

I do not apologize for reading what I have to say. The only way I can speak is like I were giving a technical paper. This will be somewhat technical. Also, it keeps me from saying something I didn't mean to say.

I want to warn you up front - I will say some things that have never been said to an audience in this building before. You will disagree with some of the things I say. I only ask that you judge what I say by what the bible says, instead of the traditions we've been taught. I hope we all know the difference.

When I chose the topic for this lesson, "What do you think an Epistle to Highland View might say?" it wasn't to pretend that I know what God might have an inspired writer say to us, if such a thing could happen. But I wanted you to think about what such an epistle to might say.

When Paul was writing to a church, he nearly always started by saying the good things he could about it. There are many good things that can be said about Highland View. One very important thing is that we are moving in the right direction when it comes to our relationships to each other and to our religious neighbors. There was a time when we wouldn't think of calling other believers in Christ "Christians," unless we thought they were practicing everything just the way we do.

I feel guilty every time I criticize the things we did in the past. One reason is that, even though I was taught things that I have since learned are not in the bible, many of the people who taught me, were very good people. Another reason is that I believed and taught many of those same things, for quite some time.

When we came to Highland View there was no benevolent program. Such things were not considered something we should be doing, except occasionally for our own members. There were Churches of Christ in and around Oak Ridge that were thought by some of our members to be too liberal or taught things that kept them from being a true church. Members were believed to be sinning by not singing all the time in church when they were supposed to, not giving of their means every Sunday, going to the movies, going to the prom, going mixed bathing (as they called it), wearing peddle pushers and shorts, and on and on and on. Some thought it was their responsibility to tell our Christian neighbors that only members of the "Church of Christ" were going to heaven. We sometimes even heard it said that some preachers were preaching too much on love.

What I see now is more emphasis on love. In Bible studies I hear fewer scriptures taken out of context. I hear fewer so-called proof texts, filled with assumptions, being quoted. And rarely do I hear other Christian groups being condemned. I hear good lessons on grace and the Holy Spirit. And there is more teaching from the gospels. I feel that we now have more love for each other. And I know we have more love for our neighbors. We are more accepting of our brothers and sisters who do not hold the same views that we do on Bible subjects. We can talk in classes about our beliefs on the meaning of the scriptures that differ from the traditional Church of Christ stand. As I said, I will say some things in this lesson that you won't agree with, but I can trust that you won't try to have me disfellowshipped. I haven't always had that confidence. I have brothers and sisters in Christ here that believe many things about the Bible differently

than I do, but they don't judge me. They love me and I love them dearly.

When I was in my teens, I began learning what every member of the Church of Christ was expected to believe. I wanted to be able to teach others what we believed.

When we came to Highland View we had classes on how to convert people. I wanted to learn where to find all the proof texts and how to convince people to believe what we believed. We learned to use the Jewel Miller film strips.

It began to disturb me when I started to study the proof texts within their contexts. I realized that there were a number of assumptions we were making in many of them.

And when I looked closely at the full context, many of them didn't really say what I had been taught they did. I began to look closely at what was called our hermeneutics, which was used to formulate our doctrine. I seldom hear about that anymore; mainly because we've learned better. It was unbiblical and didn't hold water anyway. Unfortunately, many of the beliefs we still hold are based on it. It consisted of commands, approved examples, and necessary inferences, with the underlying assumption that everything not "authorized" was automatically forbidden. That did not come from anywhere in the Bible. It was not even used consistently.

For example, we called Acts 20:7 an approved example and a proof text for observing the Lord's supper on the first day of every week, and only on the first day. But let's look at the assumptions we have to make with this example. We assumed that the term "breaking bread" meant the Lord's supper in this verse. And although one cannot tell for sure from the text, we assumed that when they actually partook of the Lord's supper, it was the first day of the week. We also assumed they engaged in the Lord's supper the Sundays prior to this event. And we assumed they did on the following Sundays. Another assumption was that they didn't break bread together every day of the week, like we see disciples doing in Acts 2:46. We assumed they did not partake of it any other day of the week. However, neither this text, nor any other, in the New Testament, tells us that these assumptions are correct. Although I think there is a rather high probability that most of these assumptions are true, they are still assumptions. And assumptions can never be used as proof of the truth.

I want you to know that I want us to share in the Lord's supper every Sunday. But I do not judge anyone for observing it at other times or frequencies. This is only one of the examples of the assumptions made in proof texts.

Even though commands seem not to be qualified in our hermeneutics, some were dismissed from our doctrine. Foot washing and greeting with the holy kiss are examples. Necessary inference is only common sense - simple logic; therefore I see no point for it being included. But, when the "necessary" aspect of it is not observed, error is the result.

As I mentioned before, the idea of using the silence of the scriptures to prohibit certain actions is foreign to the Bible. When you look at how it was used, it was used only where we wanted to use it. It was ignored when we wanted a church building, but it was

used by those who didn't want kitchens or gyms. Its most obvious use was in the condemnation of instrumental music.

I assure you, as a personal preference, I do not want us to have instrumental music in our church assemblies. But the Bible does not condemn it and I'm not going to judge anyone that uses it. I think there are good reasons for not having it. But that does not make it a sin.

I think there is a purpose for the scriptures being silent on certain subjects. I think it comes as a result of our freedom in Christ - the freedom from the old law. That law was designed for one people, Israel - in the formative era of man's relationship with God. Therefore, it needed to be very prescriptive. But the new law that Christ brought to us is designed for all the cultures on the planet and for, possibly, many millennia to come. It has to be very flexible-possibly more so in the future than in the past two millennia.

It's sad, but many Christians have not recognized how different the Law of Christ really is. They keep going back to the old law to find a pattern from it for us to follow, because no such pattern exists in the New Testament. What Jesus taught was love - love between God and humans and between humans. That is the basis of all teaching in God's word.

To see the fallacy in our hermeneutics, with its "approved example," simply look at all of the commands that God has given us in the New Testament - commands that require no assumptions. He makes it clear to man what He wants. Christ's life is our example and his teachings are our directives.

For many years, I've studied the New Testament to find everything I could on how God wants us to worship him. Nowhere have I found anything that resembles a ritual worship. What I found was that Christ freed us from it. I don't think God meant for us to have to search through the New Testament like it is a jigsaw puzzle to discover a pattern of worship to Him. But that's what was done to come up with the "five act worship ritual" that many of us have grown up with: singing, praying, preaching, giving, and partaking of the Lord's supper. Actually, we inherited the practice of ritual worship from earlier religious groups. It was brought through into our doctrine many years ago. Then the New Testament was searched for a scripture here and one there and another elsewhere to find proof texts to justify it.

We have always been told that we should go back to the first century to find the source of our worship service. And I agree. But here is a different version of it than we learned.

Here is the way ritual worship got into Christianity.

Paul warned several of the churches to which he wrote letters not to be influenced by Judaizing teachers and the pagan religions. History shows that his teaching did not eliminate that problem. In the centuries that followed, the churches incorporated many things from both the Jewish religion of that time and pagan religions around them. As you know, it wasn't long before priests, bishops, "saints," clerical dress, altars, and temples were added. And things like incense, candles, beads, along with mysticism accompanied their rituals. The Lord's table became an altar and the Lord's supper was

viewed as a sacrifice, rather than a fellowship meal. Partly because of that, and partly because of meeting in buildings instead of homes, the weekly love feast or fellowship meal was actually forbidden. Due to cultural influences, there were many other changes made as time went on.

When the Reformation Movement came along, some of these added things were reduced and most mysticism was eliminated. Though modified, ritual worship came right on through.

The Restoration Movement took us back closer to the New Testament church. But there were some things from those non-biblical influences that got carried on through. Ritual worship was one of them.

God knows how to command the use of rituals in worship. You see detailed descriptions of the rituals that He commanded in the old law. If he meant for us to worship Him in a “five act worship” ritual, he would have described a pattern for it very clearly, not by giving us hints here and there scattered through the New Testament.

In his wisdom, He commanded His people to assemble together for the purpose of edifying each other. In I Cor 14, Paul gives the most we have, by way of a description and the purpose, of how an assembly of the church should be conducted. He didn't command a ritual, but a fellowship meeting, where anyone could lead or sing a song, or testify, or give a talk or a prayer, or use their gift, within limits. All of this was to be orderly and in turn. All things are to be for edification.

Seven times he uses some form of the word “edify” in that chapter.

Elsewhere in this letter, Paul has already chastised this church for not edifying each other during the Lord's supper. During the fellowship meal part of the Lord's supper, the rich were eating with their rich friends and letting the poor go hungry.

In one place, Paul refers back to the Israelite fellowship offering. Let us look at that for a moment. Not only was the Lord's supper instituted at a Passover, it is related to the Passover. It was one of the three main fellowship offerings. A fellowship offering consisted of a sacrifice in which the fat was burned as an offering to God, and according to Lev 7:14 the priest was given the breast and right thigh. The worshiper took the remainder home to eat with his family and friends that evening. The fellowship meal was characterized by thanksgiving, dedication, renewal, joy, and festivity. The fellowship meal was sharing: God, the priest, and the worshiper. That is the context in which Jesus was fellowshiping with his disciples when he instituted the Lord's supper. This should help us understand the atmosphere in which the Lord's supper should be shared.

Our early English bible translators may have handicapped our understanding of the importance of fellowship in the Lord's supper. They used the word “communion” instead of “fellowship” or “sharing” when referring to the Lord's supper. To the average Christian, communion only means partaking of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine in the act of observing the Lord's supper. They don't think of the word meaning sharing and fellowship of God and Christ and the church.

When I began to see how many of the proof texts for the “five acts of worship” were taken out of context, and the all of the assumptions that had to be made to justify them, I started studying to find out for myself what the Bible really says about how we are to worship God. I looked up every worship word in the bible in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. I examined the context and who was worshiping what or whom.

I found that in the New Testament the word most used for worship was proskuneo. It is used sixty times. The KJV translates it “worship” all sixty times. Surprisingly, it is found only seven times outside of the gospels and Revelations. Even more significant is that, nowhere is it used to describe what Christians were doing in their assemblies.

It took me quite awhile to figure out two things: The first was, how the different words for worship related to each other. The second was, how the words “worship” and “serve” were related. In studying for this lesson, it all came together - literally. So let’s look at what these scriptures are telling us about worship.

Another word meaning “worship” and sometimes translated “worship” in newer versions, is latreuo. It’s more often translated as “serve.” Rom 9:4 and 12:1 also Heb 9:1 and 6 shows that “serving God” means the same as “worshiping God.” Act 7:42 and 43 and 24:11 and 14 show “proskuneo” and “latreuo” used synonymously.

Heb 8:5 and 13:10 show “latreuo” being used like another word for “worship” - “leitourgeo”. “Leitourgeo” is usually translated “service.” It describes the priest’s duties in the temple. It is applied to the service of Christians as priests all the time, not just on Sunday.

The point I want to make is that when our English translations use these three words referring to serving God, it means the same as worshiping God, and that worship is everything that we do to glorify Him, which should be everything that we do. I Cor 10:31 - “So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” Also in Col 3:17 - “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Another word normally connected to worship is “sacrifice.” In the New Testament it is used in the lives of Christians. Rom 12:1 describes the Christian’s worship: “Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship (latreia).” Compare these acts of worship to the so called “five acts of worship” that didn’t even include the ways that the New Testament says we are to worship God.

I maintain that our worship is to be continual, not part time.

Heb 13:15 and 16 - “Through Jesus therefore, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of the lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”

These are only a few of the scriptures that tell us what we are to do to worship God. We honor Him, we glorify Him, and we worship Him by living our lives by the principles that Jesus taught; which is based on loving and serving others.

In Galatians 5, Paul is telling the Galatians that they were free in Christ - that they were not to go back and get things out of the old law. He says, "It is for freedom that Christ has set you free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." He tells them in verse 6, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." He further said in verse 13 and 14, "serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'.

I think it would be good for us to have a study on the "one another" scriptures, especially all the ones that teach us to edify and build up one another and teach us to help one another. I don't mean listen to a lecture, I mean where everyone studies those scriptures ahead of time and every one takes part in the discussion of how we can truly fellowship and share in one another's lives. There are religious groups, some that we don't think very highly of, that put us to shame in the way they take care of each other. You may want to ask me if I believe that there is something wrong with the "five act worship service" we use. The answer is "yes," if we believe it is our primary worship to God. The answer is "no," if we understand that the primary purpose of the assembly is to edify one another and that we do everything we can to make that happen, and if we realize that everything we do in accordance with God's will the rest of the week is worshiping Him also.

I hope you will make a personal study of this subject:

Does our emphasis on ritual worship interfere with the emphasis on our edification of each other in our assemblies? In the context of what we should do in our assemblies, Heb 10:24 and 25 say - "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good works." Then, "let us encourage one another."

Do our assemblies resemble what Paul recommends to the Corinthians in chapter 14? Are they conducive to the type of fellowship he encourages at the Lord's supper in chapter 11? Remember, these chapters are in the context of love, with chapter 13 really bringing it home to us.

Do we need to consider making the Lord's supper more of a supper, a fellowship meal? Or, are we too bound by our traditions and handicapped by the design of our building?

I do believe, that our ritual worship causes more complaining and criticism than anything else in the church. Many churches have divided over it. God cannot be pleased with that.

Some of the problems it can cause are;

It promotes the belief that there is a special time and place for worship. Jesus taught there was not.

The meeting place becomes a special place with special parts, governed through ordinances having religious significance.

With the idea of a special place of worship comes the belief that God approves, or even desires, larger more elaborate buildings.

Along with the idea of worshiping in the “House of God” comes the belief that unbelievers will be attracted by elaborate meeting houses and cathedrals instead of personal evangelism.

The designation “worship service” often gives the idea, subconsciously if not consciously, that the Christian has worshiped and served God sufficiently for the entire week through his or her presence in the assemblies three or four times a week.

Worship becomes a part-time activity rather than a full time service to Christ.

It helps people to feel that what they give on Sunday is all they need to give.

A pattern of worship, whether you call it a liturgy or not, implies you have to have all the parts or you haven't worshiped.

Edification, through sharing needs, provoking to love and good works and exhorting one another has been superceded by a liturgy or pattern of worship in the assembly.

I know that most of you do not hold to these ideas, but how can our assemblies keep from promoting them? I'm afraid many of our members, who only come on Sunday morning, may not know the difference between tradition and scripture.

Please read your Bibles more on this subject and help us all to get a better understanding of how God really wants us to worship Him. When you study, try to see past our traditional teaching and try see only what the Bible says. Let me tell you how easy it is to be blinded by what we've been taught in the past. As many times as I've read and heard quoted Luke's account of the last supper, until recently, I had never noticed that Jesus gave his disciples a cup at the beginning, and then another cup, after the meal was over.

I hope no one has been offended by anything I've said. But I felt compelled to share with you what I have learned though decades of study on this subject.

There is one other thing I want to ask of you. Help us all to have the attitude God wants us to have. Keep a mental list of every positive thought you have. And keep a list of every negative thought you have. After a week or two compare the two lists. Decide if that ratio is where you think it ought to be. If not, then decide what you are going to do about it. Negative thoughts, when verbalized, discourage and tear down. Positive thoughts, when verbalized, edify.

Here is a way to start increasing your ratio positive to negative thoughts:

Count your blessings every day.

Here is a scripture that also helps me:

**what ever is true
whatever is honorable
whatever is just
whatever is pure
whatever is lovely**

**whatever is commendable
if any virtue
and if any praise
think these things**

Philippians 4:8