

Why Have Corporate Worship?

In Luke 14:33 Jesus tells his followers that if they do not forsake all that he has he cannot be my disciple. It should be a continual experience of placing Jesus in a place above everything else in our life. But there are moments when by the grace of God through the Holy Spirit we realize we have let things creep into our lives that we cling to – things other than Jesus. In resigning from my former ministry, the opportunity presents itself to really examine what I hold on to. It is an opportunity because my flesh is taken off guard, my patterns have been dropped, there are no expectations placed upon me to guide my conclusions. And so I take the opportunity to look closely at baggage I have picked up along the way. As I do I place it along side the Word of God to see if it is the living Word – Jesus, or have I gathered some substitutes, like tradition, methodology, formulas – letter without life.

One of the things I personally need to examine is our gathering to worship. Do we need to do this? Does God want us to do this? And what should it look like? Is the way we go about it pleasing Him?

I can and do worship **alone** and with my wife but do we need to gather in a group periodically? (If you don't worship during the week I would suggest you set aside time for it just as you set aside time for Sunday worship)

The Old Testament law required worship of every male in Jerusalem at least 3 times a year. There were many other opportunities but those three times were required. The Sabbath was a day of rest and to be kept holy. But I find no requirement to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, in fact there was no local synagogue until after the Babylonian captivity. David said he was glad when it was suggested to him that they should go to the house of the Lord. He loved to be there. I think it was his heart after God that made this a burning desire rather than an obligation. He loved to worship. Look at the Psalms he penned. Many of them were written in solitude but many were to be sung together.

As we move into the New Testament I find no requirement to meet as we are right now. All four Gospels do record that Jesus rose on the first day of the week, Sunday. Paul mentions to the Corinthians to take a collection on the first day of the week so we assume they were assembled then, celebrating the resurrection on what came to be known as the Lord's day. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day – Sunday. And there is that much quoted verse :(because it is one of the few passages we can find to support a regular assembly) Hebrews 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Don't forget the previous three 'let us' in the passage)

Some were already giving up meeting together and the author warned that was an unwise practice. Instead he said under the inspiration of the HS we should meet more often as we see the Day (Day of the Lord) approaching. So we are encouraged to assemble but why? What is this corporate worship thing all about?

How is corporate worship different from when I'm alone? We need to look at what went on in the early church to understand why we are encouraged to worship corporately. From 1Corinthians 14 we know that there was an exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. These gifts are said to build up the body. The verse from Hebrews says we are to encourage one another. So there must be a need to be encouraged and to build up each other. I know I need it. Anyone here make it through this week and feel like you don't need encouragement? When people ask about looking for the right place to worship I like to tell them to look for a place they can minister and be ministered to. I need to be encouraged but I also need to encourage others. That is to minister and be ministered to.

That is one main reason to gather which I see both in my life and clearly in Scripture- encouragement. But what about the act of worship itself? In John 4 Jesus tells the woman at the well God is looking for a people that will worship him in Spirit and Truth. Are you seeking God? Worship Him in Spirit and truth and He will seek you out. We elaborated on this concept of Spirit and Truth Thursday. True communion is the body-bread, the word-Truth and the blood/wine/Spirit.

Matthew 18:19,20 Says that when two or more of us agree the Father will act and when those have come together in Jesus name He is in their midst. What is this special blessing or presence when we gather? It is why David loved to go to the house of the Lord, and if you examine it I think you will find it is why you love corporate worship - to meet with the living God. To sense his Presence in the Word - in the family of God- to see and hear the Spirit speaking in our lives.

1Peter 2:4,5,9 We are the temple - each of you a living stone - made to be together. We are being built into a spiritual house. Now sometimes the stone has to be put in place to see where it needs shaping to fit - taken down and hammered on, and placed back in. AMEN? Been there - living that? But we are a house for Whom? The living God wants a dwelling place - Acts 7:48 We can't build him a temple but He can build us into a temple. WE are offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus. We bring the sacrifice of praise. I'm the house of God -and - We are the house of God. Vs 9 says why: to declare his praises - what He's doing in you!

We are also a body - 1Corinthians 12 tells us we can't function on our own. A body part by itself is an ugly sight. Unless it is reattached it will soon die. It is useless without connection to the head. You fit in the body somewhere and you can't do that alone at home. We come together to sense what God is doing with us as a body and get directions from the head - Jesus.

Rod Cooper told a story of when he was about 10 yrs old. He says, "I had the privilege of getting up at 4AM to get the cows so we could milk them. As we came in for breakfast, I would smell the beginnings of this soup my mom used to make. She would put in hunks of beef and carrots and peas and potatoes and all kinds of good stuff. And you'd begin to smell it.

I remember coming in at lunch thinking that was what we're going to have. I'd go over to get some. And she'd say, 'No Son. You can't have any yet. You'll have to wait till tonight.' We'd work hard all afternoon.

And as we came back for the evening meal (that's the only time my Dad beat me into the house), we would sit down, and my mom would set this huge cauldron of soup on the table. She would put this ladle in the soup, and the steam would rise off it. And she would put it down into the bowl, and you could put your face over it and – can you smell it right now? -- we would take our spoons and dip in there. It was wonderful. I remember asking my mother, "Why is it that we had to wait all day on this soup?"

She said, "Son, it needed to simmer so we get all the juices out of all the ingredients. And then they're all mixed together; that's what brings forth the good aroma. And when you taste it, you're getting the best of what's in each ingredient."

That is the way I look at worship. Sunday morning is a culmination of a people who've been simmering all week in the presence of God. When we simmer every day in the presence of God and then come on Sunday morning and mix all of it together, there's an aroma and a smell of the grace and the goodness of God that lifts up to heaven. And God pulls off the lid and goes, "Mmm, that's my people in Galilee Baptist Church." That's worship."

God's design and plan for us is to worship as a body – Of all the wonderful songs in Revelation there are no solos! No, a strange (to us on this side) and wonderful thing happens over and over. Everything breaks out in song in absolute unity before the presence of the glorified Lord Jesus. Worship here doesn't satisfy our hunger for God, it just whets our appetite.

Corporate worship is what He designed us to do, all adding a note to a beautiful harmonious song of praise to God, it encourages us, it shapes us, it should whet our appetite for heaven. Get together with the people of God and see where you fit – what you are gifted to share, and receive the gifts others bring to add to your walk. It's harder than staying alone, but it is more rewarding. And don't forget – your there to encourage and be encouraged.