...*Myrtle Poindexter, Celina, TN*. "Thanks for your paper. My wife and I enjoy it because of it's soundness. God bless you" ...*Donald White, Maysville, OK*. "We enjoy the paper very much. So glad of the stand you take for truth. I pray others would speak out against false teachers. May God bless all of you" ...*M/M Marvin Dulaney, Fulton, MS*. "It is enjoyable reading every month" ...*John Ballard, Miami, OK*. "Enjoy it very much" ...*John King, Union City, TN*. "Our congregation is growing (4 baptisms and 5 restored in the last 30 days) and I firmly believe that it is because of the stand that we take against any and all error that is being practiced in the Carolinas. Keep up the good work and let the elders there know how much we appreciate them for their (and your) efforts" ...*Homer Lloyd, King, NC*.

Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the East Corinth Church of Christ and is under the oversight of its elders. It is mailed FREE upon request. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless otherwise noted. Articles are also welcomed.

Editor: Garland M. Robinson
Associate Editor: Jimmy Bates

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