

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Worship or “Playing Church”

What an exalted privilege it is to worship God – to know who He is, to understand what He expects, to be confident that our heart-felt and humble devotion, our reverence and veneration, come before His majestic presence as an honor to Him. It’s almost too wonderful to contemplate.

I fear that far too many people are not as impressed with this great privilege as they ought to be. That fact is often shown by the inconsistency with which some participate in the worship services. They only come when it’s convenient to do so, and then only for as little time as they feel they can spare. I fear, too, that with some, participation is little more than a ceremonial observance, a scant observance devoid of any heart-felt spiritual commitment. Somehow they have decided that their mere presence is all that is necessary for acceptable worship.

There is great benefit to be derived from the public worship. But there is a danger, too – a danger that ritualism will replace sincere, heart-felt worship. A danger that the mere observance of

the various ordinances is all that is due Him. In Ecclesiastes 5:1, the wise man says, "Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil." The meaning is clear: to lack the involvement of the heart when we come to worship is sin.

True worship is a desire to reach out to our Father and accord to Him the filial devotion He so rightfully deserves. It seems to me that proper preparation for those acts of worship that accomplish that is essential, and sometimes neglected, if we're not very careful. Just as any good thing to be done requires forethought and planning, so it is with worship. In fact, especially is that so regarding worship, mainly because of its supreme importance and high privilege. I want to cite a few things I believe will improve our personal participation in the public worship services.

Begin early. Sometimes we are so involved in filling our weekends with pleasures of various sorts, we have only scant time to prepare our thoughts and minds for the worship of our Father on the Lord's Day. We plan activities on Saturday that reach far into Saturday night and then sleep as late as we possibly can on Sunday morning. When we do get up we are dull, listless, unprepared to offer praise to God. If we get a good night's sleep on Saturday, we're much more apt to be refreshed on Sunday morning, then ready to make our plans for the grand privileges we are to enjoy at the worship services. "O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." (Psalm 63:1).

Participate. I don't mean just be there (although you can't very well participate if you're not even there), but get involved mentally at the start of the services. That means you have to take control of your mind and drive it in the direction of God. After all, that's what worship is. Only when you get your mind involved can there be true worship. And I don't mean a casual thought of Jesus or a passing amen to the prayer, but a full-fledged effort to extol and praise him from the innermost part of your being. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). That means you reach down to the vital part of who and what you are and give yourself to God for a period of adulation and praise-giving.

Look past the leader. All public worship services require a leader to be effective. That may present a distraction, if we're not careful. Sometime we become so fascinated with the leader, or, on the other hand, so distracted by him that we actually find our minds wandering away from the purpose for being there. Even if the leader hasn't chosen the songs you like, even if the one chosen to lead can't do as well as you'd like, even if the prayer is longer than you would like, don't let that have an adverse effect on your personal worship. And even if the leader is so good that his work borders on the artistic, it should not be allowed to cause you to lose sight of why you're here and what you're to do while you're here.

Take it home with you. If you bring a big enough container to the public worship, there's no reason why you can't take a goodly portion of those services home with you. For one thing, they can

supply you with fuel for meditation and spiritual reflections when you get home. Meditation is a vital part of public worship and the fodder gained from such meditation is invaluable to your private worship after you leave the building. After you have participated in the worship services you should have feelings of warmth, new devotion for your Father, and even deeper care for those brethren with whom you have shared a time of praise and adulation. Worship – public or personal – is intended to bring glory and honor to God Almighty and to strengthen the one offering such praise to Him. And if you really care for Him as you should, you cannot leave your praise and devotion for Him at the building when you leave.

- Dee Bowman

Can We All Understand the Bible Alike?

Our question, "*Can we all understand the Bible alike?*" is phrased in such a manner as to imply a doubt that has become very prevalent. Seeing the confusion in religious circles, and the wide difference of opinion in evidence among religious teachers, the average citizen has given up in despair. If the learned doctors of the law cannot agree regarding its interpretation, how can the poor untaught "layman" hope to get the matter straight? He has, generally speaking, taken refuge behind this very satisfying makeshift: "*The Bible means one thing to me, and it means another to you; so we will just agree to disagree, and salvage what little consolation from it that we can.*" Others have turned away in disgust, and refused to entertain the Bible in their thinking, or in their conversation. The tragic thing about either of

these conclusions is that neither of them brings any lasting satisfaction, or peace of mind. The irony of the situation lies in the fact that neither of these hopeless conditions is necessary.

If the Bible message is true, then to obey its injunctions carries the only hope for man if he is to be saved from eternal ruin. If the Bible commands must be obeyed, then they, of necessity, must be understood. If the Bible cannot be understood, then it carries no hope for man. Since there is no other place to go for guidance or consolation, then we are without hope — without chart or compass, on a storm-tossed sea that is not of our choosing.

In dealing with the question, "*Can we all understand the Bible alike?*" we shall divide the problem into two main sections and deal with each in turn. Section one will have to do with man's capabilities. Section two will deal with God's capabilities and purpose. Suppose we first define the word "understand." It is related to the word "substance" and means the "under support, the underpinning of a thing." Webster tells us that to understand a thing is "*to apprehend the meaning of, to grasp the idea of, to be informed of a matter of intelligence.*" The understanding of a thing is the power to distinguish truth from falsehood, and adapt means to ends. In the face of these definitions, we are constrained to ask, "*Can two or more persons actually understand a matter, and still see it differently?*" Now we would have stated a possibility, had our question been worded in this manner: "*Can we all misunderstand the Bible and be different?*" The answer to that is, "Yes!" There is abundance of evidence to prove that men can misunderstand the Bible in a dozen ways. But when we understand it, we agree. When we misunderstand it, we disagree.

When we disagree, someone misunderstands it. To agree does not necessarily prove us to be right, but to disagree always shows somebody is wrong. Man can deal with abstractions; he can receive and give testimony; he can weigh evidence; he can reason cause to effect and from effect to cause. This the beast of the fields cannot do. This is the power that makes him a morally responsible being. He must give an accounting for his acts because of his power to receive truth and reject error. Since man is capable of this process we call "understanding," in matters that are clearly revealed, and since there is great disagreement among men in regard to the Bible, is it possible that the fault lies in the message itself? Is the Word of God so worded and compiled that we cannot comprehend it? Since God is obviously the author of the Bible, and since God wants to help man, let us consider where this line of reasoning would lead us. If the Bible is so constructed that we cannot comprehend it enough to unite in following its instructions, then the fault lies with the author. He either did not want us to understand it, or, He was powerless to give it to us in a form that could be understood. If either alternative is true, He would not be a God to inspire confidence in us. If God is not able to reveal Himself to man (His own creation) in a way that man can understand, then He is not all-powerful. Thus we have an absurd condition of perfection revealed to us by an author that is not able to reveal perfection. Perfection revealed from imperfection! That is indeed ridiculous! A stream can rise no higher than its source. A product can be no better than its producer. If the God of the Bible is revealed as all-powerful, then surely the author of such a revelation is as great as that which He has revealed. Men universally understand that the God of the Bible is all-powerful, in spite of the fact that a vast majority of men

refuse to walk in His precepts. There is only one justified conclusion on this point. If God was able to reveal Himself through a message that would stand unscathed through the ages, He was able to construct that message so that man could understand it. Man can understand the Bible sufficiently to follow its instructions.

But how did God want us to understand His revealed will? To teach that the Word of God cannot be understood is actually to accuse God of being the author of confusion. Yet the Word itself teaches that He is not a God of confusion. In 1 Corinthians 14:33 Paul denies this very charge. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." He is everywhere pictured as leading men out of confusion and strife into peaceable understanding.

Our Lord Himself is presented in the New Testament as leading men in the light — indeed being light itself. In John 1:1-5 we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." To those who teach that we can't all see the Bible alike, the above passage should read "the Word was darkness, or confusion" rather than light. The apostle instructs the young man Timothy in the second book and verse ten of chapter one, "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Again this declaration, "How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." (Eph. 3:3-5.) Again and again such statements are made by men inspired of God. "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (I Cor. 2: 1-5.)

Does God require that we shall come to an understanding of His revealed will, and do the things commanded therein? Yes, absolutely. This is commanded explicitly, over and over. Peter commands us in 2 Peter 3:18, "Grow in grace, and in knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." In Ephesians chapter 5, beginning with verse 14, Paul teaches that we must understand what the will of God is: "Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore, be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." To understand and do the will of God is wise. In 1 John 2:17 we read, "He that doeth the will of God abideth [or liveth] forever." The last beatitude in the Bible (Rev. 22:14), breathes this promise:

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." These plain injunctions would all be without meaning if it were impossible to understand the Bible and harmoniously follow the instruction contained therein.

In conclusion, then, man is capable of understanding anything that is plainly revealed to him; and secondly, God was able and willing to give to us a message that we could follow in reason and righteousness. Although the Bible is a book that cannot be completely mastered by man, it can be understood by him. Indeed, it must be.

- J. T. Smith

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Why I Left My Former Religion!"* (text: 2 Tim. 1:7-10); Sunday evening: *"The Value of Reading the Bible!"* (text: 2 Tim. 3:14-17).