

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

03-61

Dear Reader

This issue begins our 7th year of publication. How thankful we are to our blessed Lord for this privilege of proclaiming His truth by this means. We have averaged 10 issues a year. We were far behind that average last year, which is a story in itself. We'll begin with that story and then have *worship* as our main subject, featuring articles by Leslie M. Grant of Seattle, WA and Bob Costen of Chesapeake, VA, no strangers to *Assembly Messenger* readers.

First, we need to meet our legal obligation to tell you that most quotes are from the New King James Version (NKJV), used with the permission of Thomas Nelson, the copyright holder. Where necessary, the J.N. Darby translation is used because of its well known faithfulness to the best Greek texts.

THE GARAGE

“Let us lay aside every weight ... which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking [away] unto Jesus” (Heb.12:1-2). A JND note on “looking unto Jesus” says, “Looking away from other things and fixing the eye exclusively on one.” A garage brought this verse to reality to me like nothing else in many a year. The story follows. To explain the background, I live in the 111 year old family homestead in Michigan.

My grandparents first got a car around 1910 and built a garage. That garage had become increasingly dilapidated over time, till it was unsafe to even be in. So it was time for a new one. What could be so hard in tearing down a rotted-out garage and then building a simple box? Since I had more time than money and could save about \$10,000, why not? I began demolition about June 1. Easy and quick? Sure! Like fun, it was! Two 20 cubic yard dumpsters filled to the brim were needed, with an actual 38,000 lbs of debris. 90 year old concrete is tough, even with a rented electric jackhammer. And it's heavy! Then the foundation was dug through dry, rock-hard clay and roots up to six inches in diameter. Pouring the foundation and the 24x28 foot slab is best described as lots of preparation followed by an hour of terror, followed by lots of relief. The wood and roof went up comparatively fast, but there was so much of it! The garage got painted in late November at the last possible date before the snow

flew and it got too cold to paint. I was so thankful for the help of my son, daughter and brother-in-law. But I spent virtually every moment of daylight working on it from June through November, six days a week. When I came in the house, I was too tired and sore to do much more than vegetate! It sure is nice to have an enclosed garage for the first time in our lives and I did lose considerable weight. So, what's the problem, you ask?

The problem is none of us have more than 168 hours in a week. There are life-necessities such as schooling, working a full-time job, eating, family necessities, and sleeping. Our discretionary hours are very limited. Even we who are retired are hard pressed to claim more than 90 discretionary hours; those in college or working, probably not more than 40 in the average week. The important question is, “What do we do with those discretionary hours?” Where do we place the *Lord's things* in our discretionary priority? I made a conscious decision to build a garage, but that decision used up most of my discretionary hours for 6 months. No, I didn't miss any of the meetings of the assembly, and I was able to attend and participate in many of the summer and fall conferences, but the *Lord's things* still suffered. *Assembly Messenger* preparation was dramatically cut. Personal study was greatly reduced. Prayer gave way to sleep. A “weight” I chose for myself had detrimental spiritual effects!

You may sympathize with me and tell me it was something that needed to be done and I don't make it a habit of building garages. I thank you, and yes, no more projects of that magnitude for me! A garage gets built; the weight is lifted; and those discretionary hours can be redirected to *God's* priority of Matthew 6:33, “Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”

But many times we chose for ourselves a “weight” that is not over in 6 months. We may call it a hobby or recreation, but whatever its name, we have made a calculated commitment to it, possibly spent lots of money on it, and plan to use it, play with it, put our time and effort into it, whenever possible. And that often is *weekends* during our long school and work life! Were we thinking of the *Lord* and His interests in our decision, or only of ourselves? What is going to suffer? Unless you are one of the rare exceptions, it is the *Lord's things* that suffer! We soon become one of

those who “forsake the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb.10:25). Yes, we are to “use this world,” but not “misuse” it (1 Cor.7:31). We too often seem to have forgotten, as our opening verse told us, to look away unto Jesus, and run the Christian race with endurance, and *that* can only be done when worldly weights are laid aside. If not, those weights become idols (anything that comes between us and the Lord) and thus become sin (1 Jn.5:21; Heb.12:1-2).

Well, to me, that’s the lesson of the garage! Now, let’s turn to our main features by Leslie M. Grant and Bob Costen. The more we have Christ and the Father before our minds, the less will they be filled with worldly things ... and the other way around, too!

John’s writings present and defend the deity, eternal Sonship and humanity of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, presenting Him as the *true Light* (Jn.1:9), as the *true Bread* (ch.6:32), as the *true Vine* (ch.15:1), as the *true God* (ch.17:3) and the *true Witness* (Rev.3:14). Therefore, if we will occupy our hearts and lives with this Holy One and the True, we will have a response to our God and Father as true worshipers for sharing His dear Son with us.

THE TRUE WORSHIPERS

Personal Worship

The Lord Jesus, in John 4:23, used the words, “the true worshipers,” in commending those who “worship in spirit and in truth.” If we are worshipers at all, can we desire anything less than His commendation? In the Old Testament the worship of the nation of Israel was accompanied by many forms and ceremonies which are called in Hebrews 9:10, “*fleshly ordinances* imposed until the time of reformation.” Thus it is made very clear that this worship was of a fleshly character, in contrast to “worship by the Spirit,” and it was intended only to be temporary – “until the time of reformation.” The time of reformation was certainly introduced by the coming of the Lord Jesus, who told the Samaritan woman at the well, “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn.4:23-24).

Why was such a drastic change made in this matter of worship? This should be very clear to every believer. The Lord of Glory Himself had come, the Person in whom all the Father’s glory is manifested. He has not only shown the governing-authority of God as did the

law of Israel: He has revealed God Himself, the eternal Object of adoration and worship. Thus, not only God’s power and authority are made known, But God Himself personally in all the excellence and beauty of His divine glory. The Lord Jesus has made Him known as “the Father” since the Lord Jesus is the Son of the Father in truth and love. While He speaks on behalf of the Father, as He does throughout the Gospel of John, He leaves no doubt that He Himself is to be worshiped just as the Father is worshiped (Jn.5:23). The man born blind, but healed by Him, had no hesitation in worshiping the Lord Jesus (Jn.9:36-38), and the Lord fully received that worship. Thomas also, after his experience in doubting the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, was moved deeply to call Him, “My Lord and my God” (Jn.20:28), and the Lord plainly received this worship also.

In these cases there was certainly no formal ceremony of any kind, such as there was in Israel, but it was true worship by true worshipers. There is no more beautiful picture of genuine worship than seen in John 12:3. “Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.” She did not even speak a word, but the worship of her heart was evident, and it received the Lord’s commendation. Thus it is clear that worship may be personal or individual, the heart being drawn in genuine faith and love to the Lord, to simply adore Him. There was no musical accompaniment in any of these cases, but rather worship in spirit and in truth, which surely delights the Father’s heart. The house being filled with the fragrance of the oil reminds us that genuine worship will wonderfully change the spiritual atmosphere where it is exercised, as well as being fragrant to God.

Unity in Worship

The carnal (or fleshly) worship that is seen under the Mosaic law was not only personal, but the worship of the people generally. What does Scripture teach as to unity in worship in the present Church of God, the Assembly? Some even teach that a preaching service is worship, or even a prayer meeting, but preaching or teaching is giving instruction to the people, not the worship of God. And prayer is requesting something from God, not giving Him worship at all.

Has God provided a meeting that is devoted to worship? Yes! The Lord Jesus introduced the Lord’s supper just before leaving the world by way of the cross and resurrection, saying, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk.22:19). Yet not a word is said about worship.

Why not? *Because He does not want us to think of forcing worship from our own hearts!* Instead, He asks that they break bread and partake of the cup in remembrance of Him. If we actually remember Him, involving thoughts of His coming from the highest glory to be born in obscurity, His lowly pathway of faithfulness, love and grace on earth, His being despised and rejected by men and bearing their bitter persecutions, His willingly going to the cross and there bearing, not only men's reproach and hatred, but the awesome judgment of God in being forsaken on account of our sins, will such thoughts of remembrance not move our hearts in adoring worship? *Thus our worship will not be in any measure forced, but rather the spontaneous outflow of faith and love, that is, worship in spirit and in truth.*

If this is true, the very thought of any form or ritual will be totally foreign to our minds. Can instrumental music – or any external addition -- have any place in such worship? It would only be a hindrance, for while such music is often very pleasant to the senses, it is not worship in spirit and in truth. The Father is pleased with what comes from the heart, the result of the deep working of the Spirit of God. We can hardly expect Him to be impressed with our ability to play an instrument well, though people may welcome it, and in certain circumstances, where the welfare of people is sought in Sunday school or in gospel meetings, such music may attract people, though we should not even then make it an object to entertain them.

Some have strongly advocated using a musical instrument in the breaking of bread because instruments were used in Old Testament worship. But the same principle applies as to this as to any kind of formal worship. Just as all Old Testament formal worship was symbolic of true worship, so is the use of instrumental music. No doubt every instrument used in the Old Testament is typical of some aspect of worship, *but only typical*: it is not worship in spirit and truth. Singing appropriate hymns of praise is the human voice engaged in honoring the Lord, and certainly this should come from our hearts. It is sadly possible that our thoughts may falter and become lax as regards our giving to God the worship that is becoming, but it is no remedy to introduce fleshly *helps* to sustain our worship.

Praise is not exactly the same as worship, for worship does not necessarily require any words, but rather the adoration of the heart, while praise is “the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (Heb.13:15). While worship thus may be silent, praise and thanks-

giving are vocal, no doubt giving voice to our worship.

In gathering to remember the Lord, how good it is if every heart is engaged in silent worship throughout the meeting, both sisters and brothers. But unity in worship is expressed audibly by brothers as they are led by the Spirit of God to engage in prayer and thanksgiving, in reading of Scripture that stirs the worship of hearts, and in giving out of appropriate hymns at appropriate times. Should not every brother be prepared to engage in this, and depend on the Spirit of God to lead him both as to the substance of what he speaks and as to the time of doing so? It is true that we are told, “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Cor.11:33), so that we should not be too forward, but consider that another may be as deeply moved as we are to take public part. Yet waiting too long is not wise either. But let us always have a true sense of unity, faith and love when we gather to remember the Lord. He is surely worthy of our wholehearted, united worship.

Just as our worship is actually giving to God, so it is becoming that the giving of our funds to the Lord is rightly connected with worship. Thus, it would not be consistent to take a collection at a gospel meeting where the meeting is for the benefit of the lost, nor at a ministry meeting where the ministry is for the benefit of Christians, nor at a prayer meeting where we ask the Lord for something, *but when giving worship to the Lord*. Thus the giving of our substance is consistent in the meeting for the breaking of bread (Heb.13:15-16; 1 Cor.16:1-2).

May we therefore deeply take to heart the words of Philippians 3:3, “For we are the circumcision [flesh cut off; set aside], who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

L.M. Grant

Now for Bob Costen's article which he entitles:

TRUE WORSHIPERS

True worshipers are to worship the Father in spirit (from one's innermost being) and in truth (according to the revelation of Christianity), and not according to any form of Judaism (Jn.4:20-24).

Comparison of Old Testament Worship and Christian Worship.

Old Testament worship was earthly, temporary, but typical – a picture of -- better things to come. Christian worship should be spiritual, heavenly and eternal.

The Things Necessary for Worship

There had to be a *revelation* of heavenly things (Mt.11:25-29; Jn.1:18; 14:6-9). The people had to be *redeemed* (Rom.3:24; Eph.1:6-7; Col.1:14) to truly worship in spirit and truth instead of simply being God's people outwardly. There had to be a true *relationship* (Jn.20:17; Eph.2:18) and also a *response* (Gal.4:6; Eph.3:21) coming from a true desire to worship according to the divine desire.

Worship Is the Highest Service that Can Be Rendered

Our conscience has been purged from dead works to serve (worship) the living God (Heb.9:16; 10:1-2). We worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh, our sinful nature (Phil.3:3). This is an intelligent worship since we know the Father and the Son, and have the Word of God to explain God's desires for us.

True worship indicates fullness and completeness. It is an attitude of heart "springing up" in response to Him. It shows a deep appreciation of Christ who revealed the Father to us.

We give thanks for what we have received (material blessings, health, family, our salvation, the Bible, Christian fellowship, etc.). We praise the Father for what He has done, and we worship Him for who He is. Look up the uses of "worship" in the New Testament. It is most often a translation of the Greek word *proskuneo*. In most cases where there is any indication of who or what is worshiped, God (Him) is in view. The Father is the Source in the Godhead (Jas.1:17) and He dearly loves us. Therefore, since He seeks worshipers (Jn.4), how fitting to praise, worship and adore Him.

The Lord Jesus is the Leader of Praise and Worship to the Father

Psalm 22:22 tells us that the Lord Jesus in resurrection "will declare Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the assembly I will praise You." This verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:10-13 and made New Testament *assembly truth* – In the midst of the *assembly* (Gk: ekklesia) I will praise You." See also John 17:26 and 20:17.

Also, the Lord Jesus has a new song in His mouth, even praise unto our God (Ps.40:1-3). Further, He is the great Priest over the house of God (Heb.9:21) and He supports us as we draw near to God (Heb.9:19-22).

What a great privilege it is to worship the Father and the Son, individually and collectively! Perhaps you can see why from this brief outline that most of what today is called worship is not worship at all and certainly not worship in spirit and in truth.

Bob Costen

CLOSING NOTES

In the next issue we expect, the Lord willing, to begin with a follow-up article on "worldliness" which will bring to mind our opening story on the Garage. Then we expect to take up the serious and important question of the Eternal Sonship of Christ. This is a vital part of "the doctrine of Christ," although many have very little knowledge of the subject. You might be thinking about it before we send out the issue in late March, early April.

We are thankful that our website, **assemblymessenger.com** has been up and running since about the first of the year, thanks to my daughter, Cindy Kalandek. She has posted some links on it and even some pictures which sort of go with this month's lead article. She will maintain the site and will post new issues approximately as they are mailed out. You can read or download current and past issues.

Now that the *Assembly Messenger* is available on-line, some may prefer to receive it that way, instead of by regular mail. If so, let us know via the e-mail address on the website or by snail mail and we will remove you from our mailing list. However, if you prefer receiving the *Messenger* by regular mail, as currently, we are happy to continue that way. It is completely your preference.

In closing, at the beginning of the new year, I want to thank Bob Costen for his continuing careful and thorough reviews of each issue, Cindy for her efforts in doing the website, Mike Doyle for providing the mailing labels, and my wife and Art and Dorothy Kucharoff for preparing the envelopes for mailing.

RPD