

Articles by William Burnett

William Burnett

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Corporate Worship

In traveling among the assemblies of God's people, one has noted that there appears to be a growing loss of focus in many assembly worship meetings, with many not being aware of just why they are there, and what is expected from them, so perhaps it would be helpful to review what we find in Scripture regarding worship and worshippers. Let us examine a few distinctives, that may help us to appreciate what worship is, and what is expected from us when we come together to function as a Holy Priesthood.

Personal verses Collective

There are two temples in existence today: The Temple of our Bodies; (1 Cor. 6:19) and the Temple of the Corporate gathering of the Church, (1 Cor. 3:16) and worship is associated with each, the former is Personal, the latter Collective.

Personal Worship:

Worship is an integral part of our entire lives. For example, the apostle Paul writing to the Romans exhorts them, " I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." So we learn that Worship means putting our lives on the Altar for God. Further, the writer to the Hebrews says " By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews 13:15) So we learn that our praises are considered to be offering worship to God. We may yield all of these sacrifices as

individual priests on a continuous basis. These are but a few examples of the many aspects of personal worship.

Collective:

1 Peter 2 describes us as a Holy Priesthood, and this introduces collective worship. We are all priests to God, but we can only function as a Priesthood when we are together, and this is most clearly demonstrated when we come together to Break Bread. Considering the idea of priesthood, this means that the brother participating publicly is acting in a representative capacity, and is leading the assembly in worship. So we do not come together to speak to God to engage in personal worship, but with the whole assembly in view.

O.T. Priesthood verses N.T. Priesthood

God's original desire was that all of Israel should be priests unto God, rather than the sons of Aaron. (Ex. 19:5) In the Church age, God has recovered His ideal, in that all believers without exception are Priests unto God. This is a great privilege and honor bestowed upon us, yet sadly the number of functioning priests is declining year by year. Let's get back to the vision of our early brethren who recovered this blessed truth, and paid the price to be able to practice it, and come along exercised to offer worship.

Holy Priesthood verses Royal Priesthood

1 Peter 2 tells us that there are two aspects to the priesthood of believers. He first tells us that we are Holy Priests (v. 5) and later he tells us that we are Royal Priests. (v. 9) The distinction between these two aspects of Priesthood has become blurred, leading to confusion in our assembly worship. As Holy Priests we "OFFER UP

spiritual sacrifices..." As Royal Priests we "SHOW FORTH the virtues of Him..." The direction of the one is vertical, the other horizontal. The one is directed to God, the other to man. The one involves worship, the other testimony. Lack of understanding of this distinction means that many assembly worship meetings have come to be a time for sharing ministry from the word, or sharing our experiences of God.(1) Brother Boyd Nicholson used to say that as Holy Priests we minister to the Heart of God, whereas, as Royal Priests we minister to the House of God.

Worship - Spiritual verses Physical

The worship of the Old Testament was physical in its expression. An ordained Priesthood, Vestments, Ornate Structures, Choirs, Orchestras, Incense, Sacrifices etc., and a great importance placed on the Geographical centre - Jerusalem. In John 4, the Lord unveils some great truths about the great shift that was about to take place where the whole basis of worship would move from the physical to the spiritual. The Lord said "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is [a] Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. (John 4: 21-24)

This is an important principle to grasp, that our worship today is not associated with, or supported by, physical expressions, or organized programs, but it is entirely spiritual in its nature. The early church was a very simple entity, shunning the elaborate ceremonies and physical expressions of Judaism, to gather in simplicity to His Name. Let's be careful that we do not lapse back

into some modified form of Judaism with its emphasis on buildings and accompanying physical things. We worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth, and our worship should be spiritual in it's nature.

Worship verses Remembrance

When we meet to Break Bread, our main purpose is to remember our Lord Jesus. This is also an important thing to keep in mind in our assembly worship – that we should focus on remembrance rather than general matters of worship. Thanking God as the great creator, or as the giver of daily blessings has its place and time, but we come to Remember Him, our thoughts, our hymns, our expressions of worship to the Father must be Christ centered. After all there is enough in Christ to occupy and thrill our hearts for all of eternity, far less a short hour on a Lord's Day.

The Table verses The Supper

In 1 Corinthians 10 the apostle deals with what he calls the “ Table of the Lord,” And in chapter 11 he deals with the “ Lord's Supper.” These truths, though related to each other, are distinct. The apostle compares the Table to God's provision for Israel in the manna and the water from the rock, and how that now God still provides for us in our daily experience through what he calls the Table of the Lord. So the Lord's Table has to do with our daily fellowship with God. The Supper is distinct in that it was given by the Lord, imparted to the apostle by direct revelation, then delivered to the saints as an ordinance to be kept until He come, and this is the subject of 1 Corinthians 11.

May these simple distinctives help us to recover those blessed times of God glorifying worship among us that were once the hallmark of our assemblies, when we gather together as a Holy Priesthood to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.

1 We must not take Acts 20 as a pattern to encourage extended ministry to the saints at the Breaking of Bread. Most of the believers at that time were slaves and they did not have the luxury of a full day broken into sections, devoted to different exercises. Rather, having begun with Breaking Bread, their other spiritual exercises flowed on in a continuous manner, including the ministry of the apostle.

Fragmentation

A Statement of the Problem

One of the current problems affecting local Church life is that of "Fragmentation," where for a variety of reasons, some assemblies divide along the lines of sex, age, groups or geographical location to practice the exercises of the local church. This trend is a danger to the church and a denial of the unity of the Body of Christ as taught in the N.T. Also in some cases, it is an attempt to circumvent the teaching of the N.T. regarding the conduct of men and women in the Church, as such groups are no longer deemed to be "church meetings."

The New Testament Teaching Regarding Unity In The Local Church The N.T. makes it clear that each local church is intended to be a replica of the Body of Christ in all its unity and diversity (1Cor.12). Like the human body, each member has a particular function, but its usefulness can only be realised when it takes its place along with the others, and works in unity for the well-being of the body. The apostle Paul wrote "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" (Eph 4:16 AV). This is a logical extension of what the apostle had been teaching in the earlier part of the chapter where he wrote "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in

you all " (Eph 4:3-6 AV). Fragmentation in the church, whatever its form, is a denial of the truth presented in these verses where the apostle is at pains to emphasize the " oneness" of all things connected with the Church. Similarly in John 17, the Lord Jesus constantly emphasized the unity of the believers. "That they may be one even as we (the Godhead) are one." To dissect and dismember the Body is a scriptural enigma. Fragmentation of the local gatherings of the saints is in effect a dismembering of the Body of Christ, and a departure from the example of the Godhead. It can only lead to disaster.

The Protection Afforded By Togetherness

1 Cor. 14 gives us a glimpse of the early local church in operation, and one of the concerns the apostle had was the integrity of the teaching ministry, and the importance of having spiritually qualified people doing the teaching, and judging its integrity. We read " Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the others judge" (1 Cor. 14). Here we have the secret to preventing the inroads of error into the church. When prophets speak the " others " have to judge. There are two words for ' others' in the original text, one meaning ' others of the same kind,' and the other meaning " others of a different kind." The word used in the text is the first, meaning that when prophets speak the other prophets judge. This cannot take place in a group where there is no control over the teaching. The writer knows of an assembly which at one time was experimenting with home bible studies. A brother attending one of such studies, came to him in distress, because in one such study, they had concluded that the Lord Jesus must have been able to sin or he would not have been a real human

being. This is serious doctrinal error, but nobody was there to correct it. The "other prophets" were not present. There are also examples where fragmentation encouraged by elders got out of control, and fractured the entire church. This is surely a warning as to the inherent dangers of fragmentation, and that it should be avoided at all costs.

Unity In The Early Church

In the Acts the expression "with one accord." is mentioned no less than 11 times. The phrase is one single word in the original text, derived from two Greek words, the one meaning "to rush along," and the other meaning "together." Scholars have suggested that the word has a musical connotation, in that an orchestra rushes along, but there is a togetherness about it all because they are all operating as one under the control of the conductor. So it was in the early church. There was no thought about breaking up into groups. They were all together in one place (Acts 2:1). Why would we want to change this?

In closing, the Body of Christ is one, and we must preserve this at all costs. We court danger if we depart from the example of the early church as established by the apostles. Let us commit ourselves to being "with one accord in one place" for the exercises of the local church.

Godly Conduct Under Persecution

Daniel Chapter 3

INTRODUCTION

In Daniel chapter 3 we learn some of the things that were going on in the lives of Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. We will learn that the Lord does not always deliver from the trial, but that He will be with us in it, and that we must be prepared to trust him when the heat is unbearable, knowing that He will see us through. Let us examine some of the lessons of this chapter.

THERE IS NOTHING WORSE THAN TRUTH DISTORTED, EXAGGERATED, AND MADE AN IDOL IN ITSELF

In chapter 2 Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of the dream of the Great Image, and he told him, "Thou art this head of gold." When we come into Chapter 3, we discover that Nebuchadnezzar makes a great idol of gold, 90 feet high and 9 feet wide and sets it up in the plain of Dura as an object of worship. Nebuchadnezzar was indeed that head of gold, but he had now completely distorted this truth, exaggerated it, and made it an idol to be worshipped.

We see an example of this during the Lord's time here on earth. The Pharisees had taken the Law, which was given by God, and they had exaggerated it, expanded it, distorted it, and idolized it. The truth had become an end in itself and taken to extremes that violated the spirit of the letter, inflicting unnecessary suffering upon

men. For example, the observance of the Sabbath was more important to them than the healing of a man whose hand was withered. Sadly, this same spirit can invade our assemblies. We must stand for truth and right, but it is possible to take truth to extremes and to exaggerate and distort things to the point where violence is done to other principles, and for truth to become an idol in itself. May the Lord enable us to avoid distortion, exaggeration, and idolization of one truth at the expense of another.

RELIGION IS THE GREATEST INFLUENCE FOR GOOD OR BAD IN THE WORLD'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Babylonian Empire had embraced peoples with a variety of cultural, political and religious backgrounds. Nebuchadnezzar had the wisdom to see that a common religion would be a great political force to bind all into one, and this was the idea behind this image he made. Of course, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could not comply with his dictate to worship the image, and they were branded as opponents to the government, etc., and threatened with a horrifying death in a fiery furnace.

In today's world, the greatest headaches to the political leaders can be mentioned in one word—Religion!! Most of the conflicts around the globe find their roots in religious tensions. We can well imagine the political benefits in terms of world peace if all were brought under the banner of one religion. Of course, Scripture makes it very clear that this is indeed what will happen in the world system, and we already see the makings of it beginning to appear. Unfortunately, the Christian cannot comply with the dreams of the politicians, and

before the Lord returns to remove us at the Rapture, we can expect to see a wave of persecution for non-compliance and bigotry being directed to those "fundamentalist" Christians. We are about to face the same situation that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced. How will we stand?

MUSIC IS A POWERFUL ASSIST TO IDOLATRY

The subtlety of the religious intrigue being exercised by Nebuchadnezzar reaches new heights when music was used as the lead-in to the new idolatry. Nebuchadnezzar recognized that music is a powerful tool for good or bad, and he was determined to use it for his godless purpose.

I believe that good music has been given to us by God, and can be enjoyed with great benefit. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, recognized the value of music, and he used its powerful effects to calm the agitated, paranoid mind of Saul on a number of occasions. The little that is revealed to us about Heaven shows it to be filled with songs of praise to the Lamb in the midst of the Throne.

However, we are living in a world where music has become the powerful lead-in to idolatry. Modern day "rock" musicians, with their smoking altars and unearthly lighting effects, spit out their angry, filthy, violent, godless lyrics to the accompaniment of mind-bending, ear-splitting noise and confusion. Let me say, categorically, that I do not believe that there is such a thing as Christian Rock music, and we should strongly advise our young people to avoid it. It is a real danger to spiritual well-being. Parents should not allow children who are under their authority to listen to the world's idolatrous music. Young people, now beyond your parent's authority and striking out on your own, please

do not listen to " rock" music, so-called Christian or otherwise, because it will destroy your Christian life and cause you to follow other gods. It is true what Paul taught the Corinthians, "Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils." (1 Cor. 10:21)

OUR FAITH MUST NOT REST ON THE PREMISE THAT GOD WILL DELIVER US FROM ALL TROUBLE AND TRIBULATION

Nebuchadnezzar was furious at the non-compliance of these three men of God. But, at this stage, Nebuchadnezzar made a fatal mistake when he said to them " Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" He challenged God's ability to deliver them. Notice the answer that the three men gave: " If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (Daniel 3:17-18) If God wanted to deliver them, and he could, then that was good, but if he would not deliver them that was acceptable to them as well.

Many people believe that faith in Christ will introduce one to a life of plenty and prosperity, and that God will protect from any illness or misfortune in this life. This is just not true. The Lord Jesus Himself suffered more than any of us can imagine. Most of the apostles suffered death by martyrdom, and countless thousand of Christians down through the ages, from the Coliseum in Rome, to the burnings and drownings of the days of the Covenanters in Scotland, to the recent burning of a missionary and his family in India, have shed their blood

for their faith in Christ. May the Lord give us a faith that does not depend upon what God is giving to us, but a faith that trusts Him implicitly even in the midst of adversity.

IF WE TRUST GOD IN THE FIRE, WE WILL NEVER BE ALONE IN IT

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into the furnace, and wonder of wonders, they were seen by Nebuchadnezzar to be walking around with their bonds loosed, and one like unto the Son of God was with them in the midst of the flames. This had a salutary effect on Nebuchadnezzar, and he changed position completely and called the three martyrs "the Servants of the Most High God." He then gave complete freedom of worship to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and threatened his own people with death and destruction if they dare speak a word against these men or their God. He makes the amazing statement " There is no God that can deliver after his sort."

Many of God's dear people are called upon to pass through the fire from time to time in their lives, and it is in the fire that they come to know the intimate presence of the Lord in a way that they have never known before. They find that the fire only removes what is a trouble to them— their bondage. The Lord will never leave us in the fire alone. Think of the precious promise that Jehovah brought to us, His redeemed people, through the prophet Isaiah. "Fear not: ...for I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire. thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame

kindle upon thee." (Isa. 43:1-2) Remember that he has said, " I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." and that, in the final analysis, the fire will only consume the dross, and bring forth fine gold to the Glory of our God.