

# Vertical and Horizontal Worship and Service To God

Cecil Hook

## 1. God Of The High Places

Where is God? That is not a childish question satisfied by a simplistic answer. Long ago, Job cried out, “*Oh, that I knew where to find him, that I might come even to his seat!*” (Job 23:3). The elusive nature of God may cause those who have dedicated their lives to him today to keep Job’s painful inquiry alive. If we are to believe in him, serve him, and worship him, should we not at least know in which direction to seek to encounter his transcendent Presence?

Probably no pagans have ever worshipped wood and stone as gods. Physical icons have been designed to represent the unseen, mystical god that is conceived. Such images, icons, idols, or gods have been venerated because they were thought to represent a being of super-human powers. Even though God tried to lift Israel above veneration of graven images, the Tabernacle with its Ark of the Covenant, and Temple held awe nearing the point of veneration, like when the Ark of the Covenant was carried into battle as an icon of the presence of their war-God who was more powerful than the pagan gods. It was “the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts,” the fighting army of God (1 Sam. 4:4).

Considering that gods were mystical and unseen with super-human qualities, it was easy to think that they dwelt in the mountains. In Old Testament history we read of altars in the high places (Num. 23:3; 33:52; Lev. 26:20; Deut. 33:29; 1 Kings 20:23), and numerous incidents relating to Israel and Jesus seem to indicate the feeling of God’s presence and communication in high places. Emphasizing the higher source of his help, however, David asked, “*I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come?*” Then he answers, “*My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*” Yet the praise expressed in Old Testament writings more often was in recognition of national triumphs in which God had enabled them. His plaintive psalms often related to distress caused by political enemies.

Pointing above the mountains, David pled, “*Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to thee for help, as I lift up my hands toward thy most holy sanctuary*” (Psa. 28:2). David pointed us heavenward to him who made the hills and is above the gods who were limited to them. But does he locate God? We know him as our Heavenly Father, yet that Hebrew concept does not locate or define God! It only accommodates man’s limited concepts of a visible parent in a certain body and location. God pre-existed the heavens! “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” Where was/is his eternal dwelling place?

By his revelation of himself in mountain-top scenes, did he not give credence to the belief of his being a God of the high places? In a sense, he did, just as do those references of heaven being

the place of his dwelling, seat, and throne. In the mind of man God is inscrutable, incomprehensible, and without definition. We have no frame of reference in which to fit him (or time or space) except ourselves and our surroundings. God must reveal himself within our limitations of understanding, else there is no revelation of him. God is Spirit, and we cannot conceive of spirit without some physically discernible characteristic or location.

When it is stated that God made us in his image, could that mean a physical image? God is Spirit. He has no physical form with male/female function or bodily organs to sustain a physical body. His appearance in human form in a special revelation to a person is called a *theophany*. He is said to have eyes, ears, face, hands, arms, feet, and voice. His reasoning and thought processes, along with human emotions, portray him as having our nature. These must be understood as *anthropomorphisms*, that is, human characteristics attributed to him to accommodate our limited comprehension.

To say that we are in the spiritual image of God is anthropomorphic also, for an image demands a bodily form as a model. To believe that I am like God in spirit is reassuring, but I have no comprehension of my spirit within my own body apart from some physical imagery. I have witnessed many baptisms but have not seen the Holy Spirit enter a person. I have observed as a number of persons have drawn their last breaths but could not see the exit of either the human spirit or the Holy Spirit from the body. Artists have depicted spirits as vapory and visionary. Claims of *feeling* God's spirit working within us depend upon physical perceptions.

Where, then, may we locate God? Rather than God being some oversized form with human features, perhaps he is an omnipresent Spirit that defies human concepts of form, measurement, or location.

When worshippers lift up their hands to God, in what direction do they lift them? When we bow before him, can we be sure he is above us as a God of the high places instead of beneath us? He is in heaven, but is heaven a measured-off spot in the universe? Every erect tree, fence post, and utility pole on earth points upward to God continuously as the earth rotates, but they do not point to the same spot.

The concepts of God have changed through Biblical history as God has revealed himself more clearly. Through Christ he has greatly enhanced our perspective. Now I do not praise him and pray to him as a form in the skies somewhere, but as a Spirit within me inseparable from my own spirit.

God is Spirit (John 4:24), and when we are baptized, he enters us by his own life-giving Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). He lives not in temples made with hands (Acts 7:48; 17:24), but he lives in a spiritual temple, his saved body (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:22) by being in our bodies individually (1 Cor. 6:19). "*The Lord is in his holy temple!*" By this means, Jesus' prayer is fulfilled, as he prayed "*that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us...*" (John 17: 21).

Many texts could be cited on the subject, but let us now consider only Colossians 3:1-4. "*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the*

*right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*” How are we to interpret the abundance of physical concepts so familiar here? Must we not recognize anthropomorphic accommodations detailing beautiful imagery of spirituality and relationship as though they were physical?

In view of all this, I go to no structure, or place, or assembly of people, nor do I look outward, or posture myself in some direction, or perform a visible function in order to worship acceptably. I can worship him directly by communing and meditating even in silence at any and all times. My thoughts, even my unexpressed aims, purposes, and longings, are as “audible” to him as is my voice. This does not mean, however, that I cannot also worship acceptably in form and function corporately.

Employing physical terms, I can say he is **IN** me and **SURROUNDS** me every moment, for in him I live and move and have my being. That’s about as close as I can come to “locating” God.

## 2. Activity In The Temple

References to us as the temple of God allude to the Jewish temple of Old Testament history. It was the place of priestly ministry in serving / sacrificing / offering in worship to God’s Presence in this place of meeting. All temple activity served this purpose, whether it was the daily rituals, the offering of special sacrifices, cleaning the utensils, dealing with invading ants and spiders, or maintenance of the physical structure. It was a place of continuous worship and service. God “met” with them in this holy place.

Now that we are in Christ, our mediator, God has met with us in Christ – the temple who was destroyed and raised up again. There is “where” God is! We are the temple of his Presence, his Spirit, as individuals. Collectively, we are his one, universal body in which he dwells. This meeting with God in Christ is the “place” of total offering and continuous worship / service. We are not referring to congregations, systems, localities, schedules, or buildings.

The various types and shadows are fulfilled in us. Each of us becomes a priest having offered himself as a living sacrifice and praise offering to God through the high priest, Jesus Christ. Being totally dedicated, we are holy ones who live in holiness. It is a whole-life, living offering rather than segmented or scheduled portions of our lives. Though some of it is formally directed as ritualistic offering to God, the more mundane activities of life are no less dedicated to him.

Paul’s appeal for whole-life dedication is forceful: *“I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”* (Rom. 12:1). Including all our activities of life, not just “acts of worship,” he urges, *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (Col. 3:17). While we seek to please God, Paul gives us permission to use our own judgment in disputable matters. *“He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord,*

*and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's* (Rom. 14:6-9). We serve in totality.

Living as a temple involves all the day-by-day activities relating to all our needs, whether spiritual, physical, educational, recreational, or social. These needs are not met as ends in themselves but as they relate to spiritual service. Whether in private or with others, we may engage in any and all things judged to be helpful, moral, meaningful, and honorable.

Since all these things may be done in offering ourselves (our spiritual worship!), what does it say about what we can do when we are with other disciples? Is our spiritual worship suddenly shrunk to “five acts of worship” conducted by males only when we enter a formal assembly? Do we change channels when we cross the threshold, leaving the secular and entering the spiritual? Have we left our temples of continuous worship / service to enter a more holy one for two hours? Is the Spirit that indwells us more sensitive and easily offended when we are worshipping together?

Nowhere in the apostolic writings are we commanded to assemble to worship though there is record of disciples meeting together. No menu or routine of activities is prescribed for gatherings of disciples. Those who seek a pattern for Christian worship never agree on what they think should be included in the pattern. Patternists are inconsistent in their choices and in their rejection of others who do not agree.

Without finding a prescribed list of appropriate activities for gatherings, we can observe that disciples did whatever they considered would benefit those present and would honor God. What better rule could we follow today? They were not trying to keep rules but to upbuild themselves and praise God. Once more, I make this bold and challenging declaration: There is no instance in Bible history of God refusing the sincere worship of any person, even though the acts of worship had not been prescribed. It is true that God rejected Cain, Nadab and Abihu, and Saul and their offerings, but they were not humbly and sincerely trying to honor God. Certain Athenians who had no revelation from God were commended because they were worshipping “the unknown god.” Do you suppose they performed five acts of worship? The giving of ourselves as living sacrifices is in response to the grace of God. Dedicated living is not trying to earn salvation or to keep a score card of rules, but doing the things that enhance our spiritual lives and honor God. Why should the corporate temple be different in purpose and action from the individual temple?

Since I have dealt with these points in other essays, I shall move on.

### **3. The Incentives For Assembling**

During my upbringing, many times I heard it stated that we are commanded to meet upon each first day of the week – “the Lord’s Day.” It was thought to be our obligation to fulfill a command by assembling and performing certain rituals identified as “the five acts of worship.” This became *the worship service*. Although disciples could pray and sing praises at home or in other gatherings, “the assembly” on the “Lord’s Day” was the time of true worship.

Effort to please God by keeping commands is dependence upon legal works which we perform. Limiting acceptable worship to assemblies, or “the assembly,” segments our life of dedication into the secular and the spiritual, that is, secular works that have no spiritual value and spiritual works of merit. It would give God his time in assemblies while we claim the rest for ourselves.

Having Hebrews 10:25 instilled in me, I used it both as a hammer and anvil to forge out a command, to design “the assembly” (rather than “the assembling”), to frame it around “the worship,” and to weld it to the first day of the week as the authorized day. But let us look again briefly at the setting of this meaningful text.

The epistle to the Hebrew disciples offers much to reinforce their faith in preparation for a dramatic event of history. God had chosen a nation and given it the covenant of Law in preparation for the giving of a new covenant in Christ. The “last days” of Judaism were at hand because of their rejection of Christ. Their city was to be destroyed, the earthly covenant fulfilled, and their people would be scattered. “He abolishes the first in order to establish the second,” (Heb. 10:9) is written about the covenants. The impending destruction of Jerusalem would be the end of Judaism. After his ascension, Jesus became king, and now the first order is to be removed. That would be the time of confirming “a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:18-29).

When the Law was to be given and the Covenant was to be made at Sinai, Israel cleansed themselves and assembled in fear of drawing near to God though they kept a distance from him (Exo. 19-20).. Alluding to that, the writer urges the Hebrew disciples to have confidence of their relationship through Christ. Lest any waver in those trying times, they were to associate with each other in assemblies where their confidence would be built up continually. These were to be supportive associations rather than times of performing rituals of worship. Since they did not know the day or the hour of Jesus’ coming in this Day of the Lord, they were urged not to neglect these strengthening gatherings.

Undoubtedly, they worshipped any time they gathered, whether in scheduled meetings or in social gatherings. The passages about singing, which we use as prooftexts, in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, were speaking of social gatherings, as you will see by reading them in context. Even though disciples were to “stir up one another to love and good works” and to be “encouraging one another” in their assemblies, no method for doing so is prescribed. No five acts of worship. Surely, they must have used whatever methods they thought would fulfill the purpose. We would not doubt that they prayed, sang, discussed the sacred writings, reviewed the working of God in the past, communed, gave testimonials of faith, and pledged their loyalty to one another and to God in gatherings but not necessarily in every assembly.

The exhortation was to do those things “as you see the Day drawing near.” After the Day passed when the Lord fulfilled his prophecies about Jerusalem in A.D. 70, were disciples to continue those meetings? Was this a universal command?

If support gatherings were profitable for them in building their faith and character, then surely they would be profitable likewise for us, but they are engaged in by persons desiring greater strength rather than to have an attendance check mark in God’s records.

The legal concepts on which I was nurtured caused us to try to force exhortations into commands and then to try to supply all the specifics to be obeyed. Thus we made the exhortation for assembling for mutual edification into the *assembly* commanded by God for all people of all times and then searched out *five acts of worship* thought to be commanded by God. We felt legally bound to observe these gatherings whether they built us up or depressed us.

#### **4. New Paradigm for Assemblies Considered**

Since beginning the publication of my materials over twelve years ago, I have heard from many members of our congregations. Judging from their comments, perhaps the greatest change of concepts among us in this generation has been concerning our worship. There is a growing recognition of our living sacrifice of whole-life worship/service rather than segments of our lives being devoted to God. Our assemblies are being considered more as support gatherings for those honoring God than as formal worship through specific rituals directed to God. The purpose has been seen as including both but with more emphasis on the horizontal. Such an understanding erases the pattern concept for “authorized worship.” It frees worship from limitations of schedules, rituals, places, systems, and personnel while still making wise use of those elements.

This concept is rejected outrightly by those who hold to our traditional concepts of an authorized pattern of worship which includes “the five acts of worship” vertically and formally directed to God. This worship has a beginning and an end and is usually identified as the activity within “the assembly.” It is supposedly modeled after a New Testament pattern, though it is legalistic in character. It excludes any variation as sinful.

Although the whole-life concept is recognized as valid by others, they reject it as the focus of assemblies. These disciples call for a new paradigm for worship. This *paradigm* is a current “buzz” word of some leaders of academic status. As to its meaning, *paradigm* more literally means “to show side by side,” hence it is an example or pattern. It is the introduction of another shade of patternism.

This new paradigm would modify the purpose of the assembly in two main perspectives. First, it would be to present ourselves to God in praise and service in recognition of who he is and what he did through Christ on the cross, rather than in praise for current blessings or to seek relief from present distresses. Second, it would be to repeatedly offer ourselves to God at the Lord’s Table at which there is weekly portrayal of, and participation in, the sacrifice of Christ on each Lord’s Day. Through this the worshipper is given spiritual strength. All of this gives more “high church” character with focus on the interaction between the worshipper and God rather than interaction between the disciples. Any “one another” edification comes from the pulpit. By this the role of the pulpit and preacher is established and strengthened.

Congregations which have implemented this concept have adapted terminology (praise team, seeker service, etc.), programs, and practices of the Willow Creek Community Church, a mega “nondenominational” church in South Barrington, Illinois of which Bill Hybels is pastor. The validity of these concepts is not to be judged by who thought of them first, but by scriptural principle.

Let me state here that I welcome effective change in our assemblies. I have long since grown weary of dutifully “going to church” to listen to platitudes and to endure depressing routines and conducted even by the sincerest of people. To criticize their misdirections would be to criticize myself for I have been deeply involved. I hope always to recognize and welcome change that will make assemblies more effective in fulfilling spiritual purposes.

All are to be commended who sincerely seek to worship and serve God even though their understanding may be immature and misdirected. I suspect that includes all of us. The cheering realization, however, is that there is no record in the Bible of God rejecting the sincere worship of any humble person even though it might have been shallow in concept and expressed in method or ritual neither required nor specified by God. Worship is accepted more on the basis of a right heart than right knowledge.

We applaud all who assemble each Sunday to honor God by participation in the Lord’s Supper and other spiritual activities. We will question, however, some of the direction and emphasis fostered by the new paradigm.

The first point is not really new for it only reemphasizes an old concept of identifying our assembling as the assembly. Thus it distinguishes worship on Sunday from that in other gatherings and in home-life worship. It tends to identify a pie-shaped segment cut out of secular life to be distinguished as more sacred.

It changes the epochal meaning of *the Day* (Heb. 10:25) and *the Lord’s day* (Rev. 1:10) to the first day of the week. Acceptance of the first day of the week as a holy or special day is based upon questionable evidence at best. I have dealt with this subject at length in my books.

In this modified pattern, drawing near to God (Heb. 10:22) is done in “the assembly”. However, this reference is an allusion to Israel drawing near to God fearfully at Sinai in order to enter a covenant relationship. We accomplished this in Christ when we accepted covenant relationship in our conversion culminating in baptism into Christ, reception of the Spirit, and our reconciliation to God. We are no longer “afar off” so that we need to draw near because his Spirit resides in us. The yearning to communicate with a transcendent God “beyond the azure blue” seems due to a feeling of continued alienation rather than our being sanctified in him with no impediment to person-to-person communication with him. Christ has given us unhindered access to the Father to whom we have come boldly. If in our praying “in Jesus’ name,” we think that he relays our prayers to the Father, that further expresses a feeling of separateness. Christ is no longer my active mediator to make God accessible for he has brought me to the Father. He is now my advocate standing in my place.

While the Communion is a symbolic participation in the body and blood, that is, the atonement (anthromorphisms again), it holds no mystical, transcendent value. We are hearing more use of the term *sacrament* relating to the Communion. The sacramental concept comes through the Catholic Church who devised the “seven sacraments”, the Holy Eucharist (Communion) being one of them. A sacrament is a rite through which, when performed correctly, grace is thought to be infused into the soul. In communing, remembrance is made of the grace we have received, but it is/was not the means by which we received it.

According to this new paradigm, the Lord's Supper should add transcendence to our experience. True, a spiritual meaning is given a physical participation, but does this concept of transcendence point us to the God of the high places in the remote universe or to the God who is there present in his temple/temples?

In the sacramental concept of the Communion among Catholics, the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the mystical body and blood of Christ through which Jesus' body is sacrificed again in each mass. Do we not hear hints of that sacramental concept in the new paradigm? We already enjoy the benefits of the once-for-all-times sacrifice of Jesus.

Anticipation of "drawing near" into the transcendent Presence is awesome, but Jesus relieved our fear and made it a joy. We agree that the memorial meal should be eaten in reverence, but we see some ambiguity or hybrid nature. It was eaten with another meal! Were "fellowship meals" somber? Perhaps the Passover meal in which the supper was begun was somber, but may the enjoying of a meal with other disciples not be with pleasantries? In current practice, where the Lord's Supper is the focus of the assembly and is separated from a meal and the singing is all specifically praise of the majesty of God, we have tried to recreate the awe. But apart from the Supper, are there not moments of humor and laughter in those assemblies? Do reverence and awe produce solemnity? Does recognition of the awesome presence of the Spirit indwelling within prevent our fun and laughter outside "the assembly"? Or is being in or out of "the assembly" a determining factor?

No doubt, you have already concluded that what little brain I am endowed with is lodged securely on the left side. Maybe it is to my discredit, but my eyes never glaze over or fill with tears as I contemplate God's Presence. I do not expect vertical worship to be some sort of mystical seance with God lifting me into euphoria. I instinctively resist the mesmerizing manipulations of leaders to lift me into trance-like ecstasy. Is an emotional high in worship a spiritual high? "I just feel the presence of the Spirit here tonight," we hear someone exclaim. The emotional experience is thought to break into the area of transcendence of God. Emphasis on vertical communication has revived as part of the charismatic revival. Those euphoric feelings sometimes give way to ecstatic utterances. Are those manifestations of the Spirit? I cannot prove or disprove it. Worshipers in various pagan religions have been known to speak ecstatically. Were they moved by the Spirit? Subjective experiences prove nothing and cannot become standards for others. If they express a deeper feeling for God for the worshiper, then they may accomplish good.

We sing of entering his house with thanksgiving and praise, but that is an Old Testament concept of worship taking place where the holy furniture of the tabernacle was housed. His house is neither a building nor an assembly, but it is the people in whom his Spirit dwells.

No objection is being raised against formal praise in our meetings. The question is whether or not a vertical upreach is the purpose and focus of the assembly. God is to be glorified, so let us look at some terms. *Glory* means opinion, estimate, the honor resulting from a good opinion. *Glorify* means to extol, praise, ascribe honor. To be *glorified* means to exhibit one's glory (See *Vine*).

There are two aspects to praise or glorification. The first is directed to God, like “I praise you, God.” The second is to ascribe honor to God for the benefit of others, like “Praise the Lord.” It may be surprising to you to note the scarcity of the first aspect in the New Testament writings. There is only one instance of a person expressing love directly to Jesus, and Jesus had to twist Peter’s arm to get him to say it (John 21:15f)! You may wish to help me find those many (?) expressions like “I love you, God,” and “I praise you, Jesus.” While there are many expressions ascribing honor to God, most of them are expressed with a hortatory effect on other people. It is like when we sing, “Praise God from whom all blessing flow,” we honor God by exhorting others to honor him.

Does this not fulfill the purpose of praise? Does God have emotions like we insecure humans that are lifted by our calculated words of praise? Or, is he more concerned that all individuals recognize his love and provision for them so that they will be reconciled to him and live sanctified lives? God is a jealous God, not out of a bad emotion, but in that he does not want any alienation of our affections which would deter our eternal fellowship with him. A worshipping assembly is an interactive one for the benefit those present.

The First Commandment is to love God. The Second Commandment actually tells us how to do it -- by loving our neighbor. In another context, Jesus declared, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). Perhaps you have heard the old sarcastic quip about the overly pious person who was “so heavenly minded that he was of no earthly good.” True piety does not overlook people. Do you offer praise which may include uplifted hands and clapping in private, or is it only when you are with others? If it is only when you are with others, you are recognizing the horizontal purpose. God does not need our extravagant expressions, but those assembled gain strength from the contemplation of the God being praised. Ultimately, the value of praise is horizontal also.

As I was growing up in the Great Depression, the austerity of life was reflected in the songs we sang. Many were about the fleeting, transitional nature of life with lack of earthly allurements and pointing to heaven as the fulfillment of earth’s shattered dreams. However, in our present affluent generation that enjoys instant gratification, more songs express praise for what has been provided for us. Both kinds can honor God.

The psalms of David have been used appropriately as models of praise. But look again. Far from being praise, many of his psalms are desperate and plaintive cries for help and of confession. It is after help, or the prospect of it, comes that praise is forthcoming. He was not praising God when lying for days on the floor by his dying child. His expressions were more likely those plaintive cries recorded in Psalm 51.

When a four-year-old runs screaming to her father in fright of a big dog, that is a form of praise in recognizing him as her loving protector even as saying, “I love you, Daddy,” would be. The ten-year-old son who is so ill that he only moans, “Mama, Mama, ...” while she holds his hand is honoring her even as a Valentine would. Our constant requests for relief of our distresses and the thanksgiving for God’s provision honor him by a show of faith, reverence, and dependence upon him.

In spite of the facade of happiness we wear as we enter the assembly, a great number of us are deeply troubled and burdened. We hobble into God's clinic for comfort and healing. There you may be lifted by singing, "God is so good; he's so good to me." But how does that sound to the woman sitting behind you whose abusive husband left with another woman, the car, and all the money, leaving her with the children and the bills? As we sing those words, pictures may flow through the minds of others of streams of homeless, starving, frightened refugees fleeing tyranny, inhumanity, and death. Are we boasting of God's goodness to us as reward for our trust while other believers suffer? Praise can have a Pollyanna sentiment that is unreal and self-righteous. Or am I becoming too cynical?

Prayerful expressions honor God. "*Does Jesus Care?*", "*Where Could I Go But To The Lord?*", and "*Be With Me, Lord,*" may not be your favorite songs, but their type offers mutual encouragement and praise to God at the same time.

If we are looking for precedents for assemblies, we would have to give much consideration to 1 Corinthians 10-14, with most of it directed to Chapter 14, even though we may not be eager to copy it too closely.

In Chapter 10, Paul urges avoidance of worship of idols by referring metaphorically to the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons, and to the table of the Lord and the table of demons. A disciple must not identify with both. By participation in the blood and body metaphorically, we proclaim to those present our identity with Christ. In the same action we tell others of the Lord's death for us until he comes (Ch. 11).

As Paul discusses spiritual gifts in Chapter 12, he reveals, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Actually, the assembly is not the context for use of gifts, but whenever they were exercised, they were to be for the common good, not formal praise.

In correcting abusive use of gifts in the assemblies in Chapter 14, seven times Paul emphasizes that the gifts should all be exercised for edification of those present rather than vertical offerings to God. "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification (v. 26)." Notice that this includes the hymns.

## **5. Pattern or Principle?**

This has been a long, disorganized, and somewhat redundant monologue which needs some conclusion. More questions have been asked hoping to provoke further study but not just for you to reach my conclusions.

If we do not meet to fulfill a command, then why do we assemble? Well, doesn't everybody know that we assemble to worship God? Not exactly. Living in continuous worship / offering to God, we do not have to meet to worship.. When we come together, we are worshippers meeting to worship together. This worship has both vertical and horizontal aspects. Some expressions are directed specifically to God, even as when we offered thanks for breakfast before "going to church." Much of our activity has our fellow-disciple in mind. We pray for one another, we teach

each other, we give money to help human beings, we teach and admonish one another in singing, and we bear testimony to others in the Communion.

In seeking to follow lawful patterns we have itemized five activities to be performed in Sunday gatherings, no more and no less. But we have become lawyers in debating what is acceptable and what is not. Those debates have resulted in divisions. We have wanted to be sure we were keeping God's commands. We have thought we were keeping his law when we performed those functions.

Many among us now are recognizing the misdirection of our legalistic mindset and are looking for principles to guide our worship in gatherings. The question we now ask is, "Does the activity build us up?" Edification is the guiding principle to rule our conduct and activity when we meet together. We do not question the appropriateness of our traditional five acts of worship, yet disciples may meet for varied activities which are designed to be supportive and beneficial to the group. In our gatherings we may show acceptance of others by loving greetings, inquiries into the welfare of others, discussion of common needs, and making announcements publicly. We may read scriptures publicly and in unison. We may read statements of belief in unison. The ancient custom of responsive reading and antiphonal singing may be revived, along with songs by an individual or a smaller group. We may relish the company of one another while enjoying refreshments or eating a fellowship meal. We may meet together to dedicate our children to the Lord, to witness and celebrate a marriage, or to mourn and bury our dead. Testimonials of God's work in our lives encourage others. Reports by missionaries may spur us to activity. We may meet to hear the name of Christ confessed and to witness baptism. Meetings for disciplining a wayward disciple may be in order. Plans for the group may be discussed and decided upon. Special programs involving the children may prove to be helpful. Utilizing projectors, videos, dramas, and printed materials may be effective. Other minor activities may be appropriate within the assembly like saying "amen," clapping, gesticulations by a speaker, waving of the hand or baton by a song leader, and weeping and wiping of tears of gratitude, sorrow, or remorse.

In fulfilling principles governing assemblies, any one or any number of these activities may be engaged in for the edification of those present. In the same process the group will be praising and honoring God while fulfilling his purposes for the good of man.

Legalism limits and represses with a slave mentality. Following principle opens the way for utilizing all that is good and helpful. []