

The Church and Public Worship

- I. Other names given to public worship
 - a. Mass
 - i. A term used by the Roman Catholic Church which we would not use
 - ii. Usually thought to come from *Ite, missa es* – Latin for “to send out”
 - b. The Divine Liturgy is what the Eastern Orthodox call their worship
 - c. Corporate Worship
 - d. Assembled Worship
 - e. Worship service
 - f. Church, such as “I go to church”
 - i. **ἐκκλησία** – (ecclesia) assembly or gathering
 - ii. Our use of church is complicated because we use church to describe both a people group and the building in which those people gathered
 - iii. Some in history (such as the Quakers) refused to call their meeting houses churches
 - iv. When scripture talks about the church, there are two ways we understand this:
 1. The Invisible Church
 - a. The universal church of true believers throughout history which only God can see
 - b. We gather this idea from the scriptural passages which refer to the whole of God’s kingdom
 2. The Visible Church
 - a. The local gathering of believers which is visible to us and the world around us
 - b. When the scriptures speak about the church, it is almost always referring to the local body
 - g. Is it true to say, “we don’t go to church, we are the church?”
- II. Defining a church
 - a. What makes church different from a group of Christians who happen to be at the same place at the same time and decide to pray?
 - b. There are three marks that identify a church
 - i. Preaching of God’s Word
 - ii. Administration of the sacraments
 - iii. Church discipline

- c. “A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.”¹
- d. This means that a church is a body which has structure and leadership (elders/pastors/overseers/bishops)

III. Are we commanded to gather as the church?

- a. In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to gather at the temple for worship
- b. The New Testament assumes your participation in a local church
 - i. Aside from the Gospels which serve to tell the story of Christ and the Gospel, every book in the New Testament is written about the church, to a church, or to an individual who is leading churches
 - ii. The book of Acts is the history of the church’s beginnings and is centered around the works of the apostles as they go and establish churches
 - iii. All the epistles are written to guide churches or the leaders of the churches and are written as instructions which were to be read when the churches gathered
 - iv. The book of Revelation details God’s commands to the churches in chapters 2-3 and then details for us the gathered worship of all God’s people in heaven
- c. The commands of the ordinances require the gathering of God’s people
- d. Acts 2:42-47 – The meeting of the first church
- e. James 2:1-4 – Instructions as they assemble
- f. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 – Instructions in the Lord’s Supper
- g. 1 Corinthians 12:20-30 – One body with many members
- h. 1 Corinthians 13:26-40 – Orderly gatherings
- i. Ephesians 4:1-16 – The unity of the body
- j. Ephesians 5:19 – Command to sing to one another

¹ Southern Baptist Faith and Message 2000, Article VI.

- k. Ephesians 5:25-33 – Paul shows that Christ loves and cares for His church and sets that up as the example a husband should follow with his love for his wife
- l. Titus – The entire letter of Titus is written to the instruction of the church and without gathering, that letter is pointless
- m. Revelation 2:5 – God’s warning to the church at Ephesus was that He would remove them as a church
- n. Hebrews 10:23-25 – A warning against neglecting to gather

IV. How often are we commanded to gather for worship and when?

- a. Acts 2:46 – “day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes”
- b. Acts 20:7 – “On the first day of the week when we were gathered together to break bread”
- c. 1 Corinthians 16:2 – “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up”
- d. Revelation 1:10 – “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day”
- e. “And on the Lord’s Day, after you have come together, break bread and offer the Eucharist, having first confessed your offences, so that your sacrifice may be pure.” – Didache, Chapter 14
- f. “And we afterwards continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost. And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability,² and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But

Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.² – Justin Martyr

- V. Is it then a sin to not gather with the church?
 - a. Should we practice church discipline on those who don't?
 - b. Is it necessary for us to gather in person or can we gather online?

- VI. Public worship is a “meeting of the triune God with his chosen people”³
 - a. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20)
 - b. God is present in more than an omnipresent sense, but in an intimate way
 - c. Public worship is different from private worship because it is God meeting with His covenant people united as the Body of Christ
- VII. Our public worship has two elements to it (Hebrews 10:19-24)
 - a. Vertical – The worship of God
 - i. This is the chief end of our worship and the main reason we gather
 - ii. Our focus is to be completely on God and not to be distracted by anything else
 - iii. We worship by the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ
 - b. Horizontal – The building up of the body
 - i. The direct result of our weekly encounter with God is that we are changed by what God does in our lives through worship
 - ii. Through our worship, we learn how to approach God in our daily lives remembering to glorify God in all we do
- VIII. Worship as sacramental
 - a. Sacrament – a religious symbol instituted by God through which He gives grace
 - b. Salvation is a long process

² Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 185–186.

³ *Book of Common Worship*, 47-2.

- i. Justification, sanctification, and glorification
 - ii. God is saving us through our sanctification
 - c. When we speak about grace, we are not only talking about justification
 - i. God gives us many different kinds of graces
 - ii. To say that God is saving us through worship or giving us grace is not to say that we are being justified, but that he is giving us the grace of salvation in our sanctification
 - iii. He is literally changing us
 - d. When we encounter God in worship, He works in our lives to transform us and sanctify us
 - i. This is the grace of God working in our lives
- IX. Liturgy
 - a. Liturgy is the order of our worship
 - b. 1 Corinthians 14:26-40