

# THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

*A special plea for non-members visiting with us...*

## WHERE WOULD JESUS WORSHIP?

If Christ returned to earth and visited our community this week, which church would He attend come Sunday? He would certainly have a variety from which to choose. There are about as many denomination variations as there are imaginations. Would He choose a sectarian body? It was His custom to regularly worship while on earth (Luke 2:42; 4:16). Where would He go if He came back?

**He Would Attend One that Honored His Name.** Jesus demands preeminence in all things (Colossians 1:18) - including the designation given to local churches. All men should be concerned with glorifying Him, but today there is a lack of regard for His precious name. The name by which a religious body goes is important, because every time it is used, honor is given to the one for whom it is named. Most church names honor some man, ordinance, or its members.

Since He paid for the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), it is fitting that it should honor Him by what it is called. In the New Testament, congregations were called "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16), and similar terms. One would expect Jesus to go to a church that honored Him by what was on its sign.

Further, Christ is honored when His followers are called "Christians." Just Christians—not prefixed and hyphenated with some man's name, ordinance, or manmade title. When one is asked what he is religiously, his answer will either honor or dishonor Christ. By being called simply "Christians," Christ receives the honor due a crucified Lord and King of kings (I Timothy 6:16).

The Bible places considerable emphasis on the name "Christian." Isaiah prophesied, "And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name" (62:2; cf. 65:15). "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (Acts 11:26b). "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). As Paul taught Agrippa, he replied, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" (Acts 26:28). How may Christ be glorified? "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (I Peter 4:16). The American Standard Version of the Bible translates the last phrase, "...glorify God in this name." We glorify God by wearing the name, and only the name of Christ.

James calls it "the worthy name" (2:7). All can agree, Christ is pleased with this name. Why cannot divisive party names be given up? Paul asked the same question: "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Corinthians 1:10-13).

**He Would Attend One that Taught His Doctrine.** Of course, all churches teach some of His doctrine, but would He attend one that taught some error and some truth? No, He taught others to follow the apostle's teaching (Matthew 16:19; John 16:13), and only approves of those who follow all of it (Acts 20:26-27; cf. 2:42). He said, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:20) and, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Little children sing of the wise man who built his house upon a rock. Jesus explained that this rock was obedience to His commands, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24).

He would not attend a service where the Bible was not being followed (I Peter 4:1), or where members were not taught to live godly lives (Titus 2:11-12). If a church ignores or endorses the popular sins of the day, it is not a place where Jesus would be comfortable worshipping. He expects His church to take a stand against every evil (Ephesians 5:8-11).

## **IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST A DENOMINATION?**

A frequent follow-up question to “Are you a Christian?” is “What denomination are you?”

“Denomination” is not found in the Bible, and the idea is based on sectarianism and division.

“Denomination” is not simply an incidental name, but a choice to be divided from other believers who do not share the same sectarian doctrines. Religious denominations are divisions among people who may all claim to follow the same Lord and the same Bible but cannot agree because of their denomination.

As Jesus prayed for His apostles before His arrest, He said, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me” (John 17:20-21). Jesus wanted unity among His apostles, and everyone who would believe the apostles’ teaching (whether through their preaching or writings). This unity is not possible as long as the denominational system exists.

The denominational system has developed with various creeds, manuals, handbooks, hierarchies, and systems of organization, which have grown more complex over time. Years ago many people understood that the denominational system was a violation of God’s will and sought to leave the denominations so that they could restore the “undenominational” church of the New Testament. By being just Christians, without being associated with any denomination, they believed they could better serve God. That is why the churches of Christ are undenominational. We have no creed but the Bible, no denominational or church hierarchy over the local congregation, and no authority for faith and practice other than the Bible. We are not “Church of Christ Christians,” but simply Christians.

“Seeds” of denominationalism were in the church at Corinth. Paul wrote, “It hath been declared unto me of you my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ”: (I Corinthians 1:11-12). Some were not satisfied to be Christians only, but wanted to be “Paulite Christians,” or “Apollosite Christians,” or “Cephasite Christians.” Paul asked “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1:13). They had divided the church into arguing factions. Paul emphasized the seriousness of the situation by saying he was glad he had only baptized a few at Corinth, so few could claim to follow him instead of Christ (1:14-16). Of what denomination were Peter and Paul? None! They were just Christians.

The church of Christ, if it truly is the church we read of in the New Testament, cannot be a denomination.

*-Bob Prichard*

**He Would Attend One that Worshipped “In Spirit and Truth” (John 4:24).** He promised to be with those who met “in his name” (Matthew 18:20), which means worshipped by His authority (Colossians 3:17; Acts 4:7). Jesus would not attend a worship service where someone was banging on a piano, or where a choir/chorus was performing. He commanded men to sing, not play (Colossians 3:16). He commanded all to sing, not just a few (Ephesians 5:19; cf. 1:1). He condemns those who add, subtract, or change His word (Revelation 22:18-19). To add these innovations is to dishonor the One who deserves praise.

He would not attend a church that emphasized entertaining men rather than worshipping God (John 4:24; Galatians 1:10). He would worship where sermons were filled with Bible quotations (II Timothy 4:2).

**He Would Attend One that Taught His Salvation Plan.** The reason Christ came to earth was to save souls (Luke 19:10). This is why His church exists today (Mark 16:15-16). Since only the truth can set men free (John 8:32), salvation comes to those who learn and obey truth (Hebrews 5:8-9), whereupon they enter God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). The conditions for pardon are: belief in Christ as the Son of God (John 3:16; 8:24); repentance of sins (Luke 13:3); confession of faith (Matthew 10:32-33); and immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). In order for one to remain saved, one must continue to be obedient to the Gospel (Revelation 2:10; Galatians 5:4).

Jesus would not attend a church that taught salvation by faith only, because He did not teach such (Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16), nor did His inspired evangelists (James 2:24). He would not worship where baptism was ridiculed and its saving power denied (I Peter 3:21). He also would not attend where members were taught that they could do enough good works to erase their sins (Luke 17:10).

Should we not attend the church Jesus would choose if He returned Sunday? We encourage you to investigate the church of Christ. Its members are not perfect but they are trying to follow the New Testament pattern exactly.

The church of Christ honors His name by being called “church of Christ” and its members are called simply “Christians.” It honors His doctrine by only teaching those things that can be read in the New Testament. It worships “in spirit and truth” by practicing only the simple acts that characterized worship in the first century. It teaches the salvation plan that originated with Christ, not Calvin’ with the Lord, not Luther’ with the Prince of Peace, not the pope of Rome. It wants men to follow the Commander, not a catechism. It will have no one to obey any man’s creed, but the Master’s command.

**Why not worship where Jesus would worship if He were back on earth again?**

*-Allen Webster*

## WORSHIPPING THE KING

God has always demanded worship, and His deity allows this. Man cannot demand worship because that would be egotistical, arrogant, undue, and vain. However, God as being attributed with the nature that He encompasses is able to demand worship because He deserves it. In fact man was made with the intent of rendering service (including worship) unto God (Genesis 1:26). But man has misinterpreted God's demand for worship by misdirecting, misapplying, and mishandling the divine charge. Therefore man must once again reach into the recesses of God's infinite knowledge revealed in scripture and re-determine what it means to worship the King.

One of the premiere ways that man has perverted New Testament worship is by **misdirection**. For what purpose was worship created and demanded by God? There can be but two conclusions reached, only one of which can be right. Worship was either created and demanded by God for God or for man. Now given the nature of worship as evident through scripture a Biblically logical answer can be concluded. God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1). God created man (Genesis 1:27ff). God saw fit to allow man opportunity to reconcile himself unto God (Genesis 3:15). God ensured through His providence the means through which man could reconcile himself unto God (Galatians 4:4ff). God has provided ample opportunity through His longsuffering for man to be redeemed through the blood of His Son (II Peter 3:9). However, man in general has done nothing but caused God grief (Romans 3:23). With all of this in mind, is it not abundantly clear that worship, as being something deserved, has not been prescribed for imperfect man, but for the Holy God? And because worship is to be rendered to the Holy God, it then is to be performed with only the methods commanded by the Holy God. Much of the world is guilty of making worship a self-centered activity rather than a God-centered activity. Therefore rather than misdirecting worship, man needs to go back to the Bible and realize God's plan for worship calls for it to be directed toward Him.

Another premiere way that man has gone about to pervert New Testament worship is by **misapplication**. Many misapply the scriptures in order to direct worship in a way other than prescribed by God. Many misapply what it means to worship to fit a particular result they would like to see done. However, perhaps the most prominent way of misapplying worship is the purpose of it. Worship, as indicated already above, is a period in which adoration and praise can be directed from man who is the beneficiary of blessings to God who is the giver of blessings. But in the process of time it seems that man has forgotten that worship is set aside for that purpose. Often now worship is mistaken for a social hour or an opportunity to network. To the contrary, worship is designed with God and His will in mind. To misapply worship is to misapply the purpose God gave for worship and that is to give back to God the glory He is due for what He has done and continues to do for man.

Then a final way man has found to corrupt New Testament worship is by **mishandling** the charge given to him. It is not a new thing for man to fall short of God's charge. In Genesis 2 God charged man with the upkeep of the garden of Eden and the avoidance of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, yet man failed in His charge. When God charged the Israelite nation to enter Canaan and inhabit it (Numbers 13) they failed in His charge. After being charged by God to forsake the corrupt idol, man again failed in His charge resulting in the consequential captivities in Assyria and Babylon. And still man continues to fail amid God's charge. But to tamper with God's directives regarding worship is a serious matter. Nadab and Abihu learned the hard way that worship to God was not something to be mishandled (Leviticus 10:1ff). Must man continue to learn the hard way that the only way to handle worship is by handling aright the word of truth (II Timothy 2:15 – ASV). The church has been charged with worshipping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), according to the all-inspired scriptures (II Timothy 3:16) which contain all things that pertain unto life and godliness (II Peter 1:3). May she keep this charge that God might be glorified for all of time remaining.

It is of the greatest opportunity in the world to be able to worship God. The ability to worship God is reserved unto His faithful children who are able to appreciate all that God has done for them (I Peter 3:12). But with this blessing is a responsibility to offer these spiritual sacrifices of worship in an undefiled and pure manner that they might be a sweet smelling savor unto the God of heaven, the object of that worship. How is it that we can worship the King in an acceptable manner? The greatest of "theologians" have shuddered at the mere mention of such a question, but to the pure-hearted Christian the answer is clear. Worship is to be in a spirited and enthusiastic, but reverential nature, and according to the truth which is able to save our souls.

-Andy Brewer