

**BAHRAIN REBAP CHURCH FRIDAY SCHOOL LESSON**  
***Holy Ground: The Special Presence of God in Congregational Worship***  
**February 16, 2024**

**Mt 18:20** = *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*

Note: One of the distinguishing marks of Reformed heritage is its view on worship

- It is considered as the primary task of the church – a mandate above all mandates
  - Historic Reformed Th allots a separate chapter on worship – not simply a subtopic
  - Today's worship is seriously altered, trivialized, and removed from the centrality in the life of the church – it has become a *new sacrament* for the contemporary ch
- Point: A transformed worship is one of the first obvious evidence if a church has been touched by Reformation principles

***A Promise for the Gathered Church Matthew 18:15-20***

Note: The presence of Christ here is clearly not his omnipresence (immensity)

- It is a presence that is promised upon the condition of gathering in his name
- The gathering in his name is none other than the public worship of the ch. (v.17)

Point: There is a special presence of God that is promised only in the gathered assembly of the people of God

Beware: A mere gathering of Christians does not qualify to the promise of Matt 18:20

Parallel: 1 Cor 5:4 – *when you are gathered together*; = same context of ch. discipline

1. The *qahal* (congregation) of Yahweh is translated *ekklesia* (church) in Septuagint

Note: The Septuagint (LXX – ‘seventy’) is the Greek translation of the OT

- ***Qahal*** usually denotes assemblies called to gather for many purposes; e.g. war
- Another Hebrew word is available for strict religious sense – ***‘edah*** (Ex 12:19; Lev 4:13; Num 8:9) – but was not translated as *ekklesia*

Point: ***Ekklesia*** (church) was rightly used for ***qahal*** because it is the word that requires an assembly and has a more covenantal connotation

***No matter how few, whenever a church gathers as a covenant assembly, God's special presence is there***

2. The OT types and promised of God's presence is the one being promised by Jesus

Note: Jesus is not simply the Messiah, but the Son of God who is the *kurios* of OT

Point: Jesus, being God, can give God's special presence promised to His people

- Psalm 46:4-5 – *the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High...*
- Isaiah 12:5-6 – *in the midst of a worshiping Zion is God*

Lesson 1: The holy presence of God was always with His people – from the Tabernacle to the promised habitation in the New Covenant

- In the pitched Tabernacle, there was the shekinah glory...
- In the OT Temple, there was the holy of holies...z
- In the NT, the curtain was torn in two to signify that the inauguration of the NC & the holy presence of God now resides in the people of Christ...

Lesson 2: The gathered church is now the dwelling place of God's presence

***The most important reason not to interfere with the Biblically regulated worship of God is His special presence***

**1 Timothy 3:15: Conduct for the Gathered Church**

Note: This text is a key NT text for the doctrine of the church, esp. on church life

1. New Covenant *Description* of the Church

- *the household of God* – could mean the church as a family or a temple (1Pt2:5)
- *the church of the living God* – the God we worship isn't a lifeless idol (Ps 113)
- *a pillar and buttress of the truth* – the church is dominated by the truth of God

2. New Covenant *Doings* of the Church

Note: The unique character of the NC church requires a conduct that reflects it

- *you may know how one ought to behave* – There are certain behaviors fitting and not fitting to the New Covenant church
- In the OT, Yahweh was so detailed and precise in instructing Moses on how they should build the Tabernacle (Ex 26:30)

Point: If the OT had a holy and glorious doctrine of God's presence in worship, the New Covenant did not remove this, but rather intensified it!

***The Reformed doctrine of the special presence of God makes the congregational worship of the people of God never the same again***

**Congregational Implications of the Presence of God**

1. We don't create the atmosphere, God's presence does

Note: We know that God's presence is Scripture is not simply His immensity because of the evident response required from, or shown by, men to Him

- Ex 3:4f – Moses' burning bush experience = the ground turned holy
- Rev 1 – John's Patmos vision = effect on John was falling like dead (5:11-14)

Point: In all these instances, it is the presence of God that made the real difference

***Theology overshadowed by technology***

- Since we are bred in media stimuli, the power of visuals, and soundbites, we have filled our worship with addictively cutting-edge presentations...
- We have become a generation of visually dependent and image-reading creatures and later poor listeners in the process

Reformation Position: Technology (circumstances) should only assist us in worship, not to be a distraction or compensation for poor theology

***A program-oriented church will not most likely be conscious of the special presence of God***

2. We don't seek to perform, we respond with reverence

Note: True worship is always a reflection of a prior revelation-truth – *a response*

- Terminology: OT = *abad*, to serve; NT = *proskuneo*, to bow down; Anglo-Saxon: *weorthscipe* (value or worth)

Point: There is an appropriate response to God's presence – awe & reverence

Today's Problem: Flippancy and triviality characterize our worship more than reverence

(a) Worship presiders and preachers became entertainers

Reformation Position: Preachers & presiders lead people in worship to God – They are not the worship team who try to draw attention to themselves

(b) Worshipers turned customers

Reformation Position: Worshipers are sinners highly privileged by God to be drawn to His holy presence

Hughes Oliphant Old: the greatest contribution of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation to contemporary American evangelical public worship is...

***With Christ in every worship service, we are privileged to stand on holy ground... heaven comes down to us while it eagerly awaits for us***